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Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in the World

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To the members of the Congregation of the Mission

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

On this the Feast of Saint Justin De Jacobis, a missionary par excellence, I announce to the worldwide Congregation the five projects that were granted the Mission Award for 2007. There is a brief description of the history of each of the projects, as well as the goals and objectives proposed to make them realizable.

I wish to encourage the Visitors to continue to promote not only the Mission Award, granted on 30 July every year, but also the Systemic Change Award, granted each 25 January on the Feast of the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.

As I try to make clear each time these awards are announced, the overall objective is to stimulate among the provinces and individual confreres or teams of confreres creativity, which, when motivated by love, is infinite.

This year only 11 projects were presented, perhaps because the date was advanced for presenting these projects, due to the fact that we were holding the Visitors' Meeting in June, which is when we usually have our tempo forte meeting to select the winners.

I encourage the Visitors to animate the members of their provinces to participate actively in these efforts to help improve our quality of evangelization for the Poor in our world today.

The winners for this year are from the Provinces of Saint Justin De Jacobis (Eritrea), USA Midwest (Kenya), Philippines, Paris (Region of Cameroon), and Ireland.
1. PROVINCE OF SAINT JUSTIN DE JACOBIS

History: Saint Justin De Jacobis Province’s preferential option of apostolate, especially in the past 12 years or so, has been mainly the formation of the clergy and laity and the popular missions. We really are convinced that these are very Vincentian works and are in accordance with the first article of our Constitutions.

Despite the unstable and insecure socio-political situation of our country, our Church is blessed with many vocations. Nevertheless, we suspect that the real motivation of the many young men in formation to the priesthood arises from the oppressive political situation. This is why we have opted to help the diocesan priests in their ongoing formation. Our province is convinced that the popular missions are very effective and dear to our people all over the country. For these very Vincentian works we have a team of confreres, who regularly organize the formation of the clergy and the popular missions.

Goals and objectives: The first and foremost goal of this project is no more than a decision to work according to our Vincentian charism. Through the popular missions we try to reach the poor of the abandoned villages, most of them without fixed parish priests. Therefore, our popular missions are a way of awakening and strengthening the faith, as well as issuing a call to live an authentic Christian life. The ongoing formation of the clergy and laity is also very important because, as in the time of Saint Vincent, we suspect that the many vocations in our country are not all motivated by a genuine call from Christ. We, Vincentians of the Saint Justin De Jacobis Province in Eritrea, are convinced that we need to play a significant role in the ongoing formation of the clergy, the catechists and the lay Vincentians.

Method and strategies: The confreres of the “House of Providence” in Hebo, for years now, have been engaged in the ongoing formation of diocesan priests. This has been done by way of the annual retreat and conferences. It was very much appreciated by the Eparch of Asmara and the bishop himself always participated in the annual retreat.

Since the formation of two new Eparchies of Eritrea, Keren and Barentu, in 1996, there have not been good relations among the three Eparchies. The bishops asked the members of the Congregation to do something about this. After serious evaluation and reflection, we decided to present an annual ongoing formation program. It was a wonderful experience, even for us. The evaluations made by the participants have been incredibly encouraging. Therefore, the main method will be various kinds of workshops, conferences and retreats.
However, we are open to modifying the structures to meet the needs of these priests.

We have two confreres to organize and to follow-up the ongoing formation program, which is especially for the young priests within ten years of ordination.

2. PROVINCE OF USA MIDWEST (KENYA): The Emmaus Programme, Nairobi

History: The Emmaus Programme for Diocesan Priests fits the creative programmes for the ongoing formation and education of diocesan clergy in mission territories. The Emmaus Programme was created by confreres and is directed by confreres of the Kenya Mission, but in collaboration with religious and laypersons.

The Programme addresses the four pillars of formation for priests in missionary territories: human, spiritual, intellectual, and apostolic. The project dovetails with the charism and purpose of the Congregation of the Mission: to help the clergy in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor. The Programme aims at providing ongoing formation for these poor priests to be better priests in their ministry to the poor.

The Emmaus Programme for Diocesan Priests is now in its fourth year. Vincentians of the Kenyan Mission direct the programme three times a year. Over 200 priests have attended the programme.

The Programme began as a response to the call of Kenyan bishops that Vincentians reach out to their priests, many alone and lonely, scattered throughout the desolate areas of Kenya. Members of the Congregation of the Mission understand that seminary formation and education alone are not enough to form good priests in missionary areas. The opportunities for these priests after ordination are scarce. Instances of scandalous behavior with its deep and lasting wounds also convinced Vincentians that these brother priests needed not only further formation and education, but also support to help them live out what they already know to be proper priestly conduct.

While the Emmaus Programme once focused on the Ecclesiastical Province of the Archdiocese of Nairobi, it has now expanded to include priests of other Ecclesiastical Provinces. At a recent episcopal meeting (2007), bishops voiced concern and desire that their priests be afforded opportunities for ongoing formation and education. The facts are: the Emmaus Programme has been received with great acclamation by the priest participants, and it has proved its effectiveness, value and credibility over the four years of existence. Additionally, a greater number of Kenyan bishops desire their priests to participate in future programmes.
Goal: To provide an integrated series of seminars in a reflective, spiritual setting to enable diocesan clergy to engage in formation and ongoing development to encourage personal holiness, increase priestly support and morale and assist in improving ministerial competence in missionary areas.

Objectives:
1) To encourage continued growth in diocesan priestly spirituality.
2) To provide theological and scriptural updating in the African context.
3) To offer pastoral updating to assist clergy to effectively engage in evangelization, pastoral and liturgical ministry and human promotion.
4) To provide administrative assistance in areas of parish organization, Church personnel and finances.
5) To foster the healthy social life of the priest for mutual support, encouragement and the sense of priestly fraternity.

3. PROVINCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

History: Two decades ago, in April 1987, the Lay Missionaries of Saint Vincent de Paul were organized and incorporated with the Popular Mission Ministry to partner with the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity in the work of the missions. They come from the areas where the popular missions were given, from Vincentian lay associations, parishes, schools run by the Daughters of Charity, and private as well as public schools.

At present we have a core of 120 lay missionaries collaborating with us in our six Regional Mission Teams and Centers where they provide leadership. The bulk of missionaries are for the 24 missions organized and given annually.

Moreover, they assist in the follow-up programs as well as maintain the mission spirit in their communities (parish, schools, barrio chapels) and in Diocesan Programs (e.g., Youth Ministry, Catechetical Ministry, Music Ministry, Liturgy Ministry).

Aside from the Basic Formation, they attend a regular ongoing formation program regionally and nationally. We believe that the quality of their missionary commitment could be enhanced by a deeper and systematic theological, spiritual, catechetical and Vincentian, and pastoral leadership formation. We feel that a good number of them have the potential to become formators as well as full-time lay missionaries for the local missions, as well as the missions ad gentes.
**Goal:** To provide our Lay Missionaries (the core and the new) a deeper and a systematic formation in catechesis, theology, spirituality, Vincentian and pastoral leadership.

**Objectives:**

1) To train lay missionaries in our institutions — schools and parishes — to become missionaries and pastoral agents.
2) To continue the regional ongoing formation sessions.
3) To hold an Annual Meeting of the National Officers for input, evaluation and planning.
4) To hold a National Convention regularly (every two years).
5) To form and train a Core of Formators among the Lay Missionaries.
6) To enhance their pastoral leadership with the John C. Maxwell Leadership Series.
7) To widen their horizon and perspective through exposures and educational tours.
8) To acquire facilities in our formation centers (e.g., laptop computer, LDC projector, etc.).
9) To print an adapted Christian Prayer for the Lay Missionaries for their spiritual sustenance.
10) To arrange for those who are qualified to study at theological and catechetical centers that offer Diploma, MA and Doctorate.

**Methodology:** The formation process is: Interactive Lecture - Workshop - Actual Mission Exposure - Evaluation. They are then made to participate in future formation sessions as lecturers and workshop facilitators.

Moreover, we coordinate and seek the assistance of the “theological and catechetical centers” for the content, methodology and attainment of degrees (Diploma, MA, Ph.D.).

4. **PROVINCE OF PARIS (REGION OF CAMEROON): To develop ties of collaboration with the Vincentian Family in the Central African Republic**

**Presentation:** The idea is to send a community of two or three confreres of the Congregation of the Mission to Bangui in the Central African Republic (next to Cameroon) in order, first of all, to accompany the Vincentian Family, which has about 3000 members
in Bangui alone and then to reflect on a presence of the Little Company for a longer period.

For several years, there have been contacts with the Diocese of Bangui. In addition, we have already had the occasion to organize meetings with the Vincentian Family in Bangui. The idea, then, is to plan for a permanent presence of a team of missionaries.

On several occasions, the branches of the Vincentian Family and the Archbishop of Bangui have indicated their desire to welcome a community of the Congregation in the capital. There is a concern to support missionary openness of the Region of Cameroon. The presence of Central African confreres, the nearness of the country, the ties already established are so many elements which push us toward this commitment.

Goals:

1) To assure a presence for the Vincentian Family at Bangui in the Central African Republic beginning in September 2007.

2) To accompany and assure the formation of the members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family (AMM, SSVP, AIC, JMV, etc.) in Bangui and eventually in the surrounding area.

3) To foresee some important missionary experiences in Bangui in connection with the Vincentian Family present in the different parishes.

4) To reflect on a new implantation, for a longer period, with socio-educational implications.

Objectives:

1) To found a community, after a year’s trial, in Bangui of two or three confreres from the Congregation in connection with the Region of Cameroon.

2) To organize sessions of Vincentian Formation for the members of the Vincentian Family. To reply to the expectations and suggestions of the different branches of the Vincentian Family.

3) To assure and make contacts with the local clergy of the Archdiocese of Bangui.

Concretely, the first objective is the accompaniment and service of the Vincentian Family. Then, the idea is to begin missionary projects and, finally, to assure a pastoral commitment on Sundays in the different parishes.

Use of the Award: This award will help the province in the “extraordinary” expenses for this new implantation. The Province
and the Region have been questioning themselves seriously for many years. They must decide on this extension of the mission from the Cameroon. This award will help us very much in the concrete carrying out of this project and will represent the interest of the entire Congregation for this project in Central Africa.

5. PROVINCE OF IRELAND: The Ember Team

History: The Ember Mission Team has been in existence, in its current format, since 1978. More recently, it moved to a Lay Directorship, with members of the Congregation and lay people forming the team. The focus of each parish Mission is “Encounter with Christ.”

The Ember Mission Team seeks to encourage “Encounter with Christ” by four means: Liturgy, Faith Formation, Communications, and Social Interaction and Outreach to the Marginalised.

In the past years, we have noted that, while we have been, in the main, successful in the first three of these, the last remains more difficult to realise.

The team recognizes that such outreach is best achieved by the people in the local parish, but there is little or no formation provided in the skills and attitudes needed to undertake such a ministry.

To this end, the Ember Team wishes to establish a training course for people in parishes to enable them to reach out to the poorest and most marginalised in their community.

In recent years, we have been called on to give Parish Missions in poor parishes both in Ireland and in Britain. Often the cost of formation for the people in the parish is more than the parish can easily bear.

We also wish to emphasise that, in the past five years, there has been a great deal of cooperation and exchange of personnel with “Pathways: Exploring Faith and Ministry,” the lay-ministry course in All Hallows College, which has been training people for ministry in the local community since 1984.

Goal: To provide a course in formation in “mission outreach to the poorest and most marginalised” for people who will work on and with the mission team.

Objectives: To host six training and reflection workshops in All Hallows College (or other suitable venues) to be held between September and May.

Use of the Award: We recognise that those who seek training in “catechesis and mission outreach” to the poorest and most
marginalised often, themselves, come from among the poor and marginalised and from the poorest parishes.

The money received would allow us to host the training, pay for skilled experts in the field, provide educational resources for both presenters and those attending and, also, provide refreshment.

It is important to note that such training is quite specialised and is not currently available in any of the dioceses of Ireland.

I ask the Lord to pour out his blessings on all those who have worked to develop these projects for the evangelization of the Poor. May your good work continue and inspire others to do the same.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
FEATURE:

Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in the World

Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.
Editor of “Vincentiana”

This issue of Vincentiana hopes to give witness to the inculturated survival of the missionary charism in the world. We wanted the presence of the five continents in this issue, because there are confreres on all five who strive to live it out. Only those who were invited to say something and responded speak. Without doubt, there are many others who might say other things that would confirm the survival of the Vincentian charism in the world. Vincentiana, because it also wants to be an expression of the life of the Congregation of the Mission, is always open to the communication of confreres' experiences. We certainly need reflections and studies that help us maintain our fidelity to the charism, but no less necessary are the life experiences which show the creative vigor of the charism in our world today. The missionaries of heaven are also present in this issue in the short bibliographical reviews of two books written in 2007 about them.

Vincentian fidelity in the old Europe confronts new challenges to which CEVIM (Conference of Visitors of Europe and the Middle East) hopes to respond. This requires of us a deep knowledge of the charism in order to know how to live out an adequate accommo-
dation that is neither an abandonment of one’s principles, nor a forgetting of the Vincentian charism’s essential values. Africa-Madagascar, as seen by a Malagasy, the Bishop of Farafangana, discovers the values of traditional religions in those who seek to inculturate themselves in the charism. USA presents the story of incarnating the culture in a particular society that, as it evolves internally, is opening out to new needs in new worlds. From Latin America, through the pen of a Spaniard, who has lived and worked for 48 years in Latin America, we are called to appreciate with serenity the effort of the missionaries who preceded us by presenting us, in conclusion, with a promising presence of the charism in Latin America.

In the “Study” section is an extensive article by Daniel Franklin Pilario, a Filipino confrere, on textual hermeneutics that can serve as a base for an inculturated rereading of the charism in the broad Asia-Pacific context. We are happy about the appearance of this concern in the wide Asia-Pacific world, which, up to the present, has not had much reception in our western media. The study of the charism in the Philippines is a first attempt and an invitation to continue reading and deepening the Vincentian charism from these scientific and cultural bases.

(Translation: Ann Mary, D.C.)
Mission and Consecration in the Current Context in Africa and Madagascar

by Marc Benjamin Balthason Ramaroson, C.M.
Bishop of Farajangana

What is expected of a consecrated person in the current socio-economic-political-cultural context in Africa and Madagascar? What means are at our disposal to live out this vocation? What are the obstacles?

I. THE PHENOMENON OF BELONGING

By means of an introduction to this humble article, I would first like to speak very briefly of a phenomenon that has left its mark on our era: the “phenomenon of belonging, and of the ways in which we belong.” This may help those consecrated persons who read this article to situate themselves on the level of society.

At the outset, I refuse, for the purposes of my analysis, to assign a moral connotation with regard to what I call the phenomenon of belonging. The goal is to lead us to an understanding of certain ambiguous types of behaviour on the part of the members of ecclesial communities, and particularly those of members of religious communities.

What is “belonging”? It is “the state of someone who belongs to a collective or a group,” according to the Petit Larousse. In the past, “belonging” did not pose any problems, since we were in an all-encompassing society in which people’s attitudes were largely homogeneous, in which everyone knew — and helped — one another. In short: conformity was the ideal. In this type of society, in which order is the model to be followed, each person easily finds his/her place, his/her role.

On the other hand, with the advent of globalization, we have shifted from an all-encompassing society to a fractured society, whose points of reference change according to one’s point of view, in a society in which roles change according to where you are located.
It is for this reason that we speak of “ways of belonging” and no longer just of “belonging.” In this kind of fractured society, since the one constant is change, dialogue and goals become the key terms. Unfortunately, the immediate consequence of such a situation is that in it members are engaged in an unending search for their identity.

Keeping in mind this new phenomenon which can clarify certain types of behaviour, let us launch into our subject. For this article, I have been inspired above all by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa.* As we know, the general theme of the synod was evangelization, the evangelization of Africa on the eve of the end of the second millennium: “The Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission as the Year 2000 Approaches: ‘You Will Be My Witnesses’ (Acts 1:8).” This theme is, in addition, the key point of the pontificate of John Paul II: “The new evangelization.” It was a *leitmotif* for him. Since the points raised in this article are developed in that exhortation, we will profit from the Pope’s approach.

But what do we mean by evangelization? First and foremost, it is the announcing to the world the Good News that God, who loves us, has saved the world through Christ. Both in terms of its methods and its goals, evangelization must seek to offer the Good News of Christ to the world. That was at the heart of the message of the synod, which the Pope himself described as “a synod of resurrection, a synod of hope.” The goal of the synod was, therefore, to find “appropriate ways and means whereby Africans would be better able to implement the mandate which the Risen Lord gave to his disciples” (n. 29): to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8).

It is for this reason that today, in our own context, we must find (new) ways to announce the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel offers an irreplaceable opportunity for Africa and for Madagascar, but the announcing of Christ in Africa and Madagascar is also an opportunity for Christianity, as a priest from Congo (then Zaire), François Kabasélé-Lumbala, states in his book *Christianity and Africa: A Mutual Opportunity* (Karthala, 1993).

When we speak of evangelization, it is good to also keep in mind two situations which we must distinguish, but which may overlap in a given sector: these involve (1) the first evangelization (or even “pre-evangelization”) for those who have never received the announcement of the Gospel message, and (2) in-depth evangelization, for those who are already within the Church (n. 47). Nevertheless, from their status as “mission churches,” the Malagasy Church and

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1 In 2009, the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa will take place. Its theme is prophetic: “The Church in Africa: At the Service of Reconciliation, Peace and Justice.”
the African Church should be able to come to a point where they are “Churches engaged in mission.” We should be “our own missionaries”: “Since by Christ’s will the Church is by her nature missionary, it follows that the Church in Africa is itself called to play an active role in God’s plan of salvation. For this reason I have often said that ‘the Church in Africa is a missionary Church and a mission Church’” (n. 29).

This already raises a question when we observe the local reality — what is happening around us: in a country saturated with bad news, how can the Christian message be “good news” for African people in their daily lives? In the midst of despair which seeps into everything, where are the hope and optimism that the Gospel is supposed to bring? How must the Church live, so that its message of “resurrection and hope” will be credible? (n. 40).

It is precisely here that the crux of the message lies. In the face of these realities, the Church (that is to say, every baptized person first of all, and consecrated persons in particular), as those “on the front lines,” must be “the Good Samaritan” on the road to “Jericho”: “For many Synod Fathers contemporary Africa can be compared to the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; he fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him and departed, leaving him half dead (cf Lk 10:30-37). Africa is a Continent where countless human beings — men and women, children and young people — are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandoned. They are in dire need of Good Samaritans who will come to their aid. For my part, I express the hope that the Church will continue patiently and tirelessly its work as a Good Samaritan” (n. 41).

II. A RAPID OVERVIEW OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Let us try to get an overview of the situation of the (African) continent, and of Madagascar in particular, to help us respond to our vocation as consecrated persons, recognizing that the majority of the congregations which are working in Madagascar are apostolic.

1. Situation

There is no need of sketching out the situation here. We already know it (n. 51): a rising level of poverty (more than 75% of the population lives below the poverty line; source: Word Bank), extremely poor administration and management of the scarce

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The highlighting here is my own.
available resources, "political cacophony," caused by a poor grasp of democracy, poorly controlled urbanization, international debt (Madagascar has $4 billion in debt, or 4,000 billion ariary), lack of safety, rising levels of illiteracy, demographic problems (400,000 people per year, while the growth of the active population is only 220,000 people per year), deterioration of health services and educational opportunities, AIDS, an economy "held hostage" to politics, etc. In short: we are "adrift," as the media, unfortunately, loves to repeat. In an interview in Jeune Afrique magazine, Michael Camdessus, the former Director-General of the IMF, summarized the current situation in Africa quite well: "As long as Africa does not put greater order into its economic affairs, and does not affirm — with concrete measures — the political will to take charge of its own destiny, it will only be able to rely on subsidies scrounged from the administrators of charitable funds" (no comment). "In Africa, the economy is completely the prisoner of politics!" Because of this situation, Africa risks being left by the side of the road, abandoned by the international community (if it is not already!). Who, then, could be the Good Samaritan that Africa needs?
2. **Consequence: loss of confidence, loss of identity**

What is certainly the most serious issue in all of this is that this situation leads Africans, and the Malagasy, to underestimate themselves, to lose confidence, to resign themselves (to their fate), to believe, fatalistically, that their destiny is cursed. They sink deeper into this lack of self-esteem when events seem to confirm exactly what they believe (such as the fire in Rova, a symbol of national pride from the time of the Merina royal line, which burned down in 1995. The cause of the fire has never been determined). Researchers need to investigate these conclusions further, since it seems to me that it is not merely a sociological phenomenon or a psychosis, but rather something rooted in certain ways of thinking: there are many people who have the strange feeling that a divine curse is hanging over them. Some think that the Africans and the Malagasy refuse development become of this “mental block,” if we are to accept Axelle Kabou’s book *Si l’Afrique refusait le développement* (L’Harmattan, 1991).

