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Congregation of the Mission

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# GENERAL CURIA

## RECIPIENTS OF THE MISSION AWARD, 2008

Rome, 30 July 2008

*Feast of St. Justin de Jacobis*

*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 2008**. I want to thank the recipients of this award for their missionary creativity in their evangelization of the poor. I hope that all the projects presented will help to stimulate missionary creativity among confreres in other provinces.

Here is a brief description of each of the projects, as well as the goals and objectives proposed to make them realizable:

### **1. Province of Curitiba**

***Biblical, Pastoral, Social Formation and Animation of the Superagui Island and the neighboring islands***

The Island of Superagui is a national reserve in the Atlantic Ocean in the southern part of Brazil. The areas that make up this national park were originally inhabited by the Tupiniquins and Carijós indians during Brazil's colonial period.

The region is formed by colonies of fishermen. There are approximately 1000 persons who reside on the Island; the majority of them are children. There are very few prospects for the future, because there are fewer and fewer fish and shrimp as larger fishing boats come from different places in Brazil to exploit the area.

During certain times of the year, many families suffer from hunger. There is a high rate of illiteracy and many people lack basic health care needs. There is no health system, either curative or preventive in place. There is no sport center for the children or young people who are often victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The missionary project intends to assist in, little by little, the restoration of the human dignity of the people of the island, helping them to articulate their faith and life, spirituality and action through biblical formation that is rooted in the reality of the island.

The missionary team is made up of four religious Sisters, two lay people and the pastor.

The project has two goals:

- Formation and enabling of faith leaders
- The biblical, pastoral and social animation of the inhabitants of the different islands.

The missionary team is aware that the process will be slow, but gradually they hope to involve the participation of the islanders and solicit the support of other persons of good will in the promotion that is possible and progressive.

Some of the objectives of the project are the following:

- To gain the confidence of the community
- To take initiatives to help recover the self-esteem of the leaders of the community
- To continue the formation, organization and capability of the islanders, especially the youth, children and other leaders
- To organize a plan of action that is participative at the social, economic, cultural and religious levels, to reveal the values, fears, needs and expectations of the youth of the community
- To provide spiritual, intellectual and professional formation for the youth in order to provide them with alternative ways of life to the way of drugs and violence which has a heavy presence in the islands
- To enable leaders for better actualization of the following pastorals: catechetical, liturgical and charity as well as financial administration

- To initiate the Children Missionaries in order that children might evangelize children
- To organize bible reflection groups for adults
- To organize a children's pastoral enabling volunteer leaders.

The missionary team responsible for this project is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Mission Award to provide the formation and animation that is biblical, pastoral and social and benefits above all those who are excluded and denied their basic human and therefore Christian rights.

## **2. Province of Chile**

### ***Rural Areas of the St. Luis Gonzaga Parish in Chile***

The parish, founded July 1, 1892, was entrusted to the Congregation of the Mission in 1995. The areas where we wish to develop a pastoral plan are located in the northeast section of the parish and are the places farthest from the city of Collipulli. The closest community to the parish center is 50 km away and the furthest is 80 km. The parish has 14 rural communities. Each time the visits to these places are short because of the distance which has to be traveled, and because of the need to visit a number of communities at one time. The roads are in poor condition especially in the winter months. Many times the visits are interrupted because of the rain, snow, and the insecurity of the place.

The goals of the project are to evangelize, mission and animate in the Vincentian style the rural communities of the parish of St. Luis Gonzaga, Río Amargo, Santa Julia, Canadá and Niblinto.

The project intends:

- To form parish leaders and to build missionary teams in order to develop activities on the weekends
- To do home visits of each community in order to strengthen the catholic presence in the area
- To prepare the children and adults for the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation
- To select and form leaders as animators of the faith community
- To evangelize and animate the faith of the people
- To coordinate spiritual and material help for the families most in need.

**Objective #1** To recreate the family and community experience in mission places.

<b>Lines of Action</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<p>Celebrate what we believe and believe what we celebrate</p> <p>To live the mystery of the Incarnation by discovering the human being today.</p>	<p>Creating liturgical teams</p> <p>Holding formation meetings to strengthen the Christian Catholic identity,</p> <p>Providing workshops on human relations</p> <p>Creating opportunities for dialog, reflection and formation regarding conflicts and interfamily violence</p>

**Objective #2** To deepen their belonging to and co-responsibility in the church.

<b>Lines of Action</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<p>That the experience of Christ give meaning to our life and lead us to a profound permanent personal conversion</p> <p>To revitalize with the spirit of the primitive Christian communities, the base Christian communities</p>	<p>Offering instruments for growth and development in one's prayer life.</p> <p>Doing a biblical catechesis: learning how to read, understand, and meditate and pray with the Sacred Scripture (Lectio Divina)</p> <p>Forming and preparing ministers of the word of God.</p> <p>Promoting an interchange of experiences and witnesses with other base Christian communities.</p>

**Objective #3** To form pastoral agents in order to strengthen their missionary identity.

Lines of Action	Activities
To discover, strengthen and put forth our baptismal commitment as disciples and missionaries	Providing workshops on missionary formation
To strengthen the missionary identity of different parish groups.	Offering materials with a missionary content. Helping others to assume a missionary conscience.

**3. International Mission of Papua New Guinea**  
*Holy Name Parish New Evangelization Project*

Holy Name Parish was entrusted to the Vincentian Community in November 2007. The parish has 14 outstations scattered in a large territory that includes rural villages, problematic settlements, a government prison, a correctional institution, an institution for the mentally handicapped, and other institutions.

The goal is the implementation of an integral plan of new evangelization at Holy Name Parish through popular missions in order to become a community of communities in a permanent state of mission.

There are a number of **objectives** that will be accomplished:

- To organize a mission program to train parish leaders to assume the task of the New Evangelization
- To renew the life of small Christian communities by conducting retreats in the small villages and settlements of the parish
- To do home visitation and to organize meetings of families so as to reach out to those who are not actively involved in the life of the parish
- To organize a yearly popular mission during the Christmas novena in order to renew Christian life in the parish
- To give material and spiritual assistance
- To promote the justice and peace group
- To acquire catechetical materials for the Parish
- To support the missionary work of confreres in Woitape parish and other new places.

The following realities pose a challenge to us, Vincentians, in the task of evangelization of the poor at Holy Name Parish.

- Youth drug-addiction, unemployment and crime
- Poverty
- Out-of-school children and youth
- Tuberculosis, malaria, skin diseases, pneumonia
- Increase in HIV-AIDS
- Government corruption
- Tribal fights
- Family violence, especially against women
- Lack of respect for nature and the environment
- Lack of adult catechesis and Catholics joining other churches/sects
- Lack of catechists and lay ministers
- Lack of active participation by the faithful in the parish.

**There are three parts to the plan: evangelization, development, charity.** Only the first part — Evangelization — is developed here.

**Kerygmatic:** Its aim is that people receive the kerygma of the first proclamation of the gospel through the renewal of one's Christian commitment in baptism and confirmation.

**Koinonia:** In this stage the community will learn how to grow and persevere in the Christian life (formation in being disciples to becoming apostles who are sent on mission).

**Community:** In this stage the community will grow in the new life of Christ through the Word of God, prayer and fellowship; to become the Body of Christ, a small community of witness and evangelization.

**Missionary:** In this level missionaries will be formed from among the community. These will help make the parish into a permanent mission and promote growth through continuing visitation, catechesis at all levels, and the formation of new communities.

At the end of this first part the community will further promote the process of evangelization by establishing various ministries: formation of small Christian communities, catechesis, faith formation seminars, liturgy and social action, as well as special ministries such as family life, youth, health, and rehabilitation.

#### 4. Province of South India

##### *Faith Formation and Spiritual Revival Programs*

Invited by the Bishops of the Latin dioceses of Trivandrum, Quilon and Neyyattinkara, the South Indian Province of CM has taken up faith formation and spiritual revival programs. The Faithful of these dioceses consist mainly of fishermen and daily waged workers. There is indifference and apathy to faith and moral decadence among the people.

The bishops invited the CM confreres to do what they can for the revival of faith. Accordingly there is a team of 9 confreres working in the area. They form teams of priests, religious and lay ministers to preach missions, to catechize, to visit homes and to animate life in the parishes. The training of lay ministers and the preaching of renewal retreats are working together in these dioceses. The team of confreres also makes itself available for spiritual talks, retreats and guidance of the diocesan priests, seminarians and religious of the area. The methods used are mission preaching, family visits and guidance, catechizing, bible classes and guidance courses for the preachers and lay ministers, fostering of Marian devotion and formation and guidance of basic Christian communities.

The goals of the project are the formation and training of Popular Mission Teams consisting of priests, religious and lay ministers and faith formation and spiritual renewals in various parishes of the diocese.

The **objectives** are:

- To hold training sessions, consisting of two full days each, once every three months, for the lay ministers and volunteers who would preach and assist in mission preaching. (These session will consist of Bible classes, guidance in spiritual counseling, skills of listening and praying over sick people and homiletic skills).
- To hold popular missions in all the parishes of these dioceses in three years' time. (This will consist of preparation by family visits, actual preaching, counseling, family guidance, reconciliation services, etc., and follow up of the retreats by visits and motivational prayer guidance.)
- To have talks, retreats and guidance for the priests, seminarians and religious of the area.
- To spread Marian devotion through AMM in all the parishes.

## 5. Province of Slovenia

*The Integral Access to Evangelization and to Apostolic Service.  
“The greatest of these is love”*

Through this project we would like to work to decrease spiritual poverty present in our world, and we would like to fight the different types of dependencies.

### Criteria

The program addresses students 12-14 years old and young people 15-30 who want to fight increasing spiritual poverty as well as different types of dependencies in the developed world. The young people lose themselves more and more in the world of consumerism and the lure of pleasure. This is why we have prepared for them a year-long program composed of different elements:

- Summer vacation for preschool children and secondary school children
- Groups for the Sacrament of Confirmation
- Groups of young people, students and animators.

While the children grow up and they still attend the catechism regularly, the Church has an exceptional chance for presenting to them a lifestyle different from what the world offers them. We try to educate these children and young people to love through the activities and in small groups. This program is aimed at children and youth of the whole deanery. The program aimed at children for Confirmation is based on making present the gospel of St. Luke, while the one for the youth and students is based on the Sunday gospels. This program entails the following:

- One week of vacation for the children — “Let’s draw the rainbow,” for 100 children with 25 young animators
- Meetings twice a month for the children for Confirmation in small groups (7-12 people) in the whole deanery (11 parishes), about 250 young people and 35 animators. Besides these regular meetings we prepare a meeting for all of them together with their parents. For these latter also, there is a program that invites them to deepen their relationship in marriage and to deepen their faith
- Meetings for young people and students twice a month
- Meeting for animators once a month
- A Mass for young people every month prepared by the young people of the deanery

- Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament once a month and the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the young people of the deanery who prepare the liturgy
- A spiritual weekend for everyone according to their age range, where we build relationships on the chosen values in deepening the faith. Once a year we also invite the parents of the young people to the meeting.

**The project responds to the following needs:**

- The children, the young people and young couples need a clear spiritual orientation and an ongoing accompaniment, in order not to lose themselves in the mentality of a society of consumerism. The meetings and personal accompaniment correspond well to this need
- The young people lose themselves in consumerism if they are not in relation with those who share the same values
- The average age of the clergy in the deanery is 68. The Church cannot respond to these needs without new vocations. The formation of animators and of group leaders as well as working together meets this need
- There is a sufficient number of active young people; one must bring them together and give them an adequate formation, accompanying them and guiding them in working with the younger ones.

Through the insertion of young people and their parents in the program “the greatest thing is love,” the young people themselves and through them their families, change their outlook on the world. Materialism and consumerism give place to the Christian point of view. The need for prayer makes itself felt, family relations strengthen and they fall less often into different types of dependencies.

Through this program we try to break the harmful cycle of consumerism and individualism. The formation of relationships starts with the younger ones through the project “Let’s draw the rainbow,” which includes the young people and their parents and at a later time groups of students and animators. Through the interpersonal dialogs with the leader, the young people search for solutions to their problems and form themselves to be able to make serious decisions.

Being personally accompanied when living together helps them to build serious friendly bonds, that little by little become solid relationships as couples. In the group of students couples have formed who reflect on the seriousness of the union of marriage. We are convinced that these marriage unions will be more solid in the

future and that they will avoid the crises that often end up in a divorce.