This is a real identity crisis, and a very serious one. We must come to recognize that Africans and the Malagasy no longer know where they are — they doubt everything — they no longer know what to do. This is particularly noticeable among the young. They no longer want to reflect. Many of them no longer have any ideals. They have no guideposts. All of their actions are, therefore, guided by instinct. No longer is it an uncommon thing to learn about acts, committed here and there, which utterly exceed anything one could even imagine. In this context, it is difficult to speak about development, for there cannot be true development unless people believe in their own future; the real force of (human) development is trust in one’s future (the first goal that the World Bank established for the development of Africa and Madagascar was to give the population hope once again!). We often speak about changing our ways of thinking. There are already changes occurring in people’s way of thinking (in Africa), but they are changes “in the wrong direction.” While he was still Prime Minister, Mr. Emmanuel Rakotavahiny declared: “The obstacles are many, and the problems are countless. But what is painful is the present state of people’s way of thinking and acting” (speech offering his best wishes to Iavoloha in the Presidential Palace, January 22, 1996).

3. **Authentic development: development for every person — development of the whole person**

Africans and the Malagasy need more than simply an economic-political “take-off” (rapid or accelerated development — our leaders confuse *speed* and *rashness* — which is lasting). What they need is an authentic liberation of every person, which can only take place in a
properly-adapted educational programme. And this is the role of evangelization, something that the post-synodal message strongly emphasizes: “Integral human development — the development of every person and of the whole person, especially of the poorest and most neglected in the community — is at the very heart of evangelization” (n. 68). The document quotes Paul VI: “Between evangelization and human advancement — development and liberation — there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man?” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 8 December 1975, n. 31).

According to the exhortation, the role of the Church — and thus the role of consecrated persons — is clear: they must “become the voice of the voiceless” (n. 70). But, in this foundational role, the document underscores (here quoting Sollicitudo Rei Socialis): “Proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation” (n. 70). This is now the challenge after the synod, and most especially in Madagascar and Africa, in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the coming of democracy. This is the reason why the theme of the new special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa is: “The Church in Africa: At the Service of Reconciliation, Peace and Justice.”

Up to the present time, the Church has always had more of a “tendency” to “denounce” rather than “to announce.” Its true role, however, is the prophetic task, the fruit of a discernment of the signs of the times. Otherwise, we risk destroying what we have gained (which is exactly what risks happening here in Madagascar, with the Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches [FFKM], if it continues to meddle excessively in politics, as it has done these last few years).

4. But what are we announcing, and how shall we do it?

The post-synodal exhortation has no “miracle solution” to suggest. It simply wishes to highlight that the Church is part of this society in distress (cf. GS, n. 1: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs
and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”). To be in a position to accomplish its true mission, the Church must be in constant dialogue, and in a relationship of friendly solidarity, with the society in which it finds itself. Truly, faith exists only as an incarnate truth, since it is a way of life. A faith that does not become part of culture is a faith which is not fully welcomed, completely thought through and faithfully lived out. From this springs the need for inculturation, with the goal of “incarnating” the cultural and socio-political structures of the country in our pastoral work. This demands a good level of knowledge of the Church’s social doctrine, as well as of local realities.

5. Cries in the face of these sad realities

Although we know that there is no “miracle solution” which could be applied to every situation, it is nevertheless important to be convinced that love alone is the path to be followed, since it is “infinitely inventive” (Coste XI, 146), and there is no lack of examples of this down through the centuries, as well as today. They are almost cries of distress.

- The cry of SCEAM: During its 7th Assembly in July 1994, SCEAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) chose the poor as its preferential option. “To be the voice of the voiceless,” since there cannot be any authentic evangelization without progress on a human level: “The person who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being, but the subject of social and economic questions.”

- The cry of the Vincentians: As Vincentians, we cannot help but be an active part of this option. We should even go as far as to say that for us, it is not like the “preferential option” of certain other institutes. For us as Vincentians, it is our very raison d’être.

- This sensitivity is certainly not new. But the reality which prevails in Africa and Madagascar at this start of the third millennium urges us (“the charity of Christ urges us” 2 Cor 5:14) to discover something to stimulate us once more to engage in a life of community with those who are marginalized all around us. It is in this sense that the call of Paul VI in Kampala is to be understood: “Henceforth, you are your own missionaries.” “We must be our own missionaries, that is to say, bearing a concern for our own continent, and not simply allowing only non-Africans to cross thousands of kilometers to come and proclaim Jesus Christ

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3 Pastoral Exhortation of the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar, SCEAM, July 1984, n. 89.
to our brothers who are sometimes only a few kilometers from our own homes, in which we are prisoners forever.”

- This requires Christian communities, which are responsible, mature and inculturated, in order to address these many challenges. In fact, the poor suffer today, not because there is a lack of charity, but because service to the poor needs to be inculturated. “Here, he said, there is plenty of charity being practiced — but it is not well-planned. These poor sick people will receive too many supplies all at once, a part of which will be spoiled or lost, and then afterwards they will once again fall back into their original situation of need.”

This quotation from Saint Vincent speaks to our present situation, for we know very well that it is not the assistance that is lacking, but what is missing is the willingness and the proper way of assistance. The problem of the total or partial cancelling of debts illustrates well this sad reality. International financial institutions increasingly recognize that the weight of this debt on the world’s poorest countries constitutes an obstacle to their economic development, and provokes disastrous social consequences. This subject deserves to be developed further, but it goes beyond our topic. Nevertheless, a fundamental question deserves to be asked: “Who is really an expert on poverty? He/she who sees and contemplates it, or he/she who lives it?” Unfortunately, there is no shortage of theories — but what we would like to witness, and to experience, is the concretization of these theories.

III. THE CHALLENGES

Having analyzed the current situation, let us now try to examine the challenges which the Church in Madagascar and Africa must face.

1. A Church which is young, both in terms of the institution and its members: an advantage and a weakness at the same time

First of all, we need to know that this Church is still young, and so it possesses all the strengths and weaknesses which characterize youth: freshness, vitality and energy, which allow (African Catholics) to face their challenges and struggles. Youth implies growth and maturation. If crises should arise in the course of this process of coming to maturity, normally they involve crises of growth, out of

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which people normally emerge more mature. This is a Church which finds itself in a transitional phase, between being a mission Church and a Church engaged in mission, stretching its wings and seeking its own path toward maturity.

2. **The source and foundation of evangelization is the Church-as-family, which was a key concept at this synod**

In order for this evangelization to be rooted in the (African) culture, it must be thought of as building up the family of God here on earth. This concept of Church-as-family calls for a further exploration, since it is a broad new subject. Here, too, I can only spell out a few points of interest.

a) **First of all: why this new concept?**

This concept has deeper roots in the culture than other concepts of Church: Church as People of God, or Church as Communion. It expresses more deeply the values which are dear to the Malagasy, and connects well with concepts in the Gospel: *fihavanana,* that is: communion, brotherhood, solidarity, peace, companionship. A sense of belonging, the idea of a corporate personality. The concept of family (which is very strong among Africans and the Malagasy) expresses in a concrete image the profound ecclesiological notion of communion.

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5 *Ecclesia in Africa,* n. 63: “Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God’s Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.” See also the pastoral letter of SCEAM in November 2001, *The Church as Family of God: A Place and Sacrament of Forgiveness, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa:* “The plenary assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar is a privileged moment to confirm the option of the Church as family of God, a particularly appropriate expression of the nature of the Church for Africa (*Ecclesia in Africa,* n. 63) and for determining more precisely concrete consequences, with a view to a pastoral strategy that is increasingly adapted (to the African context)” (1).

6 *Fihavanana* can also be translated as “familyness,” a neologism which could be compared to the “spousality” of John Paul II. If for John Paul II, “spousality” primarily underscores the bond and relationship at the heart of a couple, then “familyness” is what which makes for the bond and the relationship at the heart of a Malagasy community having the same origin as *aina* (the breath of life). I think that this concept, even if it is called by different names, can also be found at the heart of African society.
The notion of “extended family” is one which is deeply anchored among Africans and the Malagasy: the whole of humanity is, in a certain way, the family of God for them. The only goal of evangelization is to invite humanity to participate in the very life of the Trinity, so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 1:28). Furthermore, if this concept of “Church-as-family” is understood and accepted, it also allows a way out of the dilemma of the dichotomy between daily life and faith.

b) How can we conceive of this “Church-as-family”?

The Church-as-family is that in which God has taken the initiative in creating Adam — that which Christ, the New Adam and Heir of the Nations, established by the gift of his body and blood — that which reveals to the world the Spirit which the Son commended to the Father, so that it could be the communion uniting all people. On the basis of this concept, it is not hard to rediscover categories which are already rooted in Malagasy culture: Anaran-dray (the ancestor who bears a name, and who, for us as Christians, is God the Father, Andriamanitrita Ray); Iray rà iray aina (having the same blood and the same source of life through baptism); Iray Dina (the Bible, as a living Word, is the Word of the Covenant of the divine family [Trinity] together with the human family which it creates and saves); Iray vatsy (Viaticum; Eucharist); Iray lova (inheritance; eternal life). All of these points deserve to be studied further.

c) Concretization of this notion of “Church-as-family”

This new concept clearly calls for a new approach in terms of pastoral practice. The experience of Basic Christian Communities can help us in reaching this goal. It is within these living ecclesial communities that the riches of the Church-as-family must be verified and developed, especially in terms of responsibility and the witness of one’s life. They should not be merely a place of reflection, of prayer, of listening to the Word, as in other ecclesial movements, but should be an “authentic centre of community life,” just like a family: a home (ankohonana). Thanks to the Basic Christian Communities, everyone is responsible for everything, from his/her own personal life right up to the level of the whole Church, including one’s own society. In short: we come to have a “unity in one’s life,” which is the source of integral development. This theme of a “living Christian community” is important. It calls for a deeper analysis, which goes beyond the scope of this exposition. I would just like to point out in conclusion that we are not born into the Church-as-family, but it is something we become. This calls for a real journeying, for the Church is a gift of the Spirit before it is a human construct. We must keep this in mind in our pastoral approach.
The Family as the Domestic Church

The concept of Church-as-family demands that it be rooted, first of all, in a true family-as-domestic-Church — that is, in a profound evangelization of the family. Cardinal Thianoundoum's report underscores this: "A profound evangelization of the family should allow us to eliminate the dichotomy which exists between people's faith and their way of life." In connection with this, the Malagasy concept of Fihavanana — the vital link which unites children to their parents, which unites man to woman, and individuals to their environment — could open up a new perspective. But until an authentic theology of marriage and family is developed, one which takes into account inculturation — and thus includes local realities, particularly traditional marriage — this concept will remain forever at the level of pious wishes in our different sectors, even in regions where the faith has already been implanted. This is a real challenge, because it is we (and when I say "we," I do not mean only theologians, but the entire Church, including the laity) who must put this "theology" into practice — always keeping the universality of the Church in mind, of course. Unfortunately, this synod did not even sketch out a beginning solution. The paragraphs which speak about it are short and overly general (n. 50 and n. 83).

e) The place of the laity and new ministries

This notion of the Church-as-family demands a re-thinking of the place of the laity and new ministries. Here, too, the document is not presenting anything new; it merely takes up what is said in previous documents (Christifideles Laici and Redemptoris Missio), to emphasize that lay people must honour their mission as baptized and confirmed Christians (n. 90). The situation and the context call for new ideas which will allow us to properly develop this initial mission. Here, I am particularly referring to the status of "catechists" who really do not have any ministerial status. Bishop Zévaco had already raised this problem in an August 1973 article about the Church in Madagascar in the journal Lumière, and it deserves to be explored further.

Along the same lines, I would also like to note that the formation of laypeople in the socio-political realm is an extremely urgent issue, so that we will have truly responsible laypeople (n. 54). The Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes already underscored this need: "Great care must be taken about civic and political formation, which is of the utmost necessity today for the population as a whole, and especially for youth, so that all citizens can play their part in the life of the political community. Those who are suited or can become suited should prepare themselves for the difficult, but at the same time, the very noble art of politics" (GS, n. 75, para. 6).
f) The Church and the formation of agents of evangelization

Everyone agrees on one point: the future of the Church as Family of God is closely tied to the quality of the formation given to pastoral agents, and to their life-witness. The increase in the number of vocations is, thus, a grace for the Church, and at the same time a challenge.

IV. THE CHURCH AND DIALOGUE

In order for this “Church-as-family” to truly root itself, the Church needs to know how to dialogue with other religions — both traditional religions and the great religions (of the world). This interreligious dialogue is a privileged means of promoting peace and unity. However, the great challenge for us is not ecumenism with the mainstream churches, but the proliferation of sects. The majority of their members are young people who come from our own societies. I am a bit surprised that the post-synodal document, and the different interventions (apart from that of Cardinal Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) did not mention it. Similarly, we must also take into account the pressure of Islam, especially in certain regions of the island, notably in the north, on the west and southeast coasts. The Church in Madagascar must address this also — but how? The experience of other churches (e.g. in Sudan) may be of help to us.

1. The Church and youth (n. 115)

The Church in Africa and Madagascar is youth. Youth make up the most important part of our Church, not only in the present but also in the future. By helping our young people to achieve their full potential, by fighting against illiteracy, drugs and unemployment, the Church is preparing for its own future. This calls for a true pastoral strategy for youth, anchored in their culture and context.

2. The Church and the mass media (nn. 122-124)

The Church cannot ignore this area. We must acknowledge that the media are developing extremely rapidly, much like different radio stations. The document even speaks of an “invasion” (n. 52). We have to admit that they have a great deal of influence on people’s lives. They are the “new schools” as we begin this new century. “The first Areopagus of modern times is the world of communications, which is capable of unifying humanity and transforming it into — as it is commonly referred to — ‘a global village.’ The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial,
and social behavior. We particularly recommend that dioceses and conferences or assemblies of bishops ensure that the subject of the media be address in all pastoral plans.... Bishops should seek out the collaboration of media professionals” (Pontifical Council for Social Communications).

Today, we speak a great deal about the “information highway.” The synod’s final message emphasizes that this is a “new culture”: “First of all, [the media] constitute a new culture that has its own language and above all its own specific values and counter-values. For this reason, like any culture, the mass media need to be evangelized.” Included in this new culture is what we are accustomed to call “modernity,” which calls for a profound discernment, especially on the part of young people. The Church has the duty of accompanying them, and must have an authentic pastoral strategy for the media.

3. The Church as a school of liberation

- *Henamaso et fialonana*: If there is a single plague which is sapping the life from society in Africa and Madagascar, it is what is called *henamaso* (a type of excessive hesitancy which blocks healthy, frank relationships; one is afraid to speak the truth for fear of harming good relations). It is this *henamaso* which governs relations with others. Out of a fear of hurting the other, and in order to preserve the harmony of relations based on *fihavanana* (familyness), no one dares to condemn the evils which are eroding the relationship. There is no dialogue into which the terms “fear,” “being afraid,” “out of fear that” (*sao dia* in Malagasy) do not enter. Although it is omnipresent, this fear is hidden — but just barely.

But alongside this *henamaso*, and inseparable from it, we find *fialonana*, jealousy. Because of this jealousy (*fialonana*), everything possible is done to prevent someone from rising higher in society, on the basis of his/her work or merit. Each person refuses to allow anyone else to surpass him/her or to have a position of authority over him/her, especially if it involves a family member.

Social relationships will be freed when *henamaso* and *fialonana* are finally overcome.

- A concept of authority understood as *Ray aman-dReny*: The social context has changed, but a certain concept of power and authority is still deeply rooted in people’s ways of thinking: an understanding (of power) as *rayaman-dreny* (parents, elderly persons) still persists, together with associated customs.

This situation can be beneficial in certain situations when, after long deliberations, a compromise is reached. But it can also lead to a “blockage” of development, since it makes for inefficiency in
organizations which need quick, clear decisions. It even happens that, because of this concept, no one dares to criticize others. On a more serious level, we find ourselves in situations where no one accepts responsibility.

- The meaning of law: The meaning of what we call “law” is another challenge. Law is confused with the meaning of fady (that which is forbidden by custom; taboos). Later, a new concept of law came with colonization: law imposed by the state, which becomes confused with the colonization — and thus as something imposed and never accepted — leading to a lack of a sense of the common good and of the public good.

There are still other points that are worthy of further exploration, such as ethnic and caste problems, which are also slowing any social evolution. In this field, more than in any other, a well-inculturated consecrated life should be a path of liberation, so that there are no longer coast-dwellers or plateau-people, neither nobles nor free people nor slaves. Our communities should be a school of liberation for the people around us.

4. The Church and traditional religion

This expression itself is a recent one. In the past, European ethnologists, in designating the religious beliefs of Africans for example, spoke of “primitive” or “animist” religions. In 1961 in Abidjan, a colloquium was held on African religions and the participants (mostly anthropologists and missionaries) decided to abandon the term “animism,” and to replace it with “traditional religions.” The expression is not satisfactory, since “tradition” is usually opposed to “innovation.” Today we can see that the “traditional religions” of Africa are very much alive and that, in some cases, they even tend to “phagocytize” world religions such as Christianity or Islam. These traditional religions are resisting, are adapting to the current crisis in Africa, and are demonstrating creativity, as Achille Mbembe states in his work Afriques indociles (Karthala, 1988). Characterizing them as “traditional,” therefore, seems overly simplistic. No doubt this is why the term “animism” has begun to reappear, although timidly, in the world of certain African researchers today.

A characteristic of these traditional religions is their link to particular cultures. Religion thus constitutes the bond of the culture. In certain ethnic groups, there is no word to designate religion, since this is an integral part of daily life: to be a member of the ethnic group is to belong to that ethnic group’s religion. We could call these religions “Religion-cultures.” This is the case for Malagasy traditional religion, in which all of Malagasy culture is steeped. All
efforts to inculcate Christianity in Madagascar and Africa must, therefore, take into account the need for dialogue with traditional Malagasy religion.

So, what should we do?

Unfortunately, for the moment — both because of lack of time, and because of lack of in-depth research — we will have to remain “hungry,” while yet realizing that this point is fundamental for a consecrated life in Madagascar and in Africa. Certain ambiguous situations that we are witnessing in our communities show that this is needed — and urgently. This is another challenge which awaits us.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this article, we could perhaps be left with a somewhat pessimistic outlook. Certainly, we feel very small and insufficient when faced with the immensity of the work which is to be done. This reminds us, however — and rightly so — that we are only humble servants, and that it is the Lord who works through us. But he does not wish to accomplish anything without us. What he asks for is our trust and our cooperation. This is what Saint Vincent taught: “I agree with the maxim that we are to make use of every licit and possible means for the glory of God, as if God were not going to help us, so long as we expect everything from his divine Providence, as if we have no human means at our disposal” (Coste IV, p. 366).

(Translation: Murray Watson)
Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in Latin America

by Emilio Melchor Villanueva, C.M.

Executive Secretary of CLAPVI

1. THE WONDER OF A FOREST

The best comparison I could find to focus this work was to imagine myself in a forest where there were all kinds of trees and bushes: some tall, strong and robust, others very leafy. These were the most numerous and the most striking. But I also came across other trees that were less attractive for their size (smaller), for their shape (twisted, rough); but, in the final instance, these trees also were part of the forest. There was also no lack of lesser kinds of bushes. And, to no one’s surprise, grass and even weeds had grown in the forest. All of these were part of the forest. In fact, they were the forest.

Dear reader, this image can help you as well to understand what I am going to show in this article about “inculturation of the Vincentian charism in Latin America.” It caused me to reflect much as I got more deeply into it, but it has also filled me with evermore Vincentian and missionary conviction and satisfaction.