In closing, I would like to remind all of you of the **object of the Mission Award**: “To acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individuals or groups of confreres that promote in a noteworthy way their missionary work.”

I pray that, through the intercession of St. Justin de Jacobis, God may give us the grace to continue to deepen our missionary spirit in the world where we are called to evangelize especially the most abandoned.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General

# FEATURE

## *Political Charity*

### Presentation

by Julio Suescun Olcoz, C.M.

*Editor of "Vincentiana"*

From 1-15 July 2007, the 1<sup>st</sup> Joint Meeting of CCC and APRF was held in Prigen (Indonesia). The CCC is the Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture in the Asia-Pacific region that initiated in 2003. The chairman chosen by the Visitors of Asia-Pacific is Father Armada Riyanto, C.M. The APRF is the Asia-Pacific Regional Formators, a gathering of the formators founded by the Asia-Pacific Visitors in 1994. There were 54 Vincentian participants the first week; whereas the second week was particularly for CM formators. As the chronicler notes, for the first time there were participants from all the different countries in the Asia-Pacific region: North and South India, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Australia, and Indonesia. Some members of the Vincentian Family in Indonesia also participated. The topic was: Political Charity and Vincentian Formation. The readers may find abundant information about this meeting on <http://cmglobal.org>.

*Vincentiana* wants to collect some of the reflections from that meeting in this issue, for two principal motives: first of all, the importance of the topic itself, and secondly, the origin of the reflections.

From the time Saint Vincent wrote, in the *Regulations for the Charity of Women* (Châtillon-les-Dombes), that the poor suffered *more through a lack of organized assistance than from lack of charitable persons* (CCD 13b, 8), Vincentian reflection has not ceased turning to this successful intuition. When the Congregation of the Mission, which was destined to evangelize the poor, was born, it

heard from the lips of its founder that to preach the gospel is *to do what was foretold and prefigured by the prophets to make the gospel effective*. Its members could not be content with preaching from pulpits, but had to *preach by words and by works*, because that is what Our Lord practiced and that is what we have to practice (cf. SV XII, 84, 88).

Later, and in union with the whole Vincentian Family, the Congregation of the Mission tried to make the gospel effective with efficacious works of charity in order to respond to the authentic needs of the poor. It even committed itself to a long campaign to promote Systemic Change. These works demonstrate the genuineness of *God's love poured into our hearts by the Spirit who has been given us* (Rom 5:5). Our Christian and missionary vocation is animated by this Spirit of love and is lived as an expression of a love that liberates and dignifies the poor. We were urged to it by John Paul II who called on the missionaries gathered together in Assembly in 1986: *Search out, more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long term solutions; adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so, you will work for the credibility of the Gospel and of the Church* (Discourse to the 1986 General Assembly). And in 1997, to the Daughters of Charity, he said: *Indeed, love of the poor involves respect for their cultures, which demonstrates the soul of their human communities, as well as the recognition and acceptance of the values which constitute their wealth. Fraternal relations with everyone will develop from this attitude* (Letter to the Mother General at the 1997 General Assembly). Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, *God is love*, mentioning Saint Vincent and Saint Louise among the saints who exercised charity in an exemplary way, spoke of *social charity for all people* (n. 40).

This issue of *Vincentiana* includes part of the reflection that is being done on the topic in a geographical zone of the world where the Congregation of the Mission is living out the response to its vocation to evangelize the poor with extraordinary strength and enthusiasm. Surely it would do us all well to reflect with these, our Asia-Pacific brothers, about a burning topic in our world today and that they live out with particular intensity. In the midst of the religions and cultures of the peoples they evangelize, they need to reread Saint Vincent in the context in which they live and in which they wish to interpret their Vincentian fidelity. There is not much meaning in asking what Saint Vincent would have done in this situation, because it is a hypothesis that will never be realized. But they are very right when they ask what Vincentians today would do in light of what Saint Vincent did in his time.

The Superior General, Father Gregory Gay, during his visit to Indonesia, spoke about political charity. He thinks that our candidates should not remain indifferent toward what is happening in contemporary society. They should be grounded in their own socio-political situation, be formed to analyze it critically, so that they can respond to its challenges more effectively. The term “political charity” does not appear in sociological and political science dictionaries. But, in the Vincentian tradition, charity can only exist “politically,” that is, in concrete works and social structures.

Finally *Vincentiana* carries on the memory of the Common Rules by reflecting, on this 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their presentation, on some of the values they indicated.

Translation: Sister ANN MARY DOUGHERTY, D.C.



Participants in the gathering at Prigen

# Political Charity in the Context of Inter-Religious Dialogue

by Paul A. Bharathi, C.M.\*

## Introduction

From time immemorial, India has been a land of religious tolerance and it has been rich in culture, language, tradition and wisdom. It is also known for its Philosophy. It had been receptive to various religions, such as, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Parsism and Jainism. For centuries, religious co-existence had been a hallmark of Indian tradition. All these religions co-existed in a perfect manner and the people of India grew as one nation and as one people in spite of their differences in religion. Hinduism which is an ancient religion, by its very nature is a religion of tolerance and the people also had the same nature. But over the years, the situation has changed. Hinduism has been redefined by a group of people and fundamentalism has crept into the minds of some people. The seed of fundamentalism has been sown in the soil of India and in some places it has already taken root and it is trying to take roots in some other places. As a whole the Hindu fundamentalism is very much alive and no doubt it is catching like a wild fire.

The rise of Hindu fundamentalism is the situation in which we live. Our formation should be context-based and the students should be formed based on the political, social and economical situation of today. In other words, our Vincentian formation should be based on political charity. Political charity implies three things; (1) to be aware of the political situation in which we live (2) to analyze it critically (3) to respond to that situation. Political charity demands that our formation should be well inserted into the socio-political situation of today. Hence, this paper makes an attempt to highlight the political situation of India, how we can respond to it theologically and finally how our Vincentian formation could be made effective in the light of the political situation of today.