2. MAKING AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This work has proved very difficult in many aspects: having to reduce to a minimal number of pages the miles and miles of material compiled in its preparation because our territory is miles and miles long. Long as well is the history to be verified. Another problem was having to be critical, and with that, the fear of possibly distorting the intimate truth of the facts, and, above all, the lived experience of the people which cannot be measured by the tiny lines on the ruler of criticism. There is the fear of being unjust precisely by trying to be just; the fear of bearing out the gospel warning: carefully watching the specks of dust that can be beams, or not seeing the beams thinking they are simply dust; and that because of having necessarily
to leave in silence long stretches of history and the testimony of many lives. Despite everything, I have learned much — more than just intellectually and in a Vincentian manner. I love my vocation more. I admire more my Congregational and provincial roots. I recognize and respect more my Vincentian forefathers who worked on this continent. As I say that, I am already affirming part of the response for this work.

Throughout the preparation of this work, I have found myself in circumstances similar to those we experienced when we heard speak of and focused upon the ideas of the “discovery” and the evangelization of America. What for some was an epic, for others was an outrage. So let not criticism or scientific rigor produce short-sightedness with regard to the simple vision of lived experiences; nor let existential or sentimental oversimplification justify or ennoble the trivial or ordinary. Rather let good sense demonstrate the greatness of some facts which have been written, many times with blood, almost always with sweat and suffering, and always with the grace of the Spirit — the missionary work of the sons of Saint Vincent de Paul in Latin America.

I have had to make a choice regarding how to focus this work: to do it on a theoretical plane, i.e., as an ideological reflection, or to stick to the historical recollection of facts. Or there could be a third way: to focus on the historical data bearing in mind the ideological aspect. The first option would provide no more interest than passing some time for the growth of criticism, but it would also recondition the floor so as to provide firmness without taking away solidity. With the second option, I would commit myself to an historical venture that could not possibly give satisfaction because of the scope the facts demand, but this contribution is necessary to base oneself in the data of history and life. With the third option, I think I can allow for critical reflection and allow as well for the knowledge of what was done and lived, especially by our forefathers.

As I have said, I will present this work in three parts which will make it less extensive, but will give a more complex vision:

1. What should be said about the terms expressed in the title of this article? (ideological part)
2. What are the historical facts which respond to the title? (historical part)
3. What conclusions can we draw? (reflective/conclusive part)
Part I:
WHAT SHOULD BE SAID ABOUT THE TERMS
EXPRESSED IN THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE?

Inculturation – Charism – Latin America: three words which are not easy to either understand or with which to work. Each one has its complexity and its own world or relationships. The first, inculturation, is difficult to achieve. The second, charism, is difficult to interpret. The third, Latin America, is difficult because of its geographical and cultural breadth.

1. IN-CULTURATION

Who and how many people have known how to “inculturate” themselves in the totality of their lives, work and persons? Certainly God himself, as the Lord of the Chosen People, shows us throughout the Old Testament his wish to inculturate himself with his people. But there are some scenes which cause us to question what inculturation should be. A simple and clear example of this: the passage about Abraham and his son Isaac (complete savagery for our mentality today, but perfectly in tune with the mentality of those times not as humanized as ours). Offer a human sacrifice, and to please the gods no less! If the Lord, because of wanting to inculturate himself had accepted the inhuman sacrifice (nothing less than filicide), when would that sacrificial culture have ended? This is a clear example about knowing that inculturation requires a keen sense of smell in order to discern what must be changed or what should be taken on or left aside.

In any case, to point out the difficulty, and in the same way the model of what true inculturation means in its most radical and perfect sense, we have the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, being God and never ceasing to be God, “became equal to us in everything except sin,” as Saint Paul tells us. Paul himself was a clear model of inculturation, because, being a Jew, and a cultured one, he knew how to teach Peter himself what becoming fully inculturated meant: in his person, in his work and with the Gospel, taking on the different cultures of the pagan peoples in order to truly evangelize them.

In addition to them, and very like them, we have one or another saint, although not all, like Teresa of Calcutta, to cite a contemporary, or Justin De Jacobis or Perboyre to mention some of our own, who knew how to inculturate. Without doubt, there have been and there are saints who have done it.

But, how many saints or people are there with this dimension? Because, to inculturate oneself, one must know how to and want to uproot himself (without ceasing to be who one is as a person); it is
being born again in another world, with other people, other customs and another mentality in order to take on the essences of the other culture and not just its accidents or way of acting in one or another circumstance. To inculturate oneself truly is much more than changing a manner of dressing, learning a new language, performing some rites. It is not a question of no longer thinking, but of thinking in another way, with other categories (almost always very different ones), and working accordingly. It is undergoing a whole "kenosis" so that a "planning out" of the other can occur. Is this an exaggeration? Perhaps, but perhaps more of a demand. How right Nicodemus was when he asked the Lord, who was speaking to him of "inculturating" himself in the divine (just as the Master had inculturated himself in the human) "Can one who is old be born again?"

Someone, speaking about this topic, said to me, when the hour of truth arrives every true inculturation ends in martyrdom. Examples confirm this. Naturally, all of us like to see the ear of grain already flowering, but we resist being the grain that must be buried in the ground and die.

Culture has been defined as "the totality of human activity, intelligence and emotions, the human search for meaning, human customs and ethics across a culture."

Gaudium et Spes confirms this in No. 53: inculturating oneself is a laying aside (so as not to impose) and a taking on (to accept). Therefore, one cannot understand what inculturating oneself is by trying to leave aside the culture of certain peoples of such a time and place. For the same reason, in order that any evangelizing effort or action have force and bear fruit, the grain of the gospel must be buried — or in our case the grain of the Vincentian charism — so that, by dying, i.e. losing the form of one culture, it may attain the new life of evangelic fruit — or Vincentian fruit — in these other peoples, times and places; in a word, in these new cultures which are not those of Saint Vincent and his missionaries, nor those of their countries (Europe), nor those of their time (the 17th or 19th century).

The application of inculturation to the missionary reality has been taken more into account since John Paul II spoke about it in the encyclical, Slavorum Apostoli, numbers 21 and 26, and it must touch the same vital nerve of the cultures so it can be vibrant and remain as something of the culture and not be thrown away as something foreign.

For a greater precision about the term "In-Culturation"

In order not to undervalue the work carried out by our Vincentian missionaries in Latin America, but rather in order that, even appreciating such an admirable effort, it not be the confusion of
words and their meanings, which could cause the loss of something admirable, it may be opportune, from a critical perspective, to mention other expressions which, while they are similar, have another connotation and flavor.

This should cause us to reflect upon, in the moment of analysis, whether our “Vincentian charism” has been “inculturated” or simply “transported” or “transferred” with some minor retouching, as when a door is painted with a new color, but underneath it is still the same wood, in the same form and condition as before. Even if our missionaries had done only this, it took great and praiseworthy efforts.

“In-culturation” IS a true INSERTION, very respectful and progressive, of what is essential to the values of our charism into the very heart of the culture in such a way that the culture is not destroyed nor does the charism lose its essence and values.

John Paul II conveys these ideas to us in two of his writings: *Redemptoris Missio* and *Fides et Ratio*. We also find them in the Puebla document. A reading of these documents will clarify for us that on which the space allowed for in this article does not permit us to comment.

With regard to the inculturation of the Vincentian charism in America, the same Pope enlightens us in his *Exhortation to the Peoples of Latin America* affirming that “the process of evangelization requires a lucid, serious and orderly effort towards the evangelization of the culture.”

In our case, the inculturation of the Vincentian charism should help to purify the cultures and structures of our continent from so much injustice, poverty and misery. To what degree have we achieved this? What have we done or helped to do in this sense? In what phase of the progressive process — in three centuries — do we find ourselves? But we should also ask: What, thanks to the Vincentian charism, has been advanced, transformed, improved on our continent and Church with regard to justice, humanity and the dignity of the poor and the clergy?

2. CHARISM

At the beginning of this article we pointed out that this word was hard for us to deal with because of its interpretation. How many discussions and opinions have not been given to the exact definition or understanding of this word? What does it mean? How is it to be understood? To whom is it applied? Is it a question of heredity? Is the charism lived by the father of the family the same as the one lived by his sons? Is it not something personal and nontransferable?
We should also bear in mind that this word “charism,” although it has existed for a long time — Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians speaks of it — its use became more current after Vatican II. It was Paul VI who gave it currency, using it to refer to the charism of Religious Life as well as to that of the Founders; he conceived of it always as a gift of the Holy Spirit (Evangelica Testificatio, 11).

Neither Saint Vincent nor Saint Louise used the word, although each was granted his/her own charism, not for his/her own sanctification but rather for the good of the Church and of people. This is proper to the nature of the gift (Lumen Gentium 44, 46). In Mutuae Relationes 11, the charism of the Founders is spoken of as a gift and experience of the Holy Spirit to their persons, so that they could enlighten their institutes and so that the gift could be transmitted to their followers to guard, live, deepen and develop in order that each institute would be “characterized” by the living out of the charism.

Therefore, the charism, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, 1) is personal to the Founder; 2) can be collective and participated in by the Founder’s disciples; and 3) is always for the good of the Church and people. In this sense one speaks of the charism of the Founder (personal), the Founder’s charism (collective), and the charism of the Institute (ecclesial).

The use of other words as synonyms of charism

For an understanding that may permit us to arrive at an application of the word charism (although not in the precise biblical-theological-spiritual sense), it is good to know that other synonyms are frequently used such as “spirit,” “sense,” “end,” “experience,” “living out,” “mystique of action,” “vocation,” or “mission”; e.g., With what spirit was such an action or work done? What was or is the sense with which such an action was or is being done? By understanding it thus and by expressing ourselves in this way we can avoid certain difficulties, which usually occur when one thinks that, since the charism is a personal gift, a Vincentian of the 20th century cannot have the charism of Vincent de Paul (charism of the Founder), since Vincent de Paul is unique and unrepeatable in his being and action with all his graces, potencies and actions. But a Vincentian of the 20th century can act with the spirit, sense, end, etc. with which Vincent de Paul moved, lived and acted.

On the other hand, Vincent did use the word spirit. According to Dodin he used it 2,891 times, and with 27 meanings. In any case, such meanings can never be considered as contrary, but rather as in harmony and coherent with it.
Taking spirit as equal to zeal as a synonym of charism, it has to do with a free gift of the Holy Spirit, which is given to a person so as to be better able to live the charism, which moved the Founder and which he transmitted to the Institute, thus fulfilling the mission, acting with the same spirit or sense, which the charism of the Founder implies. In this way, we can say that the missionary, who lives in America in the 21st century, who does not have the personal charism which Saint Vincent had, but works with the Vincentian spirit or sense, acts with the Vincentian charism, or that the work he does with such spirit can be understood as a Vincentian work or is carried out with the Vincentian charism.

On the other hand, one who works with such a spirit or has such a charism is always the person, and we could never apply such a label to the works, which may or may not be carried out according to the Vincentian end or spirit, etc. For it can easily happen that the work founded is not in conformity with the Vincentian charism (a school for well-off students), but the missionary who works there, because he was sent and is working with the virtue of obedience, does so with true Vincentian spirit, sense, vocation and mystique, acting with an evangelic spirit; and, as priest-professor, orients the students with a commitment to justice and love for the poor and evangelizes their lives and consciences so that in their professional future they evangelize and defend and treat the poor with the dignity they deserve. It is the case of Saint Vincent himself when he worked with the grand ladies of the Parisian social set so they would love the poor. The reverse may also happen: the work may well be in line with the Vincentian charism, but the missionary may act or live without the spirit, sense, vocation, mystique = Vincentian charism.

As we did in the previous section, speaking of inculturation, when we asked that the charism respect the cultures so as not to invade or destroy them, now we ask that inculturation respect the charism so that the culture not adulterate the charism and change its values, which are not in its forms, but rather in the content and essence, in its most neuralgic roots. Therefore we should establish whether the charism continues with its force and efficacy without losing its own criteria, because then it would lose its essence. The charism, because it is a reality that moves in the sphere of faith, should transcend all cultures, although it can incarnate itself in all of them. Otherwise the charism would end up becoming one more culture and then it would not be either transcendent, nor truly immanent. These ideas are contained in John Paul II's encyclical Princeps Pastorum, 10. We could say that the inculturation and the charism should form a true matrimony, where both parts respect one another and, without losing their identity, merge into a new reality, different from either but which belongs to both, for it could not come
about without both of them. Is it not true that we have often contributed (with all the good will in the world) to divorcing this marriage of “charism-culture”?

3. LATIN AMERICA

The geographic extension and the mosaic of cultures which comprise the third term of our work is the third obstacle which presents itself in the writing of this article.

Ever since the discovery of our Latin America, the European scientists of the time have understood that the discovered territory “constituted an until then unknown and extraordinarily complex continent.”

Indeed: Complex for its surface area: more than 42 million square kilometers.

Complex for its distances: between its northern and southern ends lies a distance of more than 14 thousand kilometers.

Complex for its geographical configurations: isthmuses, archipelagos, an immensity of islands of different sizes, peninsulas, etc.

Complex by reason of the make up of its countries: from Mexico to the most southern point there are 36 countries, whether islands (15) or landed nations (21).

Complex by reason of its population: disproportionately distributed, economically and socially unequal, ethnically composed of three great groups: American Indian, white and black.

Complex because of its cultures: in which the missionaries, and in this case the Vincentians, had to spread the charism.

Naturally enough, the idea of religion has special relevance for our theme. No one doubts that the Catholic religion is predominant and widely disseminated throughout the Latin American continent — the continent of hope for the Church — without discounting those areas where, because of strong Indian and black populations, ancestral cults, whether indigenous or imported, persist mixed with elements of Christian tradition and the presence of the sects as a substratum for weakening the force of the Gospel implying an urgent need for evangelization.

This profusion of facts may seem unnecessary for an article whose audience came rather late to the Central and South American continent, when it was practically all formed. True, but we all know how important (not to say, necessary) it is to take into account and
to be familiar with something of the foundations upon which a whole structure like the Latin American continent is based.

Furthermore, by having a basis for comparison, one can measure much better the work in question. The arrival of the Vincentians, as workers of the fourth or fifth hour in the harvest field (the earliest arrived at the end of the 18th, and officially at the beginning of the 19th century), came almost four centuries after the first evangelization (although they could not have arrived earlier). Only by knowing how things and, especially, people were, can our appreciation be more objective. Into which world did we go — that of the countryside or the city? In which mission fields or ethnic groups did our communities settle: where there were no priests or where there already were some? What kind of priests did we form — for America or for Europe?

Part II:

WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL FACTS WHICH RESPOND TO THE TITLE?

In the two centuries of missionary presence can we say that the Vincentian charism is inculcated in Latin America?

The Conference of Latin American Provinces (CLAPVI) is present in almost all of Latin America. Of the 36 countries, which make up the Latin American continent, we are in 22 of them by means of the 13 provinces, one vice-province, four delegations and one mission which make up CLAPVI and to which 700 missionaries belong.

Two warnings to better understand this work:

- When I speak of CLAPVI, I will indicate as provinces all the components of the Conference, including under this label the vice-province, delegations and mission, unless for some special reason it is better to indicate otherwise.

- I think it is fair to point out that, besides the missionaries, all the branches of the Vincentian Family are spread throughout Latin America, especially the Daughters of Charity, who also sowed the Vincentian charism on the continent. But in this work we will refer only to the work carried out by the missionaries.

There is no doubt. It is clear that the Sons of Saint Vincent are present in Latin America. But with us, is the charism or spirit of our Founder also present? Is it truly inculcated?

This is the forest about which I spoke at the beginning of this work and these are the trees that compose it. Without doubt, among them we can find trees of all kinds and sizes; but all of us together form the forest. The forest is in Latin America. In this forest one can
breathe in the atmosphere, the odor, the air, and one can see the color of the Vincentian charism.

Moving from the image-parable to the reality, and bearing in mind the ideological part of our work, I present the data and the facts so that you, dear reader, can draw your own conclusions.

1. HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN PRESENT IN LATIN AMERICA?

According to some documents we can safely say that Brazil was in the thoughts of Saint Vincent and his first missionaries. We deduce this from the letters he wrote to Father Louis Lebreton in August 1640 (SV II, 90), and from a sermon on the Catechism between 1613 and 1616 (SV XIII, 28 ff.).

But the first real and personal arrival of the sons of Saint Vincent on this continent came in the 19th century, in 1820, and precisely in Brazil, by invitation of King John VI, to minister in the present state of Mato Grosso. The first missionaries to walk on our continent were the Portuguese Fathers Leandro Rebelo Peixoto y Castro (1781-1841) and Antonio Ferreira Viscoco (1781-1875), who was Archbishop of Mariana and whose process of canonization is being undertaken in Rome.

I purposely point out these two data: mission and process of canonization (= sanctity). Are not these two terms those that express the essence of our true charismatic Vincentian identity?
2. **FROM WHERE DID THE FIRST MISSIONARIES COME?** Who founded the different provinces that make up CLAPVI today?

We have already pointed out that the first to arrive were missionaries from Portugal. Almost immediately afterwards came the French, who arrived in ten of the 19 present-day provinces. Next came the Dutch Fathers (in six provinces) and the Germans (in six others). The Spanish missionaries were those who arrived in the most provinces (11). Missionaries of other nationalities also came: from the United States, Poland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Luxemburg. Besides the missionaries from Europe, priests from other provinces in Latin America itself also made their presence felt: from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and Peru, etc.

3. **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MISSIONARIES’ COMING TO LATIN AMERICA?**

Although there are many and varied reasons that the missionaries were called to our continent, they can be reduced to three more common reasons: they were sent by the Superiors General to give spiritual attention to the Daughters; they were called by the bishops to take care of seminaries; they were invited by some governors to minister, be missioners (King John VI in Brazil, Queen Isabel II to go to Cuba, the sitting governor in Argentina and Chile).

How can we establish that they came to exercise the purposes for which Saint Vincent founded us?

4. **WHAT ARE THE WORKS in which we have labored during our stay on this continent?**

Even though the question is answered in the previous section, we have to complete it by presenting the immense work carried out by our Vincentian pioneers and their followers, following the impulse of our Vincentian charism and spirit:

In 14 of our provinces, the priests dedicated themselves to the formation of the diocesan clergy in *seminary* work. In some places they did this for more than 100 years; and in many others they staffed almost all the seminaries of the country, for example, in Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia... “imposing in them the sense of the charism in favor of the poor country people, forming priests who are going to work in the countryside,” and when, for different reasons, they had to hand them over: “They left in the clergy a deep social conscience, a sense of work, (they formed) simple, pious persons, sufficiently numerous to satisfy the needs of the country”; and everywhere “making a great contribution to the particular churches of each nation,” for from such “seminaries came forth priests and bishops
of great value.” Besides attention to the formation of the clergy in the seminaries, in some provinces, like Puerto Rico, the bishop placed them in charge of retreats for ordinands and for all the clergy of the island.

In almost all the provinces and delegations they gave popular missions in different modalities depending on circumstances; for example, by accompanying the bishops as they made their pastoral visits, which would last two or three months; or by making of them special times for the evangelization of the poor, “taking on many different shapes and combinations: traditional, mixed, short, long (for two years), forming parishes in a permanent state of mission, in the countryside, in the suburbs.... With all these the Congregation made a profound contribution to the religious life of the country.”

Attention to missions among the Indians or in indigenous zones. There were 12 provinces with a presence in areas populated by indigenous peoples (Amazonia and Paraguasu in Brazil, Otomi in Mexico, Mapuches in Chile, the indigenous settlements of the Argentine pampas, the Indians of Petén in Central America, in Tierradentro de Arauca in Colombia, the indigenous area of El Limón in Costa Rica, the Moskitia in Honduras, Santo Domingo of the Colorado in Ecuador, El Alto in Bolivia, jungle and Banda del Shilcayo in Peru). In every one of these areas one could write testimonies filled with admiration. For our purposes, this small example: the labor carried out in Costa Rica by Bishop Bernardo A. Thiel who translated into Brivi different parts of the bible and many things regarding liturgy; he was concerned about the defense of the rights of the indigenous and the poor, and he worked in the poorest area of the country, involving himself in every apostolic field: social pastoral, health, education, vocational training, neighborhoods, etc. Speaking of the Moskitia, the chronicler describes it for us in these terms: It deserves a separate section. A region of 1600 square kilometers, full of lagoons, given to hurricanes, rainy, where the mosquitoes swarm, rivers overflow with many consequences; where the Misquitos live, descendents of Negroes and Indians, leading a nomadic life cut off from civilization; and among whom the Father and two catechists began their work “with many sacrifices and adventures” as true heroes of Mosquitia, knowing how to deal fraternally with the hunger and sleeplessness, innumerable labors and fatigues, and so many needs of every kind that only God knows.... Everywhere, from the outset and later on, the missionaries attended to the indigenous peoples with that evangelizing and missionary spirit Saint Vincent so wished for during his life.