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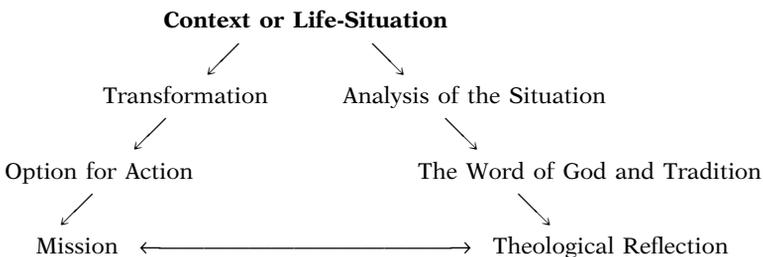
\* Paul A. Bharathi, C.M., is a doctor in Biblical theology from the Gregorian University. He teaches Biblical theology in various seminaries in India, and is currently working in a parish. Doctor Bharathi belongs to India Southern Province.

## Methodology

For our methodology, first and foremost the situation is the basis and foundation. Our theologizing, like the theologizing of the prophets, must be rooted in the concrete historical situation. This historical situation includes the political, social and religious situation. All theology of course implies an on-going dialogue between the theologian's situation and his text. But the starting point of this dialogue, if it to be fruitful, must be the situation not the text. In other words, it is a contextualization of theology. Contextualization is a response to a particular socio-political, religious and economic situation. It must be recognized that "Contextualization" is not simply a fad or a catchword but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the word. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14) is the basis for our contextual theology. After taking into consideration the context, which is the base for our theological reflection, we study it in an analytical way. In other words, we analyze the situation in a critical and objective way without any prejudice and bias.

After analyzing the context, we have to take recourse to the word of God and tradition. In this process, we reflect over the context and situation in the light of the word of God and tradition. After careful reflection, certainly a new theology arises out of a particular context and situation. In this theological process, there is also an internal process that takes place. While reflecting over the situation in the light of the word of God and tradition, there is transformation of understanding. Transformation is from pre-understanding to understanding. A transformation is needed in our way of thinking and our attitude. We have the right thinking and attitude towards others, while getting rid of our biases and prejudices. It is not only that we remain at the thinking level, but also we involve ourselves in an action. Action is nothing but mission.

The following diagram will explain well our methodology.



## **Context: The emergence of Hindutva force in India**

In simple terms Hindutva means Hinduism that is the total aspect of “Hinduness.” It is to revive the Hindu culture, tradition and religious practices of Hindu and to imbibe a spirit of Hinduism in the people of Hindu religion. Hindutva is commonly identified with the guiding ideology of the *Sangh Parivar* (Family of associations), a family of Hindu nationalist organizations. The first Hindutva organization formed was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925. A prominent Indian political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is closely associated with a group of organizations that advocate Hindutva. They collectively refer to themselves as the “Sangh Parivar” or family of associations, which include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bajarang Dal and the Vishva Hindu Parishad. The major political wing is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which was in power in India’s central Government for six years from 1998 to 2004 and at present it is the main opposition party.

“One nation, one culture, one people and one leader” has become the dominant and fundamental slogan of the Sangh Parivar.<sup>1</sup> Their fundamental argument is that the Hindus are a majority and hence they should exercise authority, precedence and domination over others. The Sangh Parivar’s slogan is aiming at bringing Christians and Muslims under the domination of Hindus. Their one nation theory always takes recourse to history and warns the citizens that there are “hostile forces” or to state it in their own words “foreign hands” within and outside the country who are all out to destroy the national unity and pride. Hence, all should be united to face this threat. In this thought pattern the “other” the “enemy” is projected as ready to devour the entire nation, culture, economy and society and thus various segments are mobilized to face this ‘threat.’

Gleaning through historical records, one becomes aware of the fact that from 1980 onward the Sangh Parivar has come to occupy a specific space in the society and polity of India. Till 1980 the Sangh Parivar remained as an insignificant organization, being strong only in certain pockets of India, taking up some issues pertaining to Hindu culture and religion but without having a strong voice at a political level. From 1980 onwards, it started growing steadily. The peak moment of the Sangh Parivar was the demolition of the Mosque at Ayodhya in 1992. It took up the temple issue at Ayodhya and stirred up the religious sentiment of the Hindu People. The Ayodhya issue

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<sup>1</sup> Family of associations.

was close to the heart of the Sangh Parivar. It took Ram to the people through symbols to which they could easily relate. Ram, Ayodya and the temple were thus brought close to the social and cultural life of the people. In doing so, what the fundamentalist group has achieved is to identify itself with the cultural life of the Hindus and to project itself as the champion of their religion. After the demolition of the Mosque at Ayodya, it won the hearts of Hindus in some parts of India and as a result the Sangh Parivar's political wing, namely the Bharatiya Janata Bharty (BJP) captured power in some states of India and eventually it captured power at the center in 1998. During their rule, they were executing their hidden agenda of promoting a Hindu nation by targeting the minorities, both Christians and Muslims.

### **Central Concepts of the Sangh Parivar**

- The Indian Subcontinent is the homeland of the Hindus.
- "Hindus" are those who consider India to be their fatherland as well as their holy land.
- Emphasizing historical oppression of Hindus by invading forces like the Muslims and Christians and the call to "reverse" the influence resulting from these intrusions.
- Denunciation of British colonialism and communism alike for a perceived weakening of Hindus.
- The irredentist call for the establishment of a "Hindu nation" to protect Hindus and to revive Hindu culture.

### **Views on other Faiths**

The advocates of Hindutva often use the term Pseudo-Secularism to refer to laws which they believe are very favorable toward minorities. They point to the different standards for Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Hence they want a uniform civil code. The subject of a uniform civil code, which would remove special religion-based provisions for different religions (Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, etc.) from the Indian constitution, is thus one of the main political planks of Hindutva. Hindutva followers question differential laws in terms of marriage and divorce and ask why in a secular democracy Muslims are allowed polygamy, but Hindus or Christians are prosecuted for doing the same. Christians are also given separate laws for divorce, which are more difficult for them than for Hindus. The followers of the Hindutva speak for the Hindu majority in India. They also often feel that secular democracy implies equal laws for all

religions, and want a uniform civil code passed for the same reason. One must also differentiate between the word “secularism” as used in the Western and Indian contexts. Secularism in the West implies “separation of church and state” whereas secularism in India means “equal respect for all religions.” Among the goals of the Hindutva organizations in modern India is a reversing of the invasions by conquerors. They include demands to convert disputed historical monuments into temples.