Parish work was also taken on from the beginning, in all the provinces, even forming in some of them the principal apostolate, or in the majority of them, almost the only work in our day, as the concentration on missions and the formation of the clergy
diminished. This work took on different modalities as years went by. But almost all the parishes were attended and run with a missionary stamp, many of them being real “Mission Houses” or places where Mission Teams were formed. Such parishes were founded in the countryside or in the suburbs of the cities where the great number of inhabitants and the lack of spiritual attention because of the shortage of priests made the presence of the missionaries an urgent necessity. In almost all of them, we can say the work was done, as they tell us was done in Mexico, where the province lived out its missionary concern guided by the motto ‘the Province carries out its missionary vocation in parish ministry according to the specific characteristics of our charism.’ It must be noted that those who awakened the missionary potential of the priests in Mexico, and those who led them to these kinds of parishes, were the Volunteers of Charity. In Panama, where missionaries from the United States had worked attending to the Canal workers, the acceptance of parish ministry was the key element in a change towards a more missionary work, leading to a more authentic inculturation. It would be unpardonable not to point out in this profile what the work carried out through the parishes inserted in the “Young Communities” (Pueblos Jovenes) of Lima meant to the Province of Peru.

It is also true that, lately, we would have to change the qualification of missionary applied to our first parishes to sacramental now.

A very telling indication of this missionary spirit of the first founders of the provinces of the continent was the attention and dedication by many of them in various provinces to the service and care of hospitals and prisons, especially in moments of epidemics. We have heroic chapters of what we could call a true Vincentian martyrrology. Many gave their lives, which was much more than giving the glass of water or the piece of bread or the medicine they also knew how to give.

Another facet we cannot leave out, in this catalogue of works carried out by our missionaries on the continent, is the area of the educational apostolate in schools and colleges with different focuses and purposes, although all could be centered on the idea of educating and forming persons, starting from Saint Vincent’s thought that the ignorance of the people and the priests brought so many misfortunes, and in many cases put salvation itself in danger. So we find: from schools and colleges (where distinguished people — presidents, ministers, congressmen, artists, writers, bishops and pastors of the Church, citizens committed to the social reality in favor of the unfortunate and in the spirit of Saint Vincent were educated) in some countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru), to agricultural schools and, of course, schools for poor children. It is true that as time went by some schools for the poor became schools for the better-off. In some provinces, the priests felt obliged by the bishops to open a
school next to the parish they were offered or the house they wished to found.

It was not only by means of these traditional institutions that the confreres exercised the educational apostolate. In some provinces publishing houses were opened; in others mass media like radio and even television were employed.

The work of “catechisms” and even the translation of different parts of the bible and the liturgy, which many of our first missionaries did to form the faithful in the Christian life, are also worthy of mention in this work.

Neither can we forget the work the missionaries did from the beginning in favor of the different branches of the Vincentian Family. Some of the branches were already established in the countries before the first missionaries arrived there, as was the case with Argentina, where it was the Knights of Saint Vincent who asked the governor to call the priests to that country; or in Mexico, the Ladies of Charity. For the most part the priests created the different branches. We already said that, in not a few provinces, the Daughters demanded the presence of the priests, and in others three or four missionaries arrived together with them, as is the case of Chile and Puerto Rico, for example.

As an appendix if you wish, but also as a sign of the creativity and the search for new paths, but always in the line of the charism and with a missionary and evangelizing spirit, it is worth pointing out new works: the Highway Pastoral in Curitiba, or the provinces which employ mass media for evangelization (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Curitiba), as we mentioned earlier.

5. THOSE WERE THE WORKS – WHAT OF THE MISSIONARIES?

This is the most important section, but also the most difficult because of the delicacy required.

It is the most important because the charism and the spirit are in the people. In them is the life.

The works exist; they are there. The people were there and they gave their example, it is true. But who is so daring as to think he can arrive at the whole truth? Who is so fair that he cannot say that he failed to mention some whose names deserved to be written in gold or silver letters? Therefore, although in a general way, I will make some brush strokes that hopefully will produce a painting. I want to base myself on the quote of one who describes our pioneering missionaries and the founders of our present day provinces this way: Admireble confreres, young men who spent their lives in our countries, wise men who shared their knowledge with many priests and lay people, tireless evangelizers whose testimony, more than their words or
methods, left footprints; courageous men who never complained about leaving their homelands to take on the hardships of our underdevelopment.

Those who are on the path to canonization are: the first to come to Latin America, Bishop Antonio Ferriera Viscoco, and the native Peruvian and also bishop, Bishop Emilio Lisson, known as the “apostle of the poor.”

But there are also some who could be honored not only for their missionary holiness, but are also worthy of sainthood; like those who gave their lives taking care of plague victims, or were victims of yellow fever (Argentina, Fortaleza, Chile); or were persecuted and exiled by anti-clerical governors (Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Honduras, Peru, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, Mexico).

Or, without giving their lives physically, exposed them to daily sacrifice, immersed in true physical, material, cultural and relational hardships, like those who traveled inhospitable roads, in truly nomadic situations; also those who lived in the seminaries who, as one missionary said to the Superior General: Seminary work is, to my way of thinking, the best thing for the Congregation in America, but it will always demand the greatest abnegation and will never be exempt from every kind of difficulty.

Very worthy of bearing in mind is what the Archbishop of Curitiba, Bishop Pedro Fedalto wrote: We can imagine and understand the sacrifices of those early times: not knowing the language, the roads of those days, with drought, mud on the curves, without electric light or running water or telephone, long journeys on the back of a donkey or horse or in a wagon.... Who would not remember what Saint Paul said in 2 Cor 11:23-29?

6. HOW WAS THE VOCATIONAL APOSTOLATE?

Another way of asking this question would be: In the beginning all the missionaries came from outside. But when did native vocations begin? As a point of departure we can say that today, in almost all the provinces, the majority of the missionaries are from the continent. But our own vocational apostolate in Latin America has a sort of common denominator, because its cause is fairly common as well. Since the first and most common ministry was in the seminaries, for reason of ethics, respect and professional pride, a mentality of not making the bishops suspicious was created. If we were working to get our own vocations, we would be taking advantage, reaping in someone else’s field. Therefore the vocational apostolate for ourselves was somewhat neglected.

But this was not the case everywhere. There were provinces in which, from the very beginning, the Founding Fathers were
concerned about working for native vocations with a view to having the possibility of a province with native personnel. Thus apostolic schools, college seminaries, major and minor seminaries and houses of formation were opened with interesting projects and plans for the vocational apostolate. Today some provinces have more personnel than the original mother provinces. With great satisfaction we have today in CLAPVI provinces who are helping other provinces or mission areas with their men both within and beyond the American continent.

Another common factor in many provinces was a kind of neglect, in this sense, based on the abundance of missionaries that came from other provinces that enjoyed abundant vocations.

Also all of our provinces felt the crisis that affected the whole Church on the occasion of the whirlwind raised in the post-Conciliar years. Thanks be to God, when the waters calmed, many had overcome or are overcoming the crisis, revising their works, guiding the formation of their own men, struggling against the shortage of personnel caused by aging, facing up to the diversity of mentalities which arise and looking for new paths according to the dictates of the Vincentian charism and spirit. One Provincial Assembly said it this way: "Integral evangelization, that is, the human and Christian promotion of the poor, especially the country people, is the commitment of our apostolic life."

Part III:
WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN WE DRAW?

After this panoramic shot, as the cinematographers would say, and completing our outline, we finish up with some brief reflections and conclusions:

1. Admitting the possible and real shadows that exist in every human endeavor, we are content because the lights that were lit in our Latin America are brighter, and the fruits that were gathered are immensely more numerous than those that were lost, thanks to the living out of the Vincentian charism.

2. The current presence of the 19 entities of CLAPVI, with its 700 missionaries, after two centuries of existence in Latin America, is a clear recognition that the work was carried out in the line of the Vincentian charism and spirituality. None of the 13 provinces, one vice-province, four delegations and one international mission, which make up CLAPVI, would exist today if the major superiors had not recognized and favored the work of the
missionaries as true sons of Saint Vincent, bearers of the charism/spirituality of the Founder on our continent. Thus we can say that the aforementioned work is a prime indication of the fidelity, cultivation, insertion and communication of the Vincentian charism by the missionaries in Latin America.

3. The place where Father Maloney had the inspiration to launch that great initiative that the Vincentian Family has today was Mexico. The place of the greatest revitalization of the AIC is Mexico. Brazil has the greatest number of members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

4. As a coda to this work, I want to offer a bouquet of flowers for those who sowed the Vincentian charism with so much conviction in this Latin America of ours: What is most important and what claims our constant gratitude is the deep spiritual action of so many and such selfless missionaries who gave everything, even their own lives, to make the spiritual and missionary presence of Vincent de Paul lasting and fruitful. I dare to place other flowers in this bouquet, citing the authoritative words of some bishops and cardinals spoken on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of some provinces: What a wide range of works! How commendable! The Vincentian Fathers are bearers of the work of Saint Vincent de Paul, initiated by him in the 17th century, and fostered and cared for by the Vincentians in Cuba. Or those of the hierarchy of Ecuador who described the missionaries as: Persons of evangelical simplicity, uncommon wisdom, tireless zeal.

This is, without doubt, a fair evaluation of the selfless, disinterested and generous self-giving of those missionaries, the majority from Europe, who managed to place and to strengthen the bases of the Church in our countries, showing themselves to be men of prayer, study, work, dedication in such a way that they won for themselves the admiration, sympathy and affection of the people, and even the awards and recognition of the Church and the governments, but most of all the love of the poor. Their work is a hymn to the Vincentian charism with regard to the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy.

(Translation: JOSEPH V. CUMMINS, C.M.)
The Vincentian Charism in North America

by John E. Rybolt, C.M.
Midwest Province

In any consideration of the development of the Vincentian charism, a methodological problem arises: How genuine can the Vincentian charism be outside France? The question is not an idle one, as we will see, but for Vincent de Paul himself, it apparently was not an issue, since he established the Congregation during his lifetime in Italy and Poland, and sent his confreres to do the work of the Congregation in other countries.

Uniformity versus Adaptation

In the years to follow, even shortly after his death, the competing ideals of uniformity within the Congregation and adaptation to local circumstances remained to be resolved. René Alméras, for example, issued an anxious circular letter, which has remained unpublished, concerning the reasons for the change of the time for the main daily meal at Saint Lazare, from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m.¹ He hoped his confreres would not be too disturbed and invited them to consider changing. In another letter, he only grudgingly permitted his confreres to wear leather gloves in winter time, even in Poland, even though Vincent himself did not make use of them.²

Uniformity was an ideal often presented in the circular letters of the Superiors General and in the General Assembly decrees of the Congregation, but it was applied somewhat loosely in practice. After the Revolution and the restoration of the Congregation in France, the dynamism for centralization and uniformity grew. The early Superiors General made uniformity a part of their program, but none more so than Jean-Baptiste Etienne. He repeatedly insisted that

¹ Circular, 16 March 1663, in ACMP, Alméras papers, copy.
² Circular, from Jolly, in Alméras’s name, 28 September 1667, Archives CM, Kraków, Circulars, original.
absolute uniformity of principles and practice be maintained, something he was never able to accomplish, as he himself admitted.

Through his visits to other provinces outside France, particularly Italy and Ireland, he sought to maintain uniformity. He knew that missioners outside Europe, particularly in China, Ethiopia and the United States, had been adapting Vincentian life to local practice. His ideal was to have large central houses with regular community life as the Congregation had in France, and he urged his Chinese confreres and their European brothers to move in this direction. He publicly criticized Justin De Jacobis, the first Vincentian to be canonized after Vincent de Paul, for not having founded a house in Ethiopia. He said: Justin left “no institution, no work, and so to say, no other trace of his passage through the vast lands that he traversed, except for the good odor of edification that he never ceased to spread.” Etienne understood too that many American confreres were forced to live apart from a community house because of the needs of the apostolate. Added to competing pastoral needs were severe restrictions imposed on Vincentians in several countries, cutting them off from official contact with France. Naples for many years ran its own affairs, as did Portugal and later Brazil, along with Lithuania. The closest the Congregation ever came to schism was in Italy and Spain, as a result of these differing perspectives concerning uniformity guaranteed by centralized direction from Paris. To overcome this, Etienne at first planned to have a single Internal Seminary (novitiate) for the entire Congregation, but when this was shown to be impossible, he wanted at least to require all the directors spend time in Paris. None of this would happen.

This conflict of ideals, between uniformity and adaptation, between centralized control and local administration, has been a factor of Vincentian life throughout its history. The Constitutions of 1984 enshrine, but without exactly explaining how, the sense of the need to adapt Vincentian principles to the cultures of the people among whom its members work, plus the centrality of control on the level of individual provinces.

For some, consequently, suspicions can easily arise as to the genuineness of the Vincentian charism as lived out in different cultural situations. These suspicions came to the fore particularly during the difficult and heated discussions leading up to the extraordinary General Assembly of 1968-1969, and in the two following Assemblies. Speaking as a participant in some of those

3 Allocution at the opening of the General Assembly, 27 July 1861: "... sans laisser aucune institution, aucune œuvre et pour ainsi dire, d'autre trace de son passage à travers les vastes contrées qu'il a parcourues, que la bonne odeur d'édification qu'il n'a cessé de répandre."
discussions, I can attest to the lack of understanding and appreciation of the differences among various provinces. For some confreres, it appeared that there was only one possible way of being Vincentian, and that those who did not adopt that way were not genuine Vincentians. This was particularly true concerning the issue of the "end" of the Congregation. The members of the Assembly of 1980 struggled to express their understanding but, thanks to a last-minute intervention, a text was finally agreed on: "The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ, the evangelizer of the poor." Despite this affirmation of a single end, the Church's own official statement is different, listing two ends or purposes: "The Congregation of the Mission, founded by St. Vincent de Paul, has the special apostolic purpose of preaching the gospel to the poor and promoting the formation of the clergy." Thus, the dichotomy so carefully negotiated and prayed over during the Assemblies has remained.

The American Experience: Universities, Seminaries, Missions

In 1816, the Congregation of the Mission arrived in the newly-independent United States to establish and run a seminary for the western part of the new nation, the Louisiana, purchased from France in 1803. At the same time, and true to the Vincentian charism, the first confreres to arrive from Europe insisted on preaching parish missions. What they found, however, was that there were very few parishes, and that the Church needed not parish missions but parish pastors, since the nation was growing so quickly through immigration. Besides, not everyone who came to the parishes was Catholic. In the early days of the Republic, Catholics and Protestants often came to church out of curiosity, to hear a sermon, and to understand their neighbors better.

The result was that American Vincentians were not initially involved in parish missions. They appreciated the problem and chose at times to speak of their founding and support of new parishes as a kind of permanent mission, but this was certainly not what Saint Vincent had in mind.

Out of the seminaries developed other works, described in several studies in *Vincentiana* and elsewhere. For our purposes here, we will concentrate only on the ministry in higher education, at the

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5 See in particular *Vincentiana* 45:3 (2001) for several articles on this subject.
university level and in seminaries, and on popular missions. The founding of independent Catholic universities is in many ways a distinctively American undertaking. The reason is that, in many other nations, the system of university education is either tightly controlled by the state or has been in existence for centuries, such that the founding of new universities under Catholic auspices can be a rare and difficult event. The American Vincentians did not begin with the thought of founding universities. Each of the three universities currently under Vincentian direction started as something else, a secondary school or seminary, and these gradually developed, through the call of the local Church, into larger institutions.  

Over the years, then, the three Vincentian universities grew in size and importance for the American Church. It took the new Constitutions, particularly statute 11, §§ 1, 3, to help these institutions refocus their attention on the Vincentian mission of the universities. “1. Recognizing the great importance of education for both youth and adults, members should take up this work of teaching and educating where it is needed to achieve the purpose of the Congregation. 3. Schools, colleges, and universities should, according to local circumstances, admit, and promote the development of the poor. All the students, however, should be imbued with a sensitivity for the poor, according to the spirit of our Founder, while the confreres affirm the value of Christian education and provide a Christian social formation.” This providential statement came out of a proposal during the Assembly of 1980 that, if approved, would have led to the abandonment of these institutions. Instead, the members of the Assembly became convinced of the utility of these and similar institutions for carrying out the mission of the Congregation. Furthermore, statistics gathered in the United States have shown that one of the most effective ways for someone to break out of the cycle of poverty is to receive a university education.

The result has been that graduates of Niagara University, Saint John’s University and DePaul University, in improving their own situation, have also been imbued with a Vincentian sensitivity for the poor. Indeed, new methods are constantly being developed to train faculty and administration in the Vincentian charism, and many ongoing programs exist in each institution to recruit poor students, particularly those from families who have never had any university education, and then to support them through their years of education until their graduation and even afterward. The values at the core of Vincentian education have, in summary, been described as being

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holistic, integrated, creative, flexible, excellent, person-oriented, collaborative and focused.7

The Vincentian faculty members of these universities also underwent significant personal development. Many became renowned experts in their fields of teaching and research, while others served the Church through their administrative skills. Many of them, in addition, underwent a profound conversion in the time of the many changes and revisions that followed the Second Vatican Council and the new Constitutions of the Congregation.8

Besides the development of Catholic universities, which enroll many non-Catholic and even non-Christian students, and which have non-Catholic and even non-Christian faculty members and administrators, the American Vincentians in recent years have seen the decline of their former work in diocesan seminaries. A question is easily asked: Did we leave the seminaries, or did the seminaries leave us? It is difficult to answer such a question, since the historical situation is complex. In some cases, the Congregation did leave the seminaries, since diocesan vocations declined and the community lacked the personnel or other resources to continue. In other cases, diocesan clergy took over the institutions little by little. At no time did the provinces decide to leave seminaries entirely as a part of their provincial planning processes. One after another either closed or passed into other hands, many of whom were priests trained by the Vincentians.

Another similar question that is easily asked but answered only with difficulty deals with the parish or popular missions: Did we leave the missions, or did the missions leave us? The fact is that, despite many attempts over the years, the parish missions in the United States never reached the top rank in the apostolates of the American provinces. Periods of advance, with large numbers devoted to various sorts of missions (particularly in the form of the Miraculous Medal Novenas), were followed by periods of decline and virtual extinction. Although the missions today are being preached and are appreciated, the local Church is not consistently calling the Congregation to offer this sort of ministry. Since the situation of American parishes is so totally different from those of France in the 17th century, this militates against attempts to impose the traditional missions on our contemporary setting. Changes have been made in format and approach, but missions are generally not regarded by bishops and pastors as something essential, but only something extrinsic.

The American Context

In which ways does the American situation differ? The nation is built of immigrants, and immigration to the United States continues in record numbers of both documented (legal) and undocumented (illegal) immigrants, reaching about one million yearly in the last ten or 15 years. This is happening so rapidly that our parishes and other works have a hard time adjusting to new cultures and peoples.

Also, the United States never experienced a period of official persecution of the Church. Although Catholics suffered from prejudice and exclusion, the Church was never suppressed here as it was in many other countries. Also, since 1812, there has never been a foreign war fought on American soil, with its attendant waves of refugees and displacement of peoples. The United States has never experienced the peasant class that existed in many other places. Today, of course, those who work the land are often wealthy and entrepreneurial, and only a very small percentage of Americans actually live on the land to produce food or other products.

The advancement of the great mass of the American people can also be explained through a culture that emphasizes freedom, equality, hard work and individual initiative. This sort of culture is ruled out by an emphasis on unquestioning uniformity. From the American perspective, these ideals were confirmed by many of the documents issued by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent statements and legislation. The Church, in other words, has been attempting to recognize cultural differences, and the Congregation has followed the same path.

Thanks to a favorable geopolitical and economic climate, the United States has never stopped growing both in population (now estimated at 300 million), wealth and influence. To the great surprise of many, its Catholic population is among the best educated, the most respected and the wealthiest of all our citizens. Many Catholics have entered politics and are represented in the federal Congress, state legislatures and the judiciary, while others are the heads of large corporations and universities, and are at the top of their chosen professions.

Out of all these considerations there arises the issue of how the Congregation of the Mission is to minister in this land. Direct service of the poor is always central to our planning, but the poor among us are often (but far from exclusively) non-Catholics, another factor differentiating American pastoral life. They are rather unchurched, Protestants or members of non-Christian religions. Nevertheless, this

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has led the universities and the parishes to focus on these groups. Paramount among them at present are Hispanics, particularly recent immigrants. Many Vincentian works exist to reach out to these brothers and sisters of ours: direct financial aid, legal aid for immigration problems, providing a Church community for worship and fellowship, planning and organization, access to public services of all sorts. As an outgrowth of this reality, many confreres in the American provinces have learned Spanish or other languages to improve their ministry. In addition, the confreres have worked assiduously at multiplying their effect through their outreach to lay people, especially lay leaders, many of whom are eager to volunteer in Vincentian works.

**American Contributions**

What have American Vincentians contributed to the Congregation of the Mission at large? One is the principle of participatory democracy, very dear to our citizens. As a result, it is difficult for American Vincentians to conceive of a congregation whose members would have little or no participative voice in its planning and governance. Another principle is that of “playing by the rules.” It has often become clear in the General Assemblies of the Congregation that the approach to its Constitutions and Statutes is not uniform. For certain cultures, the Constitutions are a set of ideals that one strives
to reach at some point, but from the American constitutional perspective, the Constitutions are fundamental and obligatory. For this reason, it is difficult to conceive of changes of Constitutions and Statutes that reflect temporary situations or are on the level of mere exhortation. A third contribution is generosity coupled with openness to others, manifested in a large scale of financial and personnel support of other provinces, whether by individual confreres or provinces.

Besides principles, the American provinces have also contributed leaders to the Congregation, in particular four Superiors General in recent years, Fathers Slattery, Richardson, Maloney and Gay. Others with organizational and leadership skills have helped guide various congregational undertakings. Recently, for example, the Vincentian Studies Institute, headquartered at DePaul University which now sponsors it, has developed into a major international source for Vincentian learning and research. American Vincentians have also contributed over the years to the foreign mission outreach of the Congregation, chief among them being Panama and China. Today we have to add the growing Kenyan mission, with its emphasis on formation of the diocesan clergy and care for the poor, supported willingly but at great cost to the Congregation in men, money and organization, as all the missions have been.

Conclusion

This study began from a request to present the state of the Vincentian charism in North America. It was my conviction that, to understand the situation, it would be necessary to examine the development of the Congregation in the United States, not only in its works but also in the principles behind this development. To accomplish this, it is also necessary to study the very model of the Congregation of the Mission, whether as branches of a single tree, or as something approaching a community of self-governing provinces. This has shown that, yes, the genuine Vincentian charism does exist in North America, despite the fact that its realization has taken on a distinctively American appearance.
The Inculturation of the Vincentian Charism in Europe

by Bernard Massarini, C.M.
Province of Toulouse

In the letter he wrote to the Visitors of the Conference of Visitors of Europe (CEVIM) on 19 April 1999, Father Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, described the situation begun in Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall (linguistic and cultural diversity, and diversity of interests). Then he continued: “Today I suggest to you some points for discussion. I intend them as an encouragement toward common reflection at this meeting and common action in the future and as rallying points around which greater unity can be promoted, while at the same time preserving the rich diversity that has characterized the many provinces that make up the conference.” He proposed six points for the Visitors to enlist the Congregation in the building of Europe: a continental formation center, attention toward migrations and associated ministries, a Congregational representation in Brussels, a continent-wide reflection on our patrimony, a renewal of the means of prayer, and a refinement of the juridical structure of CEVIM.

This led me to work through the challenges to the Christian tradition in Europe. Then various readings showed me how the Congregation has participated up to our days in the characteristic dynamisms of Europe. Following on the Council, even showing a great vitality, the Congregation has attempted to restate its charism through looking for ways to accompany the new configuration of Europe. Today, we have to continue to bring the contribution of our identity in terms of three axes.

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1 “To the members of the European Conference of Visitors (CEVIM),” 12 April 1999, Vincentiana, 43:3 (1999) 147.
The European Christian tradition

Cultural diversity characterizes the associated countries, now numbering 25 and speaking more than 15 different languages, and presenting multiple traditions unified in large measure by varying Christian traditions: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, all of which are the fruit of history. Although the past years have revived tensions over the interpretation of history, bringing out contradictory readings, such as religious traditions, philosophical currents, and non-believing traditions, Europe finally rejected the inclusion in the planned European Constitution of "religious roots" and got a note speaking instead of "spiritual traditions."

The emergence of the presence of the cultures of Islam through the populations who arrived in Europe to sustain economic growth (Turkey and the Maghreb, Asia), and fears about the future have certainly undergirded the reflections that finally ended up by rejecting the text of the Constitution in three countries, thereby putting off until later this common fundament. In the model of this slow construction, the Congregation in Europe is advancing by little steps.

Cardinal Poupard, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in a recent colloquium organized in Vienna between Catholic and Orthodox traditions, cited Maurice Schuman as a way of orienting the mission of the Churches in this laborious construction of Europe. "We have to realize that Europe will not be able, in the long run, to limit itself simply to an economic structure. It will have to become also a safeguard for all that makes our Christian civilization great: the dignity of the human person, freedom and responsibility for individual and collective initiative, the flourishing of all the moral energies of our peoples. Such a cultural mission will be the indispensable complement and the bringing about of a Europe which until now has been founded on economic cooperation. It will give it a soul, a spiritual nobility and a genuine common conscience. We should not have a narrow concept of Europe, limited to material concerns, if we wish it to resist the assault of racist coalitions and fanaticism of every sort."  

He took up this expression, "to give a soul to Europe," as the fundament for the churches within Europe. Pastor William Collins, Secretary General of CEC-KEK (Conference of European Churches), during a recent ecumenical meeting between CEC-KEK and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE), noted that secularization was beginning to appear as an inescapable element of

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2 Cardinal Paul Poupard, address at the European meeting on culture, Vienna, 3 May 2006.
the Christian presence in Europe. This will become a challenge for
the participants. But it seemed to them that “to build a just and
equitable Europe without the Churches has no meaning.” Pastor
Thomas Wipf, president of the Protestant Churches of Europe,
instead of risking putting a cultural or ideological gloss on “giving a
soul to Europe,” suggested “working directly to make a common
space of freedom, justice and peace.” He moved this undertaking
more into the field of social action to give what he called “a heart”
for Europe.

Currently, several initiatives are under way to actualize the care
for a European presence for Christians, notably that gathering
around the Swiss historian Martin Kluger, who began the “Kairos”
group, “… to give new courage to Christians and to help them to
influence the development of Europe.” To this end he proposed
several ways of responding to the challenges that this new
community is offering us. He recalls that: “We are building this
project, which is truly ecumenical, on three pillars. The first: the
invitation to pray every day, especially around noon, one Our Father
for a Europe impregnated with Christian values. This could also
mean for Catholics praying the Angelus in the same way. The second:
monthly newsletter on current themes at the crossroads between
Christianity and questions of society. The articles are written by
well-known personalities.... They intend to present issues to ‘normal’
Christians to help them keep their heads in both small and large
discussions. The third pillar is the consequence of the two others
and could be described with the concepts of ‘sensitizing,’ ‘courage’ and
‘political and cultural involvement.’ Our sticker with the European
fish, visible on thousands of cars and backpacks or bags could be a
way of encouragement and of giving a positive impulse to
Christians.”

At the heart of this Europe in search of itself, the children of
Saint Vincent de Paul are searching for their way.

The Congregation in Europe at the dawn of the 21st Century

The fall of the Berlin wall, 9 November 1989, which surprised
the entire world, was largely supported by Christian communities.
The Congregation of the Mission reacted rapidly by opening a
mission in the East, following the General Assembly of 1992. The
Superior General happily recalled for us: “As you know, the General
Assembly of 1992, in its sixth commitment (New Evangelization,

4 The site: www.europe4christ.net
5 Interview with Martin Kugler, Zenit, Sunday, 29 January 2006.
N° 6) stated: 'Our Congregation commits itself in Eastern Europe to at least one missionary project as a concrete sign of our Community's participation in new evangelization.' In response to this directive of the Assembly, we began a new mission in Albania in 1993. There are now five confreres working there along with three communities of Daughters of Charity. At Christmas I heard from both the confreres and the sisters. They express great joy in their new life and mission. At the same time, confreres from the Provinces of Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia have begun to work in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Lithuania."

Despite the impression of a "European demographic winter that is increasing each year," Cardinal Poupard finished his report by saying: "One of his French compatriots, a spectator engaged, as he was, in defining himself, Raymond Aron, had already in his Mémoires (1983) been estimating that Europeans were in the process of committing suicide through a low birthrate. The absence of descendants, regarded in the Bible as a punishment from God, has even become today in some countries an ideal, a refusal of children, being 'children free.' The desire for a child is not being decreed. This absence for a woman is the product of a hedonistic materialist culture that affects our Churches greatly. It is not an ideology, but rather a practical attitude in the face of existence, conceived as a fruit to be picked to enjoy egotistically, by one or two persons, of the same or different sex, without limits or hindrance, in an this-world horizon, where hope for eternal life is swallowed up in time without hope." At the low-point of this demographic winter, the Congregation would enter into this European dynamic by a leap of life.

We should realize, on the other hand, that the Congregation, born in the heart of 17th-century Europe, under the impulsion of Saint Vincent, was enlisted in the great movement of the expansion of the continent of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. She participated in the arrival of Christianity in South and North America, in Asia and in Africa by working in influential areas of the various countries that constituted the strength of the European continent. "We can point to the missionary expansion in the different areas of the African continent: the Italian and Dutch area in Abyssinia, the Portuguese area in Mozambique, the Belgian area — together with Polish and Dutch missioners — in the Congo, the French area in North Africa, Madagascar and Cameroon, the Irish area in Nigeria.... The presence of the Congregation and its work in Asia and the Pacific Islands is due to a great degree to the missionary thrust of the European provinces, especially in the past. Spain, for

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example, carried the mission to the Philippines and India.... The Dutch confreres, supported by missionaries from Italy, carried out mission work in Indonesia.... The Congregation owes its presence in Vietnam to the French and Dutch confreres. And the great mission in mainland China and Taiwan was begun by missionaries from various backgrounds: Italian, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian and Irish. The Irish missionaries also brought the Congregation to Australia. The French confreres missioned in the Middle East and established the Congregation in that part of the world, although our presence today is very uneven depending on the country: Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Egypt and Iran. The missionary activity in America followed the same path as in Africa and Asia. The European provinces worked diligently to collaborate in the evangelization of the new continent and establish the presence of the Congregation. In general terms it can be said that the majority of the European provinces sent confreres to do mission work in those places where the Congregation finds itself today.... Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia and Central America.... Brazil received missionary aid from the Portuguese, Polish and Dutch confreres. The former Pacific province was consolidated thanks to missionaries from very different parts of Europe, among others the province of Barcelona. Central America got missionaries from Holland, while Costa Rica got them from Germany. The Spanish provinces missioned and established the Congregation in a huge area of Latin America: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Peru and Venezuela, not to mention their collaboration in other territories of the new continent.... The mission and the establishment of the Congregation in the United States is due to the combined efforts of missionaries from various European countries: Italians, Spaniards, and later Polish; the latter locating themselves in what is today the New England Province. French and Slovenian confreres attend to the mission in Canada.

The various changes occasioned by the two world wars, the changes in understanding the concept of mission, the economic development of the 1970s, together with worldwide demographic evolutions, have moved the European population from being about 25% of world population to only about 11% now, and no more than 7% in 2050. Europeans share only a weak destiny with other industrialized countries (with the exception of the United States, which continues to increase in population). Nonetheless, in these last years the Congregation has been able to participate in new missionary dynamics by joining in the international missions: Bolivia


by France and Poland, the Solomon Islands by Poland, and Albania by Italy. There is also a continuation of its presence among Muslim populations: Italy helping Austria in Turkey, and France helping in Algeria and Iran. It is also open on the eastern side of Europe, with Polish missionaries in Greece. I should also mention the large-scale economic support from the European provinces of the Congregation toward provinces of different countries where the presence of the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul is deployed.

On the question of the mission *ad gentes*, profound changes have taken place following the new understandings of mission since Vatican II, lived out as they are in dialogue among cultures concerning the new developments that are taking place. By way of illustration, I point to the welcome of new missionaries to the countries of Africa, Asia and South America working in mission teams from Europe, as also the welcome of structural changes, leading, for example, Belgium to become a region of Congo.

It is exactly here that lay people are emerging to add their contribution to the mission in the service of the poorest. New roads are built in new ways. The members of MISEVI (Lay Vincentian
Missionaries) have developed under the impulse of Spanish Vincentians and Daughters of Charity. They are now present in Spain, for the missions of Bolivia, Honduras and Mozambique; in Italy, for a mission to Congo; in Ireland for a mission to Ethiopia; and in France for missions in Mauritania and Israel. They are a new way of bringing forward together the Vincentian mission. Their International Statutes were published at the end of 2005 at the time of their General Assembly at the Berceau.9

Our charism confronted by the challenges of Europe

Since cultures are more and more marked with a lay or non-clerical stamp, which moves the Church to the fringes of our societies, they place the citizens of Western Europe into agnosticism, and those of Eastern Europe into an attempt to imitate them, thereby weakening their dynamism. The great aggiornamento of the Catholic Church following the Council has contributed in its own way to the displacements to which we have pointed. Our Congregation would go through this crisis full tilt. Rethinking European models and the perception of the place of authority and the sacred would involve the departure of many priests, and the transference of its traditional missions (formation of the clergy and popular missions) into a context that seemed more complex and unattainable.

An article by Father Kevin Rafferty would show that the 20 European provinces, which in 1999 counted 1500 confreres divided into 248 communities, with a median age of 61,10 had only 148 students (of whom 75 were in Slovakia and Poland). He concluded his reflection on the two missions proper to the C.M. that he set out to rethink. Parish missions: we should take care not to dissociate them from theological reflection on the communities of the Church. Spain has committed itself to develop renewed missions in their own way, led by Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian laity. But the area of priestly formation and the accompaniment of the students have not perhaps been diversified and have not been rethought. There have not been new types of formation or new types of assistance to priests to respond to the new situations of the diocesan clergy, especially the solitude and isolation in large pastoral settings.11 Only one initiative of the Irish confreres could be pointed

9 http://www.misevi.org/asamblea2005
out: the Intercession for Priests, which seeks to open a temporary accompaniment for priests going through loneliness and going through crises that weaken their ministry and sometimes even their vocation.

The formation of the laity: another case of our Congregation with its new Statutes has been developed here or there by the participation of certain confreres in formation programs in the context of a Catholic university or programs of diocesan formation. Only a few of us have been involved in this. Perhaps only a few initiatives have been brought to everyone’s attention. We can, however, point out the original experience, now 30 years old, of the Vincentian Weeks held in Salamanca, Spain, which bring together annually some 300 participants, Vincentian laity, Daughters of Charity and Vincentians, to deepen themes of our spirituality. They have given rise to a printing house which continues to emphasize the patrimony bequeathed by our founders.

It was in the new Constitutions coming out of the General Assembly of 1980 that a new way of living the charism was proposed. They dealt with Vincentian identity for today, translating the wish to respond to the signs of the times. The General Assembly of 2004 pursued this same situation by evaluating the way and orienting itself toward the future. The repercussion at the European level was expressed during the meeting of the Visitors in Rio in 1989. During that meeting, three of them laid the foundations for a second continent-wide conference of the Congregation, following in the footsteps of the confreres from Latin America who, since 1971, had been organized into a conference.

Confronting the centripetal dynamics proper to the European continent (multiple language, plurality of Christian traditions, different economic interests), the Conference of Visitors took time to draw up a structure for itself. It drew up statutes and chose to be called CEVIM (Conférence Européenne des Visiteurs de la Mission). It numbers the 19 European provinces, including also the Middle East. Its first choices were to develop some sessions for young confreres, beginning with the Paris meeting of 1990. In 2000, it organized sessions for formators. They greatly appreciated the session and noted, in their closing declaration: “the common identity that characterizes the Congregation.”

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More recently, in January 2007, it brought together Provincial Treasurers, to reflect on the management of the resources of the Mission throughout Europe. It continued this dynamic by a meeting of young missionaries, the establishment of an Internal Seminary in Western Europe, the opening of annual provincial retreats to confreres from other European provinces.

What direction should it take to make this three-fold face of the Vincentian charism allied with the various associations inspired by the same spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul? Father Christian Sens proposed four directions: the evangelization of the poor (being careful to live it out in a movement of dialogue and proclamation with a renewed language that takes into account the hope of Christians) through the insertion of concern for the defense of the poorest (migrants, victims of violence) into new proposals for formation, interreligious dialogue, and vocations. We recognize here the three main lines of our spirituality: the place of God, service of the poor, and confidence in the future of creation. Confreres are already present in initiatives of proclamation of the faith among the migrants to our countries. They have created areas for proclamation adapted to persons from the cultures of Islam by the Justin de Jacobis Foundation in Austria, or they have accompanied catechumens from these cultures in France, particularly one confrere from the province of Paris. Although the attempt to renew popular missions has not had the great successes of the new dynamics in Spain, yet some traveling missions have been opened that bring together lay Vincentians, Daughters of Charity and Vincentians.

**Deploying our charism in Europe in answer to the call of the Church**

We have to keep following the new trails that have been laid down. The Synod of the Churches of Europe to prepare for the year 2000 closed with an apostolic letter from Pope John Paul II. In it, he invited the churches of Europe to respond to the new evangelization by centering its exhortation in the context of the call of the Apostle to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, as if to say that we must keep bringing the witness of unity to the heart of diversity while awaiting the return of the Lord. Encouraging each other to be creative amid our differences, to take account of hope: this is the backbone of the message.

Cardinal Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Genoa, did the same during his inauguration of the Synodal Assembly. “Christian realism which

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ought to animate our discernment cannot fail to open itself up to a radical optimism. It is the optimism which is born of faith in the presence of the Lord Jesus who has not abandoned the Church and humanity, and who continues to send his Spirit from the four corners of the earth with the aim of touching Europe and transforming it in its hidden depths. This is what continually happened throughout two thousand years of history. And numerous are the signs of this active and vivifying presence of the Spirit.”

The recent synod of the Churches of Europe pointed out that they must also have “concrete actions to help the poor of Europe, no matter the reason for their poverty. This implies an even greater solidarity toward the poorest countries of our continent. At the same time, we cannot forget the poor in other parts of the world. In other words, we have to be more generous than we are today. We have to remind ourselves strongly that Europe must not turn in on itself.” It continued by insisting on the importance of dialogue with Islam, sensitivity on everyone’s part to questions of poverty, to the formation of the laity and to the urgency of the challenge of vocations.

The European provinces of the Congregation already are offering some works that bring to life our own proper charism, whether the intuitions of our recent General Assembly, or the paths undertaken by CEVIM.

Before entering into the question of the proper area of specific activities, where our presence and our care should be focused, we should return to that which characterizes the heart of our charism: “Love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divine providence” (C 6).

“Love and reverence towards the Father”

In a Europe searching out its way concerning its religious heritage, to remark again the triple intuition of the Constitutions leads us to probe more deeply the demand for the transmission of the faith that could be directly compromised. We should not forget to restore the meaning of the call coming to us. Using the terminology of the “French School” of spirituality, Saint Vincent in his correspondence taught that the psychology of Jesus was aligned in two directions: “Reverence toward his Father and charity toward mankind.” He also placed “devotion” as a ready love, full of desire

17 Letter of Saint Vincent to a Priest of the Mission, Coste VI, letter 2334.
and action. It is a matter, then, of placing Christian faith once more at the heart of our concerns.