### **Implementation of Hindutva Policies**

The Hindutva force started implementing their Hindutva policies in some states where they rule:

1. Introducing the “anti-conversion bill” which makes it difficult for both missionaries and for individuals to convert to Christianity from Hinduism. It is introduced to counter the menace of the proselytizing religions of Christianity and Islam. Since the Hindutva force believes in a religiously defined nationhood, the conversion of Hindus to foreign faiths is seen as a grave threat to Hindu nationhood.
2. Introducing the “anti-cow slaughter bill.” It is basically aiming at the formation of a Hindu nation. The Cow is a sacred animal for Hindus. By banning the slaughtering of cows, they have double motives. One is to make India as a Hindu nation and another motive is to target the Muslims and Christians who eat the cow meat.
3. Using education to spread the Hindutva ideology. Under this agenda, the content of education from the primary level to the higher education stage should be “Indianized,” nationalized and spiritualized. In some of their ruled states, they changed the syllabus and content of the subject in order to propagate the Hindutva ideology.
4. Appointing persons as government officials who are supporters of Hindutva ideology. In the BJP-ruled states, high ranking officials are the hand-pick of the Hindutva force who have an inclination towards their policies. Hence they could manipulate the government machineries for their end.
5. Intimidation of both Christians and Muslims in the states where the Hindutva force is ruling. Sustained attacks on Churches and Christian schools across the country. Physical attack on Christian missionaries and nuns are very common in the Hindutva ruled states. The intimidation aims at the curbing of activities of our missionaries.

### **Critical Analysis of the situation**

When we look at the situation where the Hindutva force is becoming stronger, the present situation shows that for Christians, a great challenge is ahead of them. When we study it from a historical point of view, we, the Christian missionaries directly or indirectly contributed to the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. Of course, Muslims too played a role in that. First of all, the invaders both British and Muslim are to take a lion's share for being causes for the rise of Hindutva forces. The British and Muslim emperors had scant respect for Hinduism. They ridiculed the Hindu religion, saying that they are pagan gods and they also did not respect the holy places. The Muslim emperors converted a few temples into Mosques. Hence the negative attitude of the British and Muslims forced some Hindus to unite themselves under the banner of Rashtray Swayam Sevek (RSS) and ultimately it gave birth to different fundamental groups, including the political wing BJP.

Another factor which contributed to the rise of Hindutva force is our own theology and the activities of missionaries. Way back, India was filled with foreign missionaries who were very zealous in mass conversion. They were converting a lot of Dalits and Tribals to Christianity which the Hindutva force perceived as a threat to the Hindu religion. They thought that if they allowed the Christian missionaries to convert the Dalits<sup>2</sup> and Tribals, the Hindu religion would finally become extinct. Hence, they were up in arms against the Christian missionaries for their interest in conversion. The Hindutva force is against any conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. One of the main agenda items of the Hindutva force is to stop conversion.

### **Transformation: A change of attitude**

The above-mentioned factors which directly or indirectly contributed to the rise of Hindutva force, now call for a change. A change is needed in our attitude, in our thinking and in our theology too. It is true that over the years the Church in India has been thinking seriously on the relationship with other religions, especially with Hinduism. We do have a positive attitude towards Hinduism; however, against the background of the past experience, the Hindutva forces are suspicious about us. They are suspicious about our educational institutions which they think are for

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<sup>2</sup> A group of people belong to low caste in India.

converting people. They are suspicious about our social services which they think are aimed at converting people. Here, we need to have a change in our mission. We have to move from converting souls to converting persons. In other words, instead of increasing the number of Baptisms, we need to work for the welfare of humanity, society and the nation at large and through which we can certainly bear witness to Christ. Jesus, while he was on earth, had only twelve disciples and he was not obsessed with the increase of disciples. But he was more focused on his ministry rather than increasing his followers. Similarly our main focus should be ministry, i.e. doing good to humanity not the increase of the number of baptisms.

### **The Church teaching on other religions**

In India in the context of different religions, particularly in the context of Hinduism, a lot of theological activities have been going on. Indeed the Second Vatican Council gave a boost to the theological movement in India. Almost all theological reflections in India began to situate themselves in the context of non-Christian religions, especially Hinduism. Since then, the church in India has been striving hard to better its relationship with the other religions.

One of the stumbling blocks for a relationship with Hinduism was the understanding of Salvation. Earlier missionaries were convinced that there was no salvation outside the church which was indeed a cause for animosity between Hinduism and Christianity. Now, the Vatican II recognizes the universal saving will of God (II Vatican, *Lumen Gentium*, 16). It is because of this universal saving will that there are workings of God in other religions. Although the workings of God in other religions are hidden, they are not totally unknown to the Church. In the ways of conduct and of the life of the people, and in the precepts and teachings of the religions, *Nostra Aetate* perceives the reflection of a ray of the truth, the Christ who enlightens all. John Paul II when he came to India and spoke on other religions, he said that in Christ God is working out the salvation in a way also through the different religions of the people. God makes himself “present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain ‘gaps,’ insufficiencies and errors” (taken from speeches of John Paul II, when he visited India). The document stated that it may be the providence of God that the people belonging to the different religions, through the different very true religious efforts, may achieve salvation (II Vatican, *Ad Gentes*, 3, cf. also *Lumen Gentium*, 16).

As I mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for the rise of Hindu fundamentalism is our own attitude, a negative attitude of condemning other religions, saying that there is no salvation outside the church. This attitude did infuriate the Hindu fundamentalist and as a result they are against conversions in India. Now, our attitude has been changed and Vatican II clearly highlights the point that there is salvation outside the church. Hence, we need to acknowledge other religions and their way to attain salvation which may not be as fully revealed religion as our Christian religion. This thinking indeed helps the Hindutva force to get rid of their biases against Christianity especially with regard to our motivation of conversion.