If we give our attention to the suggestions of Bishop Koch for reanimating fundamental human values, we perceive the richness of the Vincentian approach for putting in place the first dimension, "love and reverence toward the Father." He suggested that "... in the lived relationship with God, the best antidote against the danger that threatens to absolutize and 'idolize' finite values... against the 'Twilight of the gods,' is to hold for the divine principle.... As a result, the proclamation of a divine reality without price is the only thing that can effectively protect the dignity of the human person; this has never been well protected save in relationship with God. Stated in this way, the human principle acts against merely using a human being and his or her dignity. Those rooted in God, conscious of their unique dignity, are at the same time brought to rely on each other to form a community. They abandon those commercial relationships to which society attaches such a high price and turn rather to authentic social relationships. In this way, the social principle is laid down over against individualism without solidarity."\(^\text{18}\)

As the article cited above reminded us, referring to the Synod of Europe, we have to recall that "it is therefore urgent that every Christian, every Christian community, rediscover a missionary spirit to announce the kerygma with the strength that the Spirit already grants to the work. At the same time, we have to seek out new methods to permit us to encounter man where he actually comes into being and expresses himself today. The proclamation of the Gospel is a task that concerns all Christians. This demands authentically believing communities and individuals. Human witnessing represents an absolute necessity. To evangelize, one must be able to spot the lacks in evangelizers and in communities at the level of faith and its expression, as if it were faith founded more on custom than on conviction, a routine religious practice, or a lack of interest in present-day cultural challenges. In a world that barely accepts abstract teachings, the Gospel is often proclaimed with more authenticity and impact only by the individual and communitarian witness of authentic believers, through their presence in daily life and in listening."

We are reminded to pay special attention to the place of formation to help in this task. The conclusions of the session of the formators of our own candidates, the one that recognized our common identity, open the way to more collaborative work of teaching to be practiced by our Congregation in Europe to face the

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demands of the society in which we are evolving. CEVIM is solidifying the International Internal Seminary through the drawing up of its Statutes, and it will finish its work in July at the time of its next meeting. The ambitious object of a common European formation for the candidates of the Mission is taking its baby steps.

"Compassionate and effective love for the poor"

Our European societies are confronted with the birth of new poverty of all sorts: unemployment, unstable working conditions, weakening of systems of social protection, uncertain housing, violence within families, breakdown of family life, mistreatment of children, migration of populations in search of a better future. Our compassionate love is translated into action through walking with those in great difficulty, and this supposes an ongoing formation that is more focused and specialized. We maintain the care for a continuing bond with these new kinds of poverty that bring about answers to new situations. As regards solidarity with migrants, we should take note especially of the support for South American migrants in Spain: "Manos Abiertas" in Zaragoza. Confreres are helping drug addicts in Italy, or Traveling People in Ireland. In France, others have been developing services for people involved in prostitution, through partnership groups; that is, working with men and women in prostitution as their partners in service groups.

In the area of interreligious dialogue, we can point to several initiatives that still remain the choice of the provinces, and which did not develop out of CEVIM. For example, the presence of the missioners to live out the "dialogue of life" in countries with an Islamic culture, in North Africa, Turkey and Iran. The first meeting of all of them took place in Lebanon in 2001, and it led them to evaluate and enrich long-term contacts that are still developing between the members of the Vincentian Family and these populations. In Europe, our Austrian brothers, through the service of the Justin de Jacobis Foundation, are developing ways adapted for those of Islamic cultures interested in Christianity.

"Docility to Divine Providence"

This dimension lays down a close bond between our inventiveness and its source, the heart of God. Monsieur Vincent only became Saint Vincent de Paul by listening constantly to Providence, inviting others not to tread on its heels. At the time of the last

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General Assembly, CEVIM proposed to “promote the vocational dimension in all our apostolic activities; promote in the European Provinces a common style in evangelization and in charitable activities; promote collaboration with the Vincentian Family and other organizations which work in Brussels in order to participate in the European Union’s social solidarity projects; promote meetings for study and exchange of views for confreres from the various European Provinces, in order to deal with the phenomenon of immigration and Islam in Europe from a common Vincentian perspective.” The elements not mentioned are already being worked on.

In the context of the vocational crisis, it is still necessary to work through this domain. Some provinces have proposed vocational discernment for young women and young men in a program of annual meetings and short-term participation in the missions of local communities. Some experiences, such as those of “young Europeans,” a year of discernment and missionary service established by the Jesuits, do not yet have an equivalent in the Congregation in Europe.

On the question of working on common horizons, let us note that the interprovincial councils of France, and recently also those in Italy, have brought out their concern for a better programming of common missionary objectives in view of an apostolate overly challenged both in personnel and in economic and pastoral resources. Has the time finally come to respond to the question of the representation of the Congregation at the European Community? This was broached at the time of the last CEVIM meeting in Istanbul, and the next session, which will close the Meeting of the Visitors of the Congregation in Mexico City will give an answer.

I will conclude these reflections on our Vincentian presence in Europe by the vibrant appeal launched by the last General Assembly. “Congregation of the Mission, be who you are! Do not yield to mediocrity! Fan into a flame the fire within! Like St. Vincent, walk passionately in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the poor. Give new life to your charism, the gift that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you. Work tirelessly to go beyond the boundaries of your mission! Full of conviction, give witness to and spread the vitality of your vocation!”

(Translation: Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M.)

Inculturating
Vincentian Charism and Ministry
in the Asia-Pacific Contexts:
A Methodological Proposal

by Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M.¹
Province of Philippines

The Case of Collaborative Servant-Leadership

Live with confreres so cordially and simply that no one, on seeing you together, may guess who is the Superior.
Do not settle any business matters, however unimportant they may be, until you have first sought their advice....
(SV VI, 66)

Introduction

When I was given this topic to develop, I felt some excitement to be given the opportunity to reflect about ‘collaborative servant-leadership’ for the whole Asia-Pacific Region. In the end, however, I found out it was an impossible task. If inculturation (of a charism, a ministry or of Christianity itself) is to be done, it should be done in its specific context, and the people who can do it are those who are there where the action is. So, what I will offer here are mere methodological pointers on how to do inculturation on the ground — hoping that, with this, we can start the process ourselves. To start

¹ Daniel Franklin Pilario, C.M., St. Vincent School of Theology, 221 Tandang Sora Ave., Quezon City, Philippines [danielfranklinpilario@yahoo.com].
the ball rolling, I volunteer an attempt to reflect on the theme from my own context, the Philippines, also knowing that mine is not the last word, and never should there be. This paper has three parts: (1) a discussion on the methods of interpretation; (2) a search for a viable theory of culture for inculturation; (3) an attempt to apply this appropriated framework on our theme.

1. The Challenge of Interpretation(s)

The project of inculturation needs hermeneutics or a theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics traces its origins to Hermes' role of unraveling to humans the messages of the gods. Hermes, thus, traverses both worlds—a posture which is also present in any hermeneutical act: the world of the 'text' and the world of the interpreter. The problem of hermeneutics therefore is to establish a dialogue between these two worlds separated as they are by time, space and cultures. It is only through this dialogue that understanding happens. The project is not as simple as it looks. For one, both worlds need to be deciphered. This is clearly understandable with the world of the text. Since the 'text' is produced in the past, there is a need to interrogate that past in order to understand it. But interpretation is equally necessary with the supposed-to-be familiar world of the interpreter. Contemporary horizon (or what we call 'culture') where the interpreter inhabits itself needs interpretation. This makes inculturation (i.e., the interpretation of the Christian tradition in our cultures) quite a complex process. Hermeneutics has a long history. Let me outline in a cursory manner these methods in order to figure out for ourselves a basic framework for our own purposes.

1.1. Grammar and Allegory: Hermeneutics as Exegetical Method

Hermeneutics can be traced to as early as the first attempts of human beings to understand themselves and their world. We do not, however, intend to go back that far in prehistory. We can start with the so-called 'religion of the books' since it is these institutions that

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"The function of Hermes was therefore an important one since the misunderstanding of the message from the gods could prove fatal to mortal men. He had to adapt the message to the language of his hearers. Hermes, since then, has become symbolized as the messenger charged with a mission, the success of which depended heavily on the manner in which this message is transmitted." EMERITA QUITO, The Philosophers of Hermeneutics (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1990), 8.

I am indebted to WERNER JEANROND, Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance (London: SCM Press, 1994), in the following section.
enthrone the ‘text’ at the center of their existence. From the very beginning, we notice two tendencies in methods: (1) grammatical interpretation which emphasizes the ‘text,’ its linguistic devices and the structural relations within it, and (2) allegorical interpretation which tries to decipher the hidden meaning of the text aided by interpretative criteria outside it. Even though in the Jewish context, we see four overlapping exegetical methods for the Torah — literalist, midrashic, peshar and allegorical interpretations — we can group these into two directions. The midrash which comes from the rabbinic schools widens the notion of literal interpretation by looking at the context and parallels. Both their criterion, however, is ‘intra-textual,’ thus, can be considered of the same kind. The peshar model which originated from Qumran claims special gnosis as criteria for the application of the Scriptures into present events. It is thus related to allegorization whose search for spiritual meaning of the text is guided by the concern for God’s transcendence (Philo of Alexandria). The Jewish exegetical debate revolves around those who privilege the text and its grammar and those who prefer to base the meaning outside the text itself.

The same oscillation between these two poles (i.e., grammatical and allegorical) can be found among early Christian thinkers particularly in the debate between the Antiochene and Alexandrian traditions. While theologians from Antioch (e.g., Theodore of Mopsuestia) assert the historical reality of the Scriptures, (thus, the significance of the literal), the Alexandrians (e.g., Origen) highlight the mysterious language of symbols, thus, giving weight to the spiritual and the allegorical.

It is this double direction which Augustine tries to pull together in his semiotics and Christian hermeneutics. For Augustine, a conventional ‘signum’ (to which biblical language belongs) may be taken either literally or figuratively. A biblical text, for instance, should be taken in its context with the help of all available means to understand difficult passages (the Antiochene strand). In case of figurative expressions (Alexandrian theme), “what one reads should be carefully considered until a reading is established which reaches the kingdom of love.” It is this praxis of love in the context of the Church that is the criterion of interpretation. Thus, it is this hermeneutical principle that lives on in the Church throughout the medieval times: the reading of Scriptures serves as a guide to Christian praxis while this same praxis of love becomes the viewpoint with which to correctly read the Scriptures. The problem with this

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5 Saint Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana III, 23.
approach, however, is that the supposed-to-be reliable criterion for interpretation (i.e., faith-love praxis of the Church) is never a monolithic reality, thus, in itself needing interpretation. Also, due to Augustine's neo-Platonic paradigm, there is a tendency towards allegorization in actual practice. The rediscovery of Aristotle swings the hermeneutic pendulum back to the 'literal' side as shown in the works of Thomas Aquinas.

“In the holy scripture no confusion results, for all the senses are founded on one — the literal — from which alone can any argument be drawn, and not from those intended in allegory, as Augustine says. Nevertheless, nothing of holy scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the scripture in its literal sense.”

This move in Thomistic hermeneutics is made in response to adopt theology to the new paradigm of science during those times. From Abelard onwards, dialectics (i.e., logic and philosophy) has become the theological handmaid (ancilla theologae). *Summa Theologica* thus gives us a sense of how Scriptures should blend with theological reflection. But Thomistic move is also ambivalent. On the one hand, Saint Thomas' rejection of allegorical interpretation has narrowed down the chasm between biblical texts and the often spiritualized direction in theology. On the other hand, the prominence given to logic and philosophy has separated theology again from biblical interpretation. This direction reaches its peak in the manualist theologies of the late scholastic period where the Scriptures only serve as 'proof texts' for theological speculation. Thus, while theology was imprisoned in its often stale academic enclosures, the fertile field of biblical interpretation was taken on by the imaginative and symbolic worlds of popular religion. In effect, the original dialectical relationship of the two poles in interpretation theory came to be collapsed into the same hermeneutic pole by the now two competing theological paradigms, i.e., scholastic theology which only needs Scriptures to substantiate its own dogmatic claims and popular devotion which also uses the bible for its own pious concerns.

1.2. ‘Behind’ the Text: Philosophical Hermeneutics

The concern of Jewish and Christian hermeneutics we discussed above was exegetical, i.e., how to understand scriptural texts. Beyond this quite practical preoccupation, modern hermeneutics displays a much wider focus: the nature of understanding itself. It asks a more basic philosophical question: “What is human understanding and

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6 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 1. a. 10.
how does it happen?" Hermeneutics thus is viewed as the 'art of understanding.' The first thinker to reflect along these lines was in fact a preacher and theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). For him, hermeneutics is an act of reconstructing the original meaning intended by the author but also in a sense of making explicit what the author him/herself takes for granted. There is a need thus for a methodologically controlled process in understanding the dynamics of linguistic texts. Language for him possesses two dimensions: the patterns of linguistic conventions and the actual performance of the work by the individual author. In effect, Schleiermacher posits two phases in the interpretation of texts: grammatical and psychological. Thus, in order to understand a text, one first needs to examine its grammar (i.e., the genre, structure, linguistic rules, etc.) in the time the text was written. Second, the interpreter needs to comprehend the peculiar combinations that characterize the text as a whole. This bears out the uniqueness of the work as it emerged from the author's mind, thus, leading us into the intentions of the author him/herself (i.e., psychological dimension). In this twofold movement, one aims "to understand the text first as well and then better than its author did." What is at issue is to grasp the sense of the text in the author's mind which can never be achieved without grammatical interpretation.

Schleiermacher's disciple, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) pursued the interests of his master by making hermeneutics the foundational theory of the human sciences. In a time when the scientifcality of the human sciences was put into question by the then dominant 'objectivist' direction in natural sciences, Dilthey argued for a separate methodology to claim some autonomy for the former. While natural sciences (Natuurwissenschaften) aim at explanation, human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) focus on understanding. In other words, while physics, astronomy or biology try to explain (erklären) natural phenomena, philosophy, literature or history intend to understand (verstehen) human life in all its complexity. These are two separate fields with altogether different methods. Hermeneutics thus presents itself to be the method of understanding life itself through individual works of authors. It presents itself to be the method for human sciences. For Schleiermacher as for Dilthey, "the

7 "Since the art of speaking and the art of understanding stand in relation to each other, speaking being only the outer side of thinking, hermeneutics is a part of the art of thinking, and is therefore philosophical." F. SCHLEIERMACHER, "Hermeneutik," in The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts from the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (London: Blackwell, 1986), 73-97, 74.

8 Ibid., 83.
The final goal of the hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself; a statement which is the necessary conclusion of the doctrine of unconscious creation. Beyond Schleiermacher, however, Dilthey's emphasis on historicity and the peculiarity of human life leads him to rely both on descriptive psychology and externalized creative 'expressions of life' as aids to understanding the text-production of an author. The bottomline, however, remains the same: the aim to recover the objective intention of the author by taking into account all the factors that went into the production of his/her text (e.g., grammar, structural and linguistic conventions, the psychology of the author, socio-historical context, etc.). To be able to understand, the interpreter needs to overcome the temporal, spatial and cultural distance, i.e., our historical situatedness, in order to be contemporaneous with the author and his/her text.

But is this project of recovery possible? Through some methodologically controlled processes, can we really transcend the spatio-temporal and cultural distance to be 'in the shoes of the author' himself? Furthermore, do we really need such overcoming in order to understand? Gadamer answers 'no'.

1.3. 'Front' of the Text: Hermeneutics as Retrieval and Suspicion

Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900-2002) *Truth and Method* is the classic work in contemporary hermeneutic theory. Following his teacher, Heidegger, Gadamer raises the realm of hermeneutics towards the 'ontological' level beyond its status as a philosophical method (in Schleiermacher and Dilthey). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, understanding is the basic condition of our being-in-the-world. It is not simply a method for grasping psychological or historical meaning. It is the only way in which humans exist in the

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*Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey identified the meaning of the text or action with the subjective intention of its author. Starting from the documents, artifacts, actions, and so on that are the content of the historical world, the task of understanding is to recover the original life-world they betoken and to understand the other person (the author or historical agent) as he understood himself. Understanding is essentially a self-transposition or imaginative projection whereby the knower negates the temporal distance that separates him from his object and becomes contemporaneous with it." David Linge, "Editor's Introduction," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), xiv.

world (i.e., a constant process of interpretation towards human self-understanding). In this context, language is crucial. Language here is no longer viewed as an instrument of communication. It is the primary place where the truth of our humanness is disclosed. "It is the centre of language alone that, related to the totality of beings, mediates the finite, historical nature of man [sic] to himself and to the world." 12

How and when does this disclosure happen? Gadamer gives the paradigm of text-interpretation. To understand a text, one does not need to overcome the spatio-temporal distance which separates the interpreter and the text. If we are serious with our being 'historical' and 'temporal,' the present situation, our contemporary issues, concerns and prejudices — instead of obstructing understanding — serve as the only condition of possibility for human experience.

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified or erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are the biases of our openness to the world. They are simply the conditions whereby we experience something — whereby what we encounter says something to us. 13

This is what Gadamer refers to as 'historically effective consciousness' (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein). 14 That is, our historical, social and cultural locations are no longer obstacles to understanding the text or the world (as in Schleiermacher and Dilthey). To interpret a text is always to approach it with a certain set of questions, pre-judgments, interests. We are always in a 'situation'; we do not stand outside it. It is this situation (i.e., the horizon of our expectations) itself which becomes the enabling condition for our understanding. Understanding thus happens in what he calls the 'fusion of horizons' 15 — the fusion of the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader, the horizon of the past or tradition where the text is situated and the contemporary cultural context where the interpreter is located. Gadamer uses the metaphor of the game to bring out the dialectical relationship of these horizons in the act of interpretation. What is important in a game is not so much the rules but the game itself. 16 The 'joy of the game' happens when the players

12 Ibid., 415.
are so caught up in it to the point of 'being played' by the game itself. The same thing happens in a conversation or dialogue. People are caught up in the dialogue inasmuch as they let go of their initial positions without their knowing it. Their differing horizons have fused. Thus, in the act of understanding (as in real games or conversations), it is in that point of joyful encounter between two horizons that the disclosure of truth happens.

There are problems, however, which can be raised against Gadamer's project. First, interpreting a text is not really like conversations or games where the dialogue-partner or opponent is an active historical subject in flesh and blood. In hermeneutics, the interpreter engages a passive text, as it were, no matter how much Gadamer asserts that it also has an 'active share' in the process. In the end, the hermeneutical act is a work of the interpreter. Jürgen Habermas (1929-), for instance, asks: what guards the interpretative act from systematically distorted communications? What criteria are there to check any fundamentalist reading imposing itself as legitimate? Is this not exposing the so-called 'disclosure of truth' to ideological manipulation? How sure are we of the truth of our reading? Who arbitrates between two conflicting interpretations, two opposite readings?

It is Paul Ricoeur (1913-) who attempts to strike a balance between the methodological aspects of hermeneutics (Schleiermacher) as well as its ontological dimensions (Gadamer). Against Dilthey who separated explanation (for natural sciences) from understanding (for human sciences), Ricoeur insists on the necessity of both in the act of interpretation. In other words, methodological tools to help us understand the text in its linguistic, historical and cultural contexts — a concern already present in Schleiermacher but denied in Gadamer — now become indispensable and salutary. In other words, what proves necessary is not only 'retrieval' or our immersing into the tradition of the text in order to disclose its truth to us but also 'suspicion,' i.e., a critical look into the context of its production in order to alert us to ideological distortions. Like Schleiermacher, Ricoeur recognizes the dialectical relationship between the two poles of interpretation present in the whole history of hermeneutic theory: the past world of the text and the contemporary world of the interpreter. But unlike Schleiermacher who underscores the 'behind


of the text' by undertaking to grasp the intention of the author, Ricoeur privileges the ‘front of the text.’

The sense of the text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the non-ostensive reference of the text. Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world — propositions opened up by the reference of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movements from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about. 19

The text as text renders its author ‘dead,’ as it were, releasing it for all possible readings and interpretations as it encounters new contexts. Being polysemous, the text engenders a ‘surplus of meaning,’ making any reading an exploration of signification and existential possibilities in new settings, new situations, new worlds.