### **Theological Reflection: Dialogue as Mission**

Taking into consideration the pluralistic context of India and in the light of Vatican II, we need to rethink our mission. In a pluralistic context, inter-religious dialogue is part of the Church's evangelizing mission. The council calls for dialogue with the non-Christian religions. This dialogue has its roots in the very concept of Religion, which is a dialogue between Man and God (cf. Paul VI, ES 70). Hence dialogue should be a mission of every religion, especially for the catholic religion. Dialogue with other religions always aims at mutual respect and mutual understanding. To achieve this objective, first and foremost, the religions at dialogue should share their theological views and ideas. It is not to find fault or errors in theological understanding. Rather it is to understand each one's stand on theological issues and to respect each one's view point. It is not for an argumentation that we enter into theological discussion, but it is for enriching one another with rich theological thoughts. Earlier, Christian theologians were critical about the theology of the Hindu religion and its tradition. But now, dialogue helps us to accept their viewpoint and to appreciate it. The appreciation and acceptance of other's views, especially on the Hindu religion, will help the fundamentalist group to change their attitude. In fact, fundamentalism is a reaction to the negative attitude of Christians towards the Hindu. Our misconception and misunderstanding of the Hindu religion invited the wrath of the fundamentalist. Dialogue indeed helps us to have a better understanding with the fundamentalist group. Hence, dialogue is one of the means through which we can reach out to our Hindu brethren. In this process, each religion stands in its position and expresses its view without criticizing the other. We engage in dialogue to clarify and to remove misunderstandings between two religions. This will help us to have a better relationship with the other religions in a pluralistic context.

By sharing our theological views and ideas through dialogue, we also seek the truth. Pope John Paul II said in Madras, India, that “dialogue is a means of seeking after truth and sharing it with others” (taken from speeches of John Paul II, when he visited India). It is this truth that has come to unite all the people as one humankind in love. Every religion seeks after truth. If we accept this basic principle, we can somewhat mellow down the fundamentalism. Absolutism also leads religion to fundamentalism. Hindu fundamentalism is a reaction to our absolutism. But now, we accept that other religions also contain truth. “The Catholic church recognizes the truths that are contained in the religious traditions of India” (II Vatican, *Nostra Aetate*, 3-4). Religions in India, especially Hinduism, are ardent seekers of truth. In this context “dialogue is a means of seeking after truth and sharing it with others.” *Dignitatis Humane* of Vatican II states that by dialogue people will be sharing “with each other the truth they have discovered, or are convinced they have discovered, in such a way that they help one another in the search for truth.” Today’s India has been experiencing division, hatred and disunity because of fundamentalism. By seeking truth in other religions, especially in Hinduism, the Catholic Church can bring unity and fellowship in the society. As Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 1, says, “it is the truth that human beings have in common and on what promotes fellowship among them.”

### **Kingdom of God as mission**

First of all, the Kingdom of God should not be identified with the Church. The Kingdom of God is a wider concept than the Church. The Church is a sign of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God can be understood in three ways. One way, we can understand the kingdom as the future of the Church. This interpretation leads us to rigidity and exclusiveness. The church is seen as the beginnings of the kingdom. Another way of understanding the kingdom is to insist that it is not merely a future, heavenly reality, but has to be realized here and now in history as a human community of freedom, fellowship and love. People would however agree that the kingdom is not merely an earthly reality and that while we must keep on striving for the realization of the kingdom in this sense in human society, its actual advent may be eschatological in or beyond history. In this interpretation, the kingdom is understood as both present and future reality. The problem with this interpretation is that it is very much limited to the church. It sees the church as kingdom which is both a present and future reality. This interpretation will not be applicable to a pluralistic society. A third way of understanding the kingdom

refers to its presence also in other religions and cultures as God's continuing activity. The kingdom in this sense transcends the Church. The concept of kingdom goes beyond religion and culture. The church is only a historically and culturally conditioned realization of it. In promoting and serving it the church is called to realize its limitations and open out to other cultures and religions in dialogue. Through dialogue we acknowledge the presence of the kingdom in other religions. This acknowledgment and acceptance of God's presence in the other religions will really open the doors for the Hindu religion. Our closed-door attitude is one of the reasons for the Hindu fundamentalist to nurture hatred and animosity towards us.

Our narrow way of interpreting the "Church" and the "Kingdom of God" leads one to the mission of "saving of souls." In the past there was an anxiety to baptize and save as many as possible from hell fire. Now that we believe that God is reaching out to every human person in ways unknown to us, we can afford to be less anxious and ask ourselves whether the meaning of mission is not so much the saving of souls, but of being a force for the transformation of societies in view of their final fulfillment. The reinterpretation of the "Kingdom of God," invites us to work for the transformation of the society, not for increasing the quantity of the Church members but for a qualitative change in the society. The Kingdom of God is to build a society based on the values of justice, love and truth. The Kingdom of God means to establish a community of fellowship, brotherhood and sisterhood. The mission of the church is to work towards establishing the kingdom here on earth. In order to spread the kingdom, we need to work with the other religions. God's Kingdom is a common platform where all the religions meet to bring about transformation in the society. The dialogue with the other religions will help us to come together to fight against all inhuman structures, and will enable us to bring a just society which the Kingdom of God envisages. In order to bring the Kingdom of God here on earth, we need to join hands with the other religions and fight against the anti-kingdom forces. According to John Paul II, in a multi-religious society like India, the inter-religious dialogue will help the people to work together for the defense of shared human and spiritual values, and for the promotion of integral development. The dialogue will be a catalytic agent for giving a sense of solidarity among all religions in their effort to fight against the militant religious fundamentalism which threatens the unity of the people of India. Finally, we could conclude saying that dialogue helps us to work with the other religions in bringing about transformation in the society and thus we can establish the Kingdom of God which is a community of fellowship, brotherhood and sisterhood which Jesus envisaged.

## **Conclusion**

In the conclusion, I would like to give some concrete suggestions for our formation:

- Formation is to be rooted in the historical-social situation of people; in this sense, Formation is not to be away or secluded from the life-situation of people; rather it is to be with people and a student has to immerse himself in the situation of people.
- Students should be well exposed to fundamentalism.
- Students should be well informed about the faith of other religions and should have first-hand experience of other religions.
- Our formation should enable students to face the challenges of fundamentalism.

# Poverty, Culture and Religiosity

To See Realities for Political Charity and Vincentian Formation

by Fransiscus Xaverius Eko Armada Riyanto, C.M.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac among “the men and women of faith, hope and love” (art. 40) who have exemplified for us authentic Christian charity. Love, which proceeds from God, can only be real when it shows itself in concrete ‘charity’ for the neighbor; when it expresses itself in viable structures which alleviate hunger, loneliness and pain in society. All throughout this great letter, the Pope outlines how the Church has made the practice of charity its main responsibility. The ministry of charity is part of the Church’s nature, “an indispensable part of her very being” (*DCE*, 25). In fact, Benedict XVI asserts that it is only when we see charity effective in the structures of society that “we see the Trinity,” he quotes St. Augustine (*DCE*, 19).

St. Vincent already made the same assertion almost 400 years earlier when he told the sisters “to leave God for God.” He also once reminded the missionaries who wanted to abandon the ministry of charity in favor of preaching: “Are not the poor the suffering members of our Lord? Are they not our brothers? And if priests abandon them, who will be there to help them?” (SV XII, 87). Organized charity — that is — charity effectively working in the structures of the church and society is not only a work of the Company. It belongs to the deepest part of its identity.

It is within this tradition that Vincentian formators in Asia Pacific study ‘political charity.’ We think that our candidates should not remain indifferent towards what is happening in contemporary society. They should be grounded in their own socio-political

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<sup>1</sup> *Introduction* to the first Joint Meeting of the Commission of Vincentian Charism and Culture and Asia Pacific Regional Formators at Prigen, Indonesia, July 1-15, 2007 drafted by Armada Riyanto, C.M., and Danny Pilario, C.M. (chair and co-chair of the CCC).

situations, be formed to analyze it critically so that they can respond to its challenges more effectively. The term ‘political charity’ does not appear in the sociological and political science dictionaries. But, in the Vincentian tradition, charity can only exist ‘politically,’ that is, in concrete works and social structures. As St. Vincent says: “Our work [for the poor] is the only proof of our love.” In the same conference, he continued: “Let us love God, my brethren, but let us love him with all our strength and in the sweat of our brow” (ABELLY, Bk. I, Ch. XIX, 81).

In the gathering of Vincentian formators and other members of the Vincentian family in July 2007 at Prigen, we have chosen the theme: “Political Charity and Vincentian Formation.” Our aim is to think of concrete ways with which to equip our candidates and members with critical sensibility to the movements of contemporary society — its joys and hopes, its ups and downs, its lights and shadows.

This paper offers a brief outline of “to see”<sup>2</sup> the realities of Asia Pacific as the first step of delving into the main topic, “Political Charity and Vincentian Formation.” The Asia Pacific region has been called the place in which poverty, culture, and religiosity are characteristically its three main pillars of existence.

## 1. POVERTY

*Understanding Poverty.* Before proclaiming the Gospel to the poor, Saint Vincent examined the poverty of his time by paying visits to the poor, listening to confessions, learning zeal by living a hard life. Following the example of the holy Founder, today it would be worthwhile to listen to what the poor people say about their understanding of poverty. In *India*, indigenous *women* (or ‘tribal women’ as they are called) describe how they view poverty. Poverty, to them, is not having enough food from the farm, little or no access to drinking water, low literacy, and being landless.<sup>3</sup> Group discussions among migrant youths and children in *Vietnam* identify

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<sup>2</sup> “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act” (Pope JOHN XXIII, 1961, *Mater et Magistra*, 263).

<sup>3</sup> The IFAD-funded Bihar-Madhya Pradesh Tribal Development Program, 1997.

specific situations that illustrate poverty to them: being pulled out of school because parents cannot afford the costs; schools being closed down; teachers beating or humiliating poorer pupils; fathers drinking and beating mothers, shouting and quarrelling in the household, neighborhood fights; drug addiction; being considered inferior by wealthier households, being beaten by richer children; unstable income, being hungry, having poor clothes; concern about mother's health and inability to afford good health care.<sup>4</sup> In the *Philippines* the poor categorize themselves in status groups according to access to basic survival means: *Walang-wala* (have nothing or next to nothing, meaning no land to farm, scarcely any income, tiny houses and, worst of all, little food); *Sumasala sa oras* (missing meals); *Isang kahig, isang tuka* (living hand-to-mouth and eking out a living like a chicken scratching and pecking the ground); *Agaw-buhay* (hovering between life and death).<sup>5</sup>

In *Indonesia* the meaning of poverty can perhaps be defined as the life of the *indigenous* as those of Papua, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and many other parts of the archipelago of Indonesia. Their condition means *par-excellence* lacking good health service. There have been thousands of children, mostly poor ones, suffering from malnutrition, starvation or lacking of good quality of food that causes them to be sickly ones with big stomachs and "tiny" brains. These children are usually found in villages, remote places, uplands, coastlands, the inner part of forested lands. Poverty is also in connection with very limited conditions of basic infrastructures. This is the crucial problem of small islands or remote places in the big ones like Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Flores where streets, schools, electricity, health services are not properly established. Or, if they have been set up, they have often been neglected. Consequently, poverty is just everyday life. People have difficulty in breaking up poverty and developing their quality of life.

*Overall rural poverty.* Some 1.2 billion people in the world are estimated to consume less than a 'standard' dollar a day and are therefore in 'dollar poverty.' More than two thirds of the world's poor are in Asia, and poverty is disproportionately concentrated in the rural areas of the region. Almost 75% of the poor live in the rural

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Save the Children Fund 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Kerkvliet 1990 as quoted in IFAD 2003. Cf. <http://www.ifad.org/> (Accessed on June 20, 2007). See also the meaning of poverty in the web "povertyNet" <http://web.worldbank.org> (Accessed on June 10, 2007) & in the web "a dollar a day" [http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/over\\_what.htm](http://library.thinkquest.org/05aug/00282/over_what.htm) (Accessed on June 10, 2007).

areas.<sup>6</sup> In Asia Pacific countries there is a somewhat sluggish policy over rural development. Though Indonesia, for instance, is not yet categorized as an industrialized state, recently people have been desperately trying to abandon their lands. The government for sure recognizes the crucial problem of farmers, yet politically it remains paralyzed to resolve immense challenges of the so-called “globalization”. Assuming that developing countries have sometimes become victims rather than protagonists in the globalized world, I think the similar condition is happening in countries of Asia Pacific. The fact that poor people are those who live in rural areas is indeed true.<sup>7</sup>

*Urban poverty.* 700 million people in Asia and the Pacific live on less than US\$1 a day, 400 million of which are residing in urban areas. Each day a further 120,000 people are added to the populations of Asian cities due to rural-urban migration and job-mobility.<sup>8</sup> Many Asian cities face deteriorating sanitation and environmental conditions, inadequate housing and infrastructure, and other problems.<sup>9</sup> Urbanization, however, is also a chance for the poor to escape poverty though oftentimes they fall into another trap of poverty and marginalization.