1.4. Towards a Methodology for Vincentian Studies

The purpose of this cursory survey of hermeneutical theories is simple: to search for methodological guidelines towards inculturating Vincentian charism and ministry in our differing contexts, particularly in the Asia-Pacific Region. Vincentian studies, like Christianity itself, have been interpreted in the West and exported to the rest of the world for consumption. A cursory review of the articles published in *Viricentiana* bears out articles written mostly in French or Spanish, and more recently, in English. Most authors — the so-called ‘Vincentian experts’ — come from the West as well. This tells us a glaring fact: that despite the growing number of Vincentians in the so-called ‘South’ or ‘Third World’ and the fertile field of apostolic ministry in these regions, there is yet no significant literary production in the field of Vincentian studies emerging from their contexts. There might be several factors which might explain this: there is no time to do serious writing and reflection as many confreres are being caught up with the demands of the ministry; there is a lack of Vincentian literature (dearth of copies, lack of translations, etc.); there is no financial structure and access to publication, etc. But one obstacle which might be behind most minds of confreres wanting to write something on Saint Vincent is the availability of a viable methodology. “How will I do it? Am I sure that

I am doing it right like they did? What then is the proper way to do this?" The following is my attempt to develop some pointers towards a methodology for inculturation of Vincentian charism in our differing contexts.20

(1) Vincentian Historical Studies

What we have are Vincentian ‘texts’ — those coming from Saint Vincent as read through the lens of his secretaries and biographers, most of which are still in their French or Spanish versions. Their contents are Vincent’s interpretations of the events of his life, the communities and institutions he founded, his relations with others, the events of his times and his responses to them. This in itself requires a host of methodological linguistic tools to be able to understand Saint Vincent’s texts in their contexts. It is here that the researches and studies of the so-called Vincentian ‘experts’ can help us. This is a necessary moment in any inculturation process. It is these historical studies (linguistic, structural, psychological, contextual, etc.) that make us see the larger picture, as it were, and enable us to understand Saint Vincent maybe (just maybe) “more than he understood himself,” as Schleiermacher and Dilthey promised us.

(2) Starting-Point for Inculturation

Historical studies do not suffice; there is a need to make the charism relevant to our differing contexts. If we follow the directions set out for us by romanticist hermeneutic theory (Schleiermacher and Dilthey), what remains to be done is application. Laudable efforts are done along this line in recent times, the most prominent of which (in the Anglophone context) are the studies by Robert Maloney.21 There is a consistent methodology in Maloney’s articles. In his study of the five Vincentian virtues, for instance, he starts by (a) a look at the five virtues “as Saint Vincent himself understood them”; (b) an examination of the horizon shifts between the 17th and 20th centuries; (c) retrieval of the virtues in their contemporary forms.22 This three-level framework is ever present in most of his

20 My position here is a reworking (also a revision) of my previous article, "In Search of Meaning: Vincentian Charism and Hermeneutics," in Knowing the Tree by its Leaves: Re-reading St. Vincent de Paul in the Philippine Context (Manila: Congregation of the Mission, 1993), 3-29.


main studies, e.g., the vows, providence, mental prayer, simplicity, humility, aging process, gentleness, authority, friendship, etc. Even as we acknowledge the value of these excellent studies towards making Saint Vincent relevant to contemporary times, I would like to pose some questions as to its method, particularly with regard to the starting-point of the inculturation process. To start reflection with Saint Vincent’s words and actions (or how he understood himself) engenders quite a host of methodological problems for us. First, following Gadamer, we can ask if we can ever know the mind of Saint Vincent “as he understood himself.” Are not our readings interpretations in themselves emerging from our prejudices and situations? Second, granting that we can reconstruct the times of Saint Vincent and proceed as Maloney does, all that is left for us is to apply what the ‘experts’ have produced. For no one of us would ever have the time to learn 17th century French, to read Coste’s 14 volumes, to understand Vincent’s socio-historical context, etc. In this perspective, we can only be passive ‘consumers’ of a Vincentian production done elsewhere.

If we are to understand Saint Vincent for our times, our option is to start reflection from our different contexts, cultures, interests. It is these present ‘prejudices’ and ‘situations’ that make us understand who Vincent is today. There is no way for us to recover the ‘behind of the text.’ In a Ricoeurian fashion, what is crucial is the ‘front of the text’ as it opens us to a ‘meaning surplus’ in new horizons, new worlds, new possibilities beyond what the original author ever imagined. This is good news for us who are ‘non-experts,’ i.e., formators, missionaries, pastors, workers in the grassroots communities. It opens a way for us to actively interpret (not just passively ‘consume’) Saint Vincent from our situations in life in a way that is as real and valid. Our concern here is beyond the methodological, but the existential. That is, we do not just want to understand Vincentian texts for the sake of merely understanding them, but mainly to also understand ourselves. It is only through these continuous acts of interpretation that we also shape our Vincentian identities and the truth of our existence and mission is disclosed to us, as Gadamer reminds us. What we refer to as

products of our interpretation are not just literary outputs but also our works and mission, our personal and communal witness — documented or not — all disclosures of the truth of Vincentian existence for our times. In this context, we can say that we are all ‘Vincentian experts,’ as it were, as we continually articulate the Vincentian meaning vis-à-vis the ‘texts’ handed down to us. There is no one proper way to do Vincentian hermeneutics as each culture, context or situation engenders its own method.

(3) Dialectical Interaction

In order to guard us from ideological use of the Vincentian tradition, there is also a need to posit within our methodology itself a dialectical and critical interaction between the past and the present, between the text and the interpreter, between one interpretation and another, in the manner of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion. It is here that rigorous Vincentian historical studies prove useful as they can also place into question our contemporary retrievals. But the dialectics also works in the opposite direction as contemporary horizons critique the structural prejudices of Saint Vincent’s times. The problem with Maloney’s methodology is its uni-directionality. Even as he adopts the Vincentian charism to our times and contexts through the analysis of the ‘horizon shifts,’ his method seemingly appears to be a ‘top-down’ reflection process (i.e., Saint Vincent’s reflections merely applied to our times). There is no way in which contemporary perspectives can put into question the positions and options Saint Vincent made, he being the product of his own times. Examples of this dialectical interpretation will be given in our analysis of ‘collaborative servant-leadership’ in a later section.

2. The Challenge of Culture(s)

What I have explored so far is how to deal with ‘the past,’ that is, with the world of historical texts and its relation to the interpreter. What is often left out in the discussions on hermeneutics is the fact that ‘the present,’ the world of the interpreter is also a matter of interpretation. When we aim to re-read the Vincentian charism into our culture(s), it is often forgotten that this same culture also needs to be ‘read’ or is already a product of plural and often conflicting readings. What then is culture?

2.1. Culture as Process

In many anthropological discourses, ‘culture’ is always used as an abstract ‘noun’ for something. It either refers to some ‘elitist’ social practices (e.g., music, paintings, theatre, etc.) or, in more contemporary sociological egalitarian views, to some determinate
communal forms of life, meanings and everyday practices. It is located either in the past (as traditional values and 'ways of life') or in the future (as socialist or religious ideals). Both the Vatican discourse of the so-called 'Christian culture' and the radical communist utopia called 'classless society' are the same rendering of culture as 'noun'; the former founded on the nostalgia of the past, the latter hinged on an ideal future. Despite their seeming ideological differences, what binds these two positions is the abstract determinate form in which culture has been conceptualized and captured. A contemporary cultural theorist, Raymond Williams (1921-1988) argues against this passive connotation of pre-determined values by emphasizing culture as 'verb.' Before becoming an abstract 'noun' for something, culture was first a 'process.' The Latin term, cultura can be traced to its root, colere, which, among other things, means 'to cultivate.' 'Culture' thus originally is a word to denote an actual practice, that is, the cultivation or tending of something, generally of plants or animals, and by metaphorical extension, of human 'tending.' Only in later developments did it come to denote an abstraction, a thing-in-itself. What I intend to underline here is culture's original meaning; it is a verb, a process, a dynamic reality. Beyond abstract and determinate cultural 'forms' to which we often refer, culture is about collective human praxis necessary for a local community to survive in the social and physical environment in which it finds itself.

What repercussions does this have to the project of inculturation?

(1) What I call 'top-down' inculturation approaches fall into the danger of 'adapting' into the present some reified (most often imported) cultural forms — either from the West or from the past — into contemporary practice. One example is the early practices on liturgical 'adaptation': the adaptation of some foreign reality by retaining the so-called 'essentials' and adjusting the 'expressions' to local contexts. The 'essentials' (or the 'core') represent the 'more authentic' reality as compared to the 'expressions' (or the 'peripherals') which are just its cultural trappings. Thus, the essentials need to be kept while the expressions can be transformed according to context. This is often referred to as the 'kernel-and-husk' theory of culture. But we can ask, for instance, who determines the so-called 'essentials' from the 'peripherals'? Can we really separate the two? For instance, is Filipino Catholicism separable from the Spanish practices of processions, fiestas, santos, panata, etc.? Are these essentials or peripherals? Applied to a more distinctly

24 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society Coleridge to Orwell (London: Hogarth Press, 1993 [1958]), xv-xvii. See also Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana, 1988), 87-93.
Vincentian context, who delineates between the ‘essentials’ and the ‘expressions’ of the Vincentian lifestyle? This issue has been debated all throughout the centuries in our communities — discussions to the point of violence and destruction of persons and relationships, with all the parties believing that their reading is the more ‘essential’ one.

(2) Even if we start inculturation from local cultural contexts, we still meet the same methodological dead-end, if we continue to view culture as ‘noun,’ not verb; as reified realities, not as process. One instance of which is the romanticist cultural analysis which equates Filipino culture (or any culture for that matter) with its frozen past as ‘native’ costumes and food, ‘ethnic’ dances and songs, ‘traditional’ practices — including even the so-called ‘Filipino values.’ For who can ever pinpoint what the ‘Filipino values’ are all about? The culture from which any inculturation process starts is never a static reality but is in the process of being formed and transformed by concrete social agents through time. Thus, any cultural analysis must take this dimension seriously. When we say Filipino culture (or Fijian, Indonesian, Indian, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Australian, or Chinese, for that matter), there is not a single set of values, art forms or practices which we can pin down to identify with it. These practices and values are in fact constantly created and recreated as these specific societies encounter different forces and influences all throughout history. This brings us to the next point.

2.2. Culture as Power

In any cultural analysis, what needs to be attended to and examined is the play of forces in the shaping of cultures. Our first realization is that cultures are not prefabricated realities; they are dynamic realities constantly transformed through time. Corollary to this assertion is that cultures do not just ‘innocently’ move or mix among themselves as coffee to water. Our second assertion is that culture also means ‘power.’ Some cultural realities (e.g., language, worldviews, religion, values, etc.) come to be accepted as the norm due to their dominance not only in the cultural but also in the economic and social spheres. Think about McDonald’s, Coca-Cola or Hollywood celebrities becoming household names. It is not an

35 An example of this approach is found in JULMA NEO, “Inculturating the Charism in the Asian Context,” in Of Roots and Wings: Reflections on Rediscovering and Reliving a Religious Charism Today (Manila: Daughters of Charity, 2003), 285-310. Neo states one of her basic assumptions for inculturation: “We need to distinguish between charism and its expressions (e.g., works, lifestyle, forms of community living, ways of praying, structures). These expressions must be developed from within cultures of those who live the charism” (286).
Innocent diffusion. Some analysts call it the 'McDonaldization,' 'Coca-Colonization' or 'Hollywoodification' of the world — all because the US is exerting hegemonic dominance in all fields — cultural, political and economic. For most people, 'hegemony' — a notion made popular by Antonio Gramsci — constitutes their sense of reality, their ordinary or common sense experience as they are also constantly bombarded by the media and propaganda for these things to be 'taken for granted' as the reality. It is another world for 'culture'; in our case, global capitalist culture. But a lived hegemony is never a totalizing, singular, abstract system. It is a complex of relationships, experience and activities. The dominant position must constantly renew, recreate, defend and modify itself as it is also continually resisted and subverted by forces in its margins. According to Williams, "there is no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality that includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention." Thus, resistance can be located within what Williams calls the 'residual' and the 'emergent' which, together with the 'dominant' hegemonic force constitutes the whole cultural process. In other words, there is more to culture than the 'dominant,' since actual human practice in the rough grounds can never be totally exhausted by its control despite its universalizing intentions. "For there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness, in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize." It is from these areas that 'emergent voices' — both alternative and oppositional — emerge in order to exert pressure on the hegemonic.

What repercussions do these assertions have to inculturation?

(1) If we start the inculturation process from our present culture, we need to be reminded that this culture is never a monolithic reality. For instance, the notion of 'nation' (thus, national culture) is not a natural entity but a constructed reality, thus, the question of power in the process of its coming to be. When we say 'Filipino culture,' we can ask "which Filipino?" "whose culture?" The more difficult it is, therefore, to look for a regional identity for when we say 'Asian soul' or 'Asia-Pacific' culture, to what do we actually refer? To force us to come up with one gets us involved in a process

27 Ibid.
of construction, thus, also an imposition of some dominant readings which enthron some cultures but also alienate others. This leads us to ask the question what is the ultimate locus of inculturation. I believe that inculturation (of the Christian message or of the Vincentian charism) basically happens in what Williams call 'placeable social identities' — those 'knowable bonds, locatable voices in face-to-face interactions.'

It is these grassroots communities — be it a DC or CM local house, an SSVP conference, Marian youth group, a Confraternity of Charity, or a Basic Ecclesial Community — which are confronted by the challenge of survival but also of living the Christian message (and Vincentian charism) in their own contexts. Inculturation, therefore, neither happens in conventions and conferences nor in articles that we write (like this one). What we can do at most is to reflect on the attempts at inculturation in the grassroots communities. As liberation theologians love to say: "Reflection is a second act, the first act of which is praxis," that is, the praxis of these 'placeable social identities.'

(2) In more pastoral terms, I would like to forward for serious consideration the basic processes of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, or, in inter-religious context, the Basic Human Communities, to be themselves models for inculturation. In the see-judge-act processes of BECs, there is no dominant voice from above that is being re-interpreted in individual contexts. Even the Scriptures take on new color when read from the perspective of the community's own situation. So do the Vincentian texts. Each community decides on what particular line of action it is to pursue based on what is necessary for it to survive and to have a meaningful existence in the here and now. If there is anything 'sacred' in BEC, it is its process. Here, cultural formation is not an imposition of some preconceived forms — from the past like frozen texts from tradition or from reified cultural practices. Being aware of the power dynamics in cultural process, our aim as agents of inculturation in these communities is to create "conditions in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values, and in the consequent

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29 Placeable social identities' is equivalent to Stuart Hall's insistence on 'ethnicity' in global times — that "face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are... Ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak.... Modern theories of enunciation [like the emancipative discourse of the margins] always oblige us to recognize that enunciation comes from somewhere. It cannot be unplaced, it cannot be unpositioned, it is always positioned in a discourse. It is when a discourse forgets that it is placed that it tries to speak everybody else." STUART HALL, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity, ed. Anthony King (London: Macmillan, 1991), 35-36.
decisions between this meaning and that, this value and that”¹⁰ as they continually reread and reinterpret their Christian identities. For traditional Christian theology has also acknowledged the presence of ‘sensus fidelium’ or the capacity of the ‘faithful’ (or the present grassroots communities) to communally discern what is best for their own well-being, their faith-life and their communities.

3. Collaborative Servant-Leadership: A Provisional Attempt at Inculturation in the Philippine Context

This specific position in inculturation methodology is what makes me hesitant to reflect on the notion of ‘collaborative servant leadership’ in the Asia-Pacific contexts. This reluctance is founded on two things in our previous discussion: (1) the recognition that it is impossible to identify a specifically Asia-Pacific culture (that which is the starting point of inculturation) without exercising some form of ‘violence’ through the act of generalization; and (2) the realization that ultimately it is not I (the theologian or the pastoral worker) but the specific local communities which is the ultimate agent of the inculturation process. To respond to the first obstacle, I have delineated the focus of my reflections into the Philippine context. I am aware that the so-called ‘Philippine context’ is also a ‘generalized view,’ thus, also poses some danger of imposing its own signification over others. With this attempt also comes the invitation for other cultures and voices in the Philippines or outside it to contribute in the conversation. Most important of all, it is done with the awareness that this reflection is tentative and provisional. It can only be made definitive by the actual communities’ reflection and praxis on what constitutes Vincentian leadership in their own specific contexts. It is these communities who have the last word on this matter, if there should be any last word at all. In this attempt, I intend to do three things: (1) to ‘see’ the Philippine contemporary socio-cultural context in terms of its experience of leadership; (2) to reread our socio-cultural past in order to search for some insights to our contemporary cultures; (3) to reinterpret the Vincentian ‘text’ from the perspective of our cultural analysis and establish some critical interaction between these two poles. What is lacking here are the concrete implications these reflections have on the formation process. Being consistent with our methodology, however, it is only the ‘formators-on-the-ground’ who, with their formandi, are the ultimate agents of inculturating this Vincentian charism. I will divide my reflection into three areas of leadership: collaboration, inclusion and servanthood.

3.1. ‘Datu’: Leadership as Collaboration

(1) A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context

The Philippines did not have very positive experiences of leadership in recent decades: 20 years of dictatorship, inefficient bureaucracy, corresponding hopelessness and political callousness among the citizenry. One only has to read the daily newspapers to prove this. Two months after the presidential election, a proclaimed president still has to fight for the legitimacy of her rule and political survival. We do not only suffer from graft-ridden leadership but also the concentration of governance in the elite minority. The conclusion of a recent survey on the Philippine legislature is sad but not new: that our legislators belong to the select few of our society: “They are richer, older, better educated, and better connected than the rest of us.... A congress of well-connected and well-born multimillionaires sets the rules for a poor nation.”

But even as early as the first cries of Philippine independence, politics was already in the hands of the *ilustrados* (the ‘enlightened’ elite) who saw themselves as “the legitimate leaders and spokesmen of their...”

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people." The proverbial ‘man-on-the-street’ in effect can only sigh in hopelessness; others could not care less. No one pins his or her hopes on the ‘politicos'; not anymore. In local places, the Church leadership serves as a more benign alternative. In electoral contests, for instance, church leaders and the ecclesiastical institution as a whole still retain credibility as the lone impartial voice. But the Philippine Church is not the best model for shared and collaborative leadership with the feeling of restorationist tendencies in some quarters and the consolidation of powers in the hierarchy. Side by side with these bleak prospects, however, we also hear of aspirations and experiments in participative governance at local levels: decentralization of government through Local Government Code; the rise of civil society; the tasks of NGOs economic development; the role of cause-oriented groups and ‘party-list’ system in political advocacy; the attempts to politically empower the grassroots, etc.

In the Church, we also see the movements towards BECs, the mushrooming of lay groups and their search for their active role and place in Church governance.

(2) A Rereading of Pre-colonial Philippines

This ambivalence with regard to leadership structures in Philippine society is traceable to as far as its pre-Hispanic political set-up. The three-tiered social hierarchy (i.e., datu, timawa and oripun in the Visayas; datu, maharlika and alipin in Luzon) is well-entrenched in most local groups called the barangay. The role of leadership falls to the datu who is considered to be the ‘captain of the boat’ (also called

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32 Michael Cullinane, Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 34. Even Rizal considered the educated and the wealthy as “the rightful leaders of the Filipino social and political life” — a conviction which he shares with many ilustrados. Ibid., 364, n. 63.


barangay) — as the early Spanish chronicles believed that they came to migrate in the archipelago through these boats. Belonging himself to the rich and powerful classes, the datu wields enormous powers, e.g., governing the people, leading them in war, settling their disputes but also helping them "in their struggles and needs." In return, he also receives labor and tribute from his people. Despite this strong social hierarchy, the structure could not be equated to European monarchies. There is no king among the datus. What we have is a 'loose federation of chiefdoms'; the acting head is a mere 'primus inter pares.'

The datus were not subject to one another "except by the way of friendship and kinship." The above description, however, is the mainstream class and leadership structure. Maybe there is no single social structure in pre-Hispanic Philippines as other studies also bring out different results: there are also classless societies which are "bilaterally structured, loosely stratified, and predominantly egalitarian... [with] no formally recognized or titled leaders even of jural sort, no chiefs, no headmen, and no servants." If there is a dominant class structure and a hegemonic form of leadership, there are also cracks and fissures on the dominant where alternative voices are heard as challenging and exerting pressure on the hegemonic (to use Williams’s analysis). How does this differ with Saint Vincent’s time?

(3) Saint Vincent and Collaborative Leadership

Let us bear in mind that Vincent lived in the monarchic France, just before the absolutist régime of Louis XIV, *Le Roi Soleil* (the abuses of which later led to the French Revolution), but whose structures were already entrenched much earlier within the French social fabric. Vincent was at the death bed of the king’s predecessor (Louis XIII), was the adviser of his mother (Anne of Austria), was present when Louis XIV was growing up and was still at the height of his works and mission when the sovereign assumed the monarchy in 1651. Being part of that society, Vincent, so to speak, also ‘breathed the air that they breathed.’ This absolutely hierarchical set-up — a legacy of medieval feudal society and the Council of Trent — shows itself within the CM community as a structure favoring the ‘clerical state.’ The so-called ‘coadjutor lay brothers’ in fact appear like second-class citizens who were prohibited from studying Latin and were never eligible to become superiors until today. One only needs

to see the centrality of the 'superior' both in the Common Rules and the community structures to the point of having to obey the rules 'almost blindly' and to accept that the will of the superior is identical with the will of God. To the Daughters, he emphasized that obedience is due to any person in authority — the Pope, bishops, pastors, confessors, directors, superiors, the Kings and his magistrates and their sister superiors. The sequence with which Vincent enumerates them is reminiscent of the medieval feudal framework. Thus, to trace the Vincentian ministry of shared and collaborative leadership, of decentralized governance, and of democratic communal processes to the times of Saint Vincent is anachronistic. But parallel to William Henry Scott's 'cracks in the parchment curtain,' there are also traces where Saint Vincent has, in fact, thought outside the mold, as it were. At a time when the lay people were merely passive consumers of religious production, Vincent collaborated with them and made them collaborate with each other in the Confraternities of Charity. Even as superiors are ultimately responsible like "pilots who must guide the ship on the seas" (SV X, 262), they must also be men who are ready to consult others. He himself makes it a point to consult the lay brothers. To Marc Coglée, he advised: "For temporal affairs, we consult a lawyer or some laypersons who are knowledgeable about them; for internal affairs, we discuss matters with the consultors and other members of the Company" (SV IV, 36).

What I intended to bring out in this dialogue of perspectives is the fact that 'collaborative leadership' is a phenomenon that emerges out of the horizons of people in contemporary times. Thus, it would be illegitimate to extrapolate this contemporary experience directly

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[38] Józef Kapuściak made a listing and overview of documents treating the role of 'superiors' from the Common Rules onwards. "Reading these documents, even quickly" he writes, "evokes the image of the Local Superior as 'an almighty father.' According to the established rules, he intervened directly in all aspects of the daily life of the community, of work and of problems which touched on the personal life of each confrère, including the problems of conscience. And everyone had to believe that 'the will of God is expressed by the will of the Superior.'" JÓZEF KAPUŚCIĄK, "The Vincentian Local Superior," Vincentiana 46, No. 3 (2002): 210.


[40] "As for myself, I call my men together whenever some difficult point of governance, either in spiritual or ecclesiastical questions or in temporal matters, has to be decided. When there is a question of the latter, I also consult those responsible for them; I even ask the advice of the Brothers in whatever concerns their duties because of the knowledge they have regarding them. The result is that God blesses resolutions taken this way through consultation" (SV VI, 66).
from the mind of Saint Vincent. In fact, it is this present reality that should be made to critique Saint Vincent and his times (as well as the experiences of pre-Hispanic Filipinos) — a hermeneutical act which is not possible in top-down inculturation discourses. But I have also shown that despite the dominant cultures where Saint Vincent found himself (or that of our early Filipino ancestors), oppositional and alternative approaches still show themselves — fields of resistance acting like fissures of the dominant hegemonic power.

3.2. Babaylan (Katalonan): Leadership as Inclusion

(1) A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context

Philippines is a typically macho-society with its corresponding double-standards and double-talks — all to the woman’s disadvantage. In recent times, researches lead us to what is now called the ‘feminization of poverty’ in the Philippines. That is, if the Filipino is poor, the Filipina is poorer (or experiences the impact of this poverty much more intensely because of entrenched structural inequality biased against women). It is also the Filipino woman who dominates the ‘informal economy’ in order to help make both ends meet. But it is also this part of the social economic endeavor that is not accounted for either in GNP or in the consciousness of the husband and the whole family. In the labor migration phenomenon, it is the women who dominate since they are much more in demand with regard to domestic work abroad. Thus, they have in effect become the actual ‘breadwinners’ of their own families. Yet decision-making in the typical Filipino family still rests on men. The Catholic Church is not very different — with an entrenched all-male leadership. With the rise of feminism movements, however, Filipino women begin to reclaim their role in the Church, in society and its governance.


Though these movements are starting to make their voice heard and to gain influence, there is so much more to do in terms of instituting structures as well as forming consciousness of both men and women with regard to these issues.

(2) A Rereading of Pre-Hispanic Philippines

Philippine historians attest that in pre-colonial customary laws, Filipino women were equal to men in social, economic and political spheres. They could possess goods and properties, engage in commerce and even succeed the datu in the absence of a male heir. But it is in the religious sphere that the woman exercises distinct authority in the person of the babaylan or katalonan (i.e., priestesses). According to Zeus Salazar, there were three central figures in the pre-Hispanic society: the datu (the chief) who governs; the panday (blacksmith) who supervises society's technical needs and the babaylan (priestess) who takes care of its arts, medicine, religion and the humanities. Though there were males among them, most of them were women or hermaphrodites. She is the guardian of society's myths and keeps its harmony with nature through the performance of rituals. The role of babaylan, however, goes beyond ritualism. She is also the community healer and psychologist. Her knowledge of medicine is beyond the 'technical' since she is in touch with the depository of the community's traditional healing knowledge. She is acknowledged to know the depths of the person's and community's history that can lead to holistic healing. The babaylan's role is as crucial as the datu's as she watches over the theoretical and practical resources of the cultural and spiritual sides of her society's existence. Even the datu needs to consult her as she also determines the best time for plowing and preparing the fields, for sowing and harvesting.

With the coming of the male Catholic clergy during the Spanish times, the babaylan was marginalized by the colonial structure as they were relegated to be procession coordinators, flower arrangers, prayer leaders, etc. Some who resisted this strategy of co-optation formed small 'messianic groups' which waged the first resistance against the colonial regime, particularly against the male clerical class (called the 'frailes') long before the political revolutions, which were later launched by the enlightened male elites. Others, however, continued with their usual function and practices in religious groupings which can now be found in indigenous communities in Philippine hinterlands.

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45 For this, see Zeus Salazar, Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas (Diliman: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999). Also published in Women's Role in Philippine History: Selected Essays (Diliman: University Center for Women's Studies, 1996), 52-72.
(3) Saint Vincent and Inclusive Leadership

Vincent de Paul lived in a totally male-dominated society. To read feminist discourse into his conferences is absurd. Despite this location, Vincent did not consider women’s status and role as secondary. His early collaborators were women: Madame de Gondi (co-foundress of the CMs) and Louise de Marillac (co-foundress of the DCs). Most members of the first Confraternities of Charity were women, even ladies of the court.” He also deconstructed the cloistered existence of women religious then by instituting a group of women “having for monastery only the houses of the sick...; for cell, a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city” (SV X, 661). But for Saint Vincent, the ultimate role of leadership in the ministry still goes to men. For one, he and Saint Louise agreed and instituted in the DC Constitutions that the real head of the Daughters of Charity will be the CM Superior General (Constitution 3.27). Vincent for sure is a man of vision, a creative genius for organization, a determined soul to get things done. For this, he is more of a datu than a babaylan.

It is in this aspect that the Filipino experience of pre-Hispanic babaylan’s inclusive leadership becomes relevant to critique, but also to supplement, Vincent’s medieval paradigm. However, this so-called ‘babaylan dimension’ of reality is not also totally foreign to Vincent’s experience. There is a crucial part of his life when he was still searching for his personal and ministerial identity which provides a key to this dimension but which he also wanted to forget and suppress for reasons only he knew — i.e., his captivity in Tunis and his experience with his alchemist master. A lot of debates have already gone into the authenticity of Vincent’s account (i.e., his two letters narrating this experience) but I follow José María Roman’s position that Vincent was in Tunis (1605-1607) even if the events really did not happen exactly the way Vincent wrote about them. His relationship with the alchemist is interestingly ambivalent. Vincent so dislikes him for his magic and trickeries as later to call him a

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46 To the Ladies of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu, he states: “For eight hundred years or so, women have had no public role in the Church; in the past there were some called Deaconesses, who were responsible for seating the women in the churches and teaching them the rubrics then in use. About the time of Charlemagne, however, by a discreet working of Divine Providence, this practice came to an end; persons of your sex were deprived of any role and haven’t had any since then. And now that same Providence is turning today to some of you to supply what was lacking to the sick poor of the Hôtel-Dieu” (SV XIII, 810).

47 For a good account of this debate and a reasonable position therein, see JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography, trans. Joyce Howard (London: Melisende, 1999), 61-83.
‘wretch.’ But he also acknowledges a more than master-slave relation between them. “He loved me deeply,” he recounts, “and took great delight in discoursing with me about alchemy and even greater about his Law to which he did everything in his power to win me, promising to give me enormous wealth and to impart all his knowledge” (SV I, 6). Vincent in fact was very interested in acquiring his medical knowledge which he later on applied to the M. de Comet (the son of his benefactor). My interest in retrieving this suppressed ‘alchemist’ episode in Saint Vincent’s life is not so much to see his metallurgical or medical skills as to reinforce a weak dimension in Vincent’s ministry for our times — that of ‘inclusive leadership’ as modeled by the Filipino babaylan. In medieval Europe and Christianity, alchemy was put in a bad light as it was related with magic and Islam. It was thoroughly banished with the coming of chemistry as modern Western science could not also accept the ambiguity (but also the inclusiveness) of its discourse. The alchemist was not only a chemist but also a doctor, not only a physicist but also a priest. He was one who could connect with both nature and the human psyche, both external and internal, both human and divine. In the pre-Hispanic Filipino context, this role, which is the nerve center of connectivity, was most effectively performed by the ‘feminine’ which also came to be suppressed by the coming of an all-male Spanish Catholic clergy. In the Asian Churches’ call for triple dialogue (i.e., dialogue with cultures, with ancient religions, with the poor), the art of ‘inclusion,’ connection and openness proves to be crucial attribute for its leaders and ministers. For all the anti-Islamic feeling of medieval France (Vincent was a ‘Christian slave’), Vincent

48 A manuscript preserved in the Hospital at Marans states: “St. Vincent de Paul’s remedy for gravel. Take two ounces of Venetian turpentine, two ounces of white turpeth, a half an ounce each of mastic, galangale, gillyflower, and cubed cinnamon bark. Mix all together along with half a pound of white honey and a pint of the strongest spirits. Let the whole mixture stand for sometime and then distill. The fourth part of a spoonful should be taken fasting every morning, along with three parts of borage or bugloss water; it may be taken as often as one likes, because it will do no harm; on the contrary, it is very good for health and especially so in case of urinary troubles. Hence no special régime is required except that one should not eat for an hour after drinking; and one can go about one’s ordinary business. This will be seen from experience. This servant of God learned the remedy in Barbary when he was captive there.” PIERRE COSTE, The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul, Vol. I, trans. Joseph Leonard (New York: New City Press, 1987), 31.

leads us to a sense of openness as to be able to learn from an Islamic alchemist (dialogue of religions) in a land and culture quite far from his own (dialogue of cultures). We now turn to the third dialogue: dialogue with the poor.

3.3. Oripun (Alipin): Leadership as Servanthood

(1) A Look at Contemporary Socio-Cultural Context

Philippine political leadership is not only composed of an exclusive elite minority (as we have asserted above), but also of a majority of corrupt and self-serving politicians. How to cover-up this pursuance of self-interest in the name of ‘public service’ is a skill which any politician has to learn. The seasoned ‘politico’ is one who can skillfully transform one’s own interests to the language of the concerns of those they represent, thus, also concealing real self-interest.\(^5\) In other words, while politicians purport to advance the agenda of their constituents, they are in fact also pursuing the fulfillment of their own interests, most often without admitting it. One case: The rationale of ‘pork barrel’ fund (PDAF - Priority Assistance Development Program) is to direct resources to districts too remote to get the attention of the national power centers. A fund is readily available to the district’s representative (i.e., the Congressman or Senator), who is most intimately in touch with the local situation and thus the best person to act. But the truth is that “the benefits officials get out of it far outweigh those gained by the public.”\(^5\) Thus, for all their promises of ‘service’ to the citizenry especially during electoral campaigns, every single ‘taxi-driver’ (the Filipino counterpart for the proverbial ‘man-on-the-street’) knows that running for public office is nothing but for self-aggrandizement. Instead of helping improve economic performance, political leaders

\(^5\) Such duplicity is also seen in the discrepancy between two images congressmen project in the Congress hall and among their constituents. Some legislators in fact fare poorly in bill-sponsorship (e.g., law-making becomes a sideline), yet they are also elected back to Congress by their constituents as they have projected themselves as the ‘human face’ of the law through immediate assistance, resource allocation and service provision, etc. (e.g., job referrals, community projects, “sponsorships in weddings, baptisms, guesting in fiestas, coronations, graduations, anniversaries, foundation ceremonies, conventions, seminars, beauty contests, funerals and other services”). Renato Velasco, “Does the Philippine Congress Promote Democracy?” Democratization: Philippine Perspectives (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1997), 281-302.

\(^5\) S. Coronel et al, The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and the Well-Born Dominate Congress (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004), 175.
in fact drain the national coffers. On whom does the government rely for its economic survival at this point in history? It is those who are in the lowest strata of the pyramid of power — the 'least of all' in the Philippine society — who provide for the country’s very subsistence: the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). They are the numerous Filipinos who do jobs refused by many others; they clean other people’s homes, wash their dishes, do their laundry, cook their food or take care of their children — all scattered all over Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Most of them do not even have permits to work nor to stay. Thus, they are also living clandestinely. This has become so widespread that one edition of the Webster dictionary equated the word ‘Filipina’ with ‘housemaid.’ Ironically, it is their dollar remittances that serve as “the main pillar of the Philippine economy.” The servants have become our leaders; the slaves our breadwinners!

(2) A Rereading of Pre-Hispanic Philippines

What comes to mind in pre-Hispanic Philippines is the lowest group in the social strata: the oripun (present Visayan ulipon; Tagalog alipin). Oripun comes from the archaic root udip which means “to let live,” for example, “to spare life on the field of battle, to ransom a captive, or to redeem a debt equivalent to a man’s price.” In other words, the existence of these classes depends on the generosity of their masters to whom they owe their lives as they were rescued from differing situations of death: captives in wars, victims of human sacrifice, household slaves, agricultural tenancy, etc. Due to their insurmountable debt situation, these slaves can be bought and sold. But the slave owner is not so much a perpetual lord as one’s creditor. Thus, the slaves can also ransom themselves from such situations of dependence. It has to be mentioned, however, that the upper two classes (the datu especially) are non-working members of society, i.e., the unproductive leisured class. Thus, it is the oripun, in fact, who sustain society through their productive activities much like the Greek slaves who, despite being excluded from the polis, make possible the Hellenic philosophical and political (also read

52 Eric Hobsbawm writes: “[T]o me it seems inevitable that, one way or another, the countries that don’t reproduce their populations... will import cheap labor or people who will do these jobs that the indigenous population no longer wants to do.... We have already seen migratory exchanges of this kind: the most common of which is the use of Filipinos as domestic servants.” ERIC HOBSBAWM, The New Century (London: Abacus, 2000), 144.


54 W.H. SCOTT, op. cit., Barangay, 133.
as ‘leisurely’) practice. What pre-Hispanic Filipino society considers as its parasites (i.e., the captured, ransomed, indebted, etc.) act as its source of life. Those who are ‘left to live’ by society (from battle or debt), in fact, let this same society live out of their own sweat and labor.

(3) **Saint Vincent and Servant Leadership**

It is here that Vincent de Paul’s understanding of the Christian narrative can help critique contemporary and ancient Filipino experience. It is Christian love which taught him that to be able to lead is to make oneself the least of all; to be a master is to be a servant. Vincent says: “Yes, my brothers, the place of our Lord is the lowest place. Someone who desires to rule cannot have the spirit of our Lord” (SV XI, 138). Or, as he writes to Antoine Durand, a confrere who became superior at 27 years of age: ‘I do not share the opinion of a person who said to me some time ago that it is essential for a man to show that he is superior if he is to rule properly and maintain his authority. O my God, Our Lord Jesus Christ never spoke like that. He taught us the contrary by word and example, telling us that he had not come to be served but to serve others, and that he who wishes to be master should be the servant of all’ (SV XI, 346). Vincent’s journey was a following of the Jesus who was the ‘evangelizer of the poor.’ What impresses him in the Scriptural narrative is the ‘poor Jesus’ who incarnates himself in the ‘poor person.’ Thus, Vincent can say that ‘the poor are our masters and lords.’ If he were alive in the Philippines today as he works for the poor, he, in fact, would know too that this so-called ‘refuse of society’ is also the source of its survival, the wellspring of its own salvation. It is in their seemingly ‘wasted lives’ where Jesus reveals himself. Vincent was the first who ‘turned the medal.’

**Conclusion**

I would like to end this reflection on the method of inculturating Vincent’s charism and ministry into different contexts with a story from Hermann Hesse’s *Journey to the East*.

In this mythical journey of a company of men (called the League) to the East where the ‘Home of the Light’ is found, there was Leo who is the joy of the whole group. It was he who did all the lowly tasks, while, at the same time, offering them his songs and lively disposition. It was all a

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pleasant journey until the day Leo left. The group soon disbanded and went on their separate ways for they could no longer tolerate one another. They realized it was impossible to go on without Leo. One day, quite long after, the narrator joined an Order. To his great surprise, there he found out that Leo the servant was in fact its leader. The real leader does not need to flaunt his authority. For as Saint Vincent also once advised: "Live with confreres so cordially and simply that no one, on seeing you together, may guess, who is the Superior" (SV VI, 66). There is thus a need to continually search for who the real leader is or what real leadership should be in our different and constantly evolving contexts.
In speaking of *I Santi della Famiglia Vincenziana (The Saints of the Vincentian Family)*, we are referring, Father Guerra says in the introduction to this book, to the confreres, the Daughters of Charity, the groups of Vincentian laity, the Sisters of Charity (founded by a Daughter of Charity, Jeanne Antide Thouret), and the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, from which we recall Frederick Ozanam (the principal Founder), Jean Léon Le Prévost (from the group of young pioneers) and Santiago Massarnau (the Founder of the SSVP in Spain).

The book not only gathers information on those who have been canonized or beatified, but also on those who have begun the processes. We thank the Postulator General, Father Guerra, for the publication of this book, in which appear the traditional saints, known to all, as well as many other witnesses to the more recent history of the Congregation. These show the fruits of Christian fidelity, many times heroically to martyrdom, that the Holy Spirit has produced in our Vincentian Family. In all of them is made visible what is expressed in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas est* that those who draw near to God do not withdraw from people, but rather become truly close to them.

A good group of Vincentian authors participated in the writing of the brief, but attractive, biographies, which are collected in this book of 466 pages. Nine saints, 13 blessed or groups of blessed, venerable and up to 19 servants of God or groups of servants of God, march through these pages, beautifully published by CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane.

**GIUSEPPE GUERRA, C.M., I Santi della Famiglia Vincenziana (The Saints of the Vincentian Family), CLV - Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome, Italy, 2007, 468 pages.**
ALBERTO VERNASCHI
UN PATRIMONIO DI FAMIGLIA
Santi e Beati della Famiglia Vicenziana
(A Family Patrimony.
Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family)

Less extensive, but with the same care, an improved presentation and a profusion of color photos, this other little book, of only 144 pages, comes to us composed by Father Alberto Vernaschi, C.M., Director of the Daughters of Charity of the Provinces of Sienna and Rome. In this case, the list includes the recognized saints and blessed.

It is sufficient to peruse the index, writes Msgr. Antonio Buoncristiani, Archbishop of Sienna, in the presentation, and place next to each name the years and places in which the person lived, to realize that from 1625 and 1633, when the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity were born, until now, there has been a continuous current of humble and hidden evangelical coherence, but that also, every so often, the vein of a recognized holiness has shown itself, especially in the most hostile conditions and times: martyrs in China or during the French Revolution, lives offered with generosity in the hospitals and at the service of the “least” in the various parts of the world. The presentation concludes with these words of H. Berson: “Witnesses attract multitudes after them. It is not necessary that they speak; it is enough that they exist; their existence is an appeal.”


ERMINIO ANTONELLO, C.M.
UNA MISTICA DELLA CARITÀ: BEATA GIUSEPPINA NICOLI
(A Mystic of Charity: Blessed Giuseppina Nicoli)