*Environmental poverty.* Over the past decade, there has been a corresponding increase in the incidence of poverty that can be attributed to environmental causes. Floods, landslides, tsunami, gas volcano, declining natural resources productivity, droughts and urban pollution exert disproportionate impacts of poverty on the lives of people. The poor suffer more losses, illnesses, injuries and death as a result of resource degradation, natural disasters and pollution than the rest of the population, because they are more likely to be dependent upon natural systems for their livelihoods.

*The Feminization of poverty.* While nearly two thirds of the world’s poor are in the Asian and Pacific region, two thirds of the region’s poor are women. And poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural areas. The notion of ‘feminization of poverty’ was first used to imply that women are making up an ever increasing share of the world’s poor as a result of recession and cuts in public spending.<sup>10</sup> The term has been used for any or all of the following situations:

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<sup>6</sup> ADB 2005 (Asian Development Bank). <http://www.abd.org/> (Accessed on May 20, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> IFAD 2001. [http://www.ifad.org/poverty/region/pi/PI\\_part1.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/poverty/region/pi/PI_part1.pdf) (Accessed on June 15, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> ADB 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Asian Development Bank 2005.

More women than men are poor; poor women suffer more from capability deprivation than poor men; the severity of poverty is higher for women; women face greater hardship in lifting themselves and their children out of the poverty trap; there are poor women even within non-poor families. Male migrants in search of work and consequent changes in household structures have placed additional burdens on women, especially those with several dependents. Improving the political, legal, cultural, economic, and social status of women is thus pivotal to escaping the poverty trap.

## 2. CULTURE

*A common way of understanding* culture is to see it as consisting of three elements that are “passed on from generation to generation by learning alone”: *values, norms, institutions*.<sup>11</sup> Values comprise ideas about what in life seems important. They guide the rest of the culture. Norms consist of expectations of how people will behave. They are concrete in what we may call “*habitus*,” the series of ethical customs and habits, including laws and sanctions enforced. Institutions are the structures of a society within which values and norms are transmitted. Institution is a part of culture as it is typical in different people of different places. It depicts symbolically some ideas of culture.

*Culture as worldview.* People started to understand culture as worldview in the time of ideology especially the Second World War. The notion of worldview implies ideas of the ways that people define their relationship with the world. It can be something traditional inherited by the ancestors from generation to generation such as rites, popular “liturgical” celebrations, values, and series of laws. But,

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<sup>11</sup> “In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, symbols and beliefs... it is culture that gives (man) the ability to reflect on (himself and the world). It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that (man) expresses (himself), becomes aware of (himself), recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations.” HERVE CARRIER, “Understanding Culture: The Ultimate Challenge of the World-Church?,” in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience of North and Latin America*, Edited by Joseph Gremillion, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 19.

worldview is also connected with ideological ideas that people live out and promote.<sup>12</sup>

*Culture as phenomena of the everyday-life.* Oftentimes we have heard people spontaneously saying “culture of violence,” “culture of death,” “culture of corruption,” “culture of harmony,” “culture of hedonism,” “culture of materialism,” “culture of feminism,” “culture of gender equality,” “culture of fear,” “culture of terror,” “culture of terrorism,” “culture of globalization,” “culture of instant mentality,” “culture of getting suddenly rich.”<sup>13</sup> The way of understanding culture as indicated above is based upon what we may call concrete experiences of “everyday-life.” The terminology “everyday-life” is taken from the philosophy of Alfred Schutz whose book, *Phenomenology of the Social World*, became the emblematic line of phenomenological approach, the new mainstream of sociological research. Everyday-life is understood as the “province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense.”<sup>14</sup> In everyday life the style of lived experiences is wide-awakeness. For Alfred Schutz, “consciousness is itself under the greatest tension, which originates from the attitude of full attentiveness to life and its necessities. In acts and doings that are directed toward the surrounding world, the ego is fully interested in life and is therefore wide-awake.... It is the world from which we cannot escape as long as we are wide-awake, the world where stones hurt our toes, where desires demand satisfaction, where fears inhibit our freedom, where we encounter our fellows in the flesh and have to communicate with them.”<sup>15</sup> So, when we hear people saying “culture of violence,” it indicates their awakening to the concrete world they live in. That saying of “culture of violence” does not refer statistically

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<sup>12</sup> In Asia, Mao was the one who called the ideological revolution of the communists in Mainland China that of culture in 1949. In Indonesia, there is a national ideology called “Pancasila” (the five Principles). These five principles (1. belief in one Supreme God, 2. sovereignty of the people, 3. deliberation to arrive at consensus, 4. humanitarianism, and 5. social justice), are also understood as a set of values and common beliefs based on the cultural heritage of the Indonesian cosmic world-view.

<sup>13</sup> Culture of being suddenly rich happens in our experience: to some candidates and their parents especially from middle class or poor economy, being a priest means being rich, since a priest has cars, an amount of money, a good relationship with the haves and business people, etc.

<sup>14</sup> ALFRED SCHUTZ - THOMAS LUCKMANN, *The Structures of Life-World*, Volume II, Translated by Richard Zaner and David J. Parent, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 3.

<sup>15</sup> MARCELO MANIMTIM, C.M., *The Concept of Lifeworld in Jürgen Habermas*, Rome 1993, 49.

to objective facts of violence (though it can be so). The concrete world is given to us in the sense of experience.

*Asia Pacific and Culture of Harmony.* Being young in its zest for life, Asia Pacific is ancient in its own cultural heritage. It can be seen not just from plurality of cultures, cultural rituals and types of societies, models of economic practices, variations of technologies, arts, sciences, and philosophies. But, it can be clear from the most worthy one, that is “culture of harmony.” I underline the importance of “harmony” since Asia Pacific is granted with rich diversity of cultures. Diversity can be richness and challenge at the same time. It is richness, as diverse cultures indicate the beauty of differences. Yet, it is challenge as in many cases people of Asia Pacific have suffered cultural tensions, conflicts, or even civil wars.

Just take as an example, Indonesia has a population of around 210 million people (2001), including 500 ethnic groups speaking more than 600 languages (dialects). This ethnic diversity is understood as an asset of cultural riches supporting state unity, which is reflected in the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, unity in diversity. All these have also contributed to the complexities of life, to its agony and ecstasy. Yet, in Indonesia too, we observe the search for cultural and human as well as religious harmony, that vibrant dynamic totality attained by interacting with other pulsating and maybe conflicting parts. Harmony in a certain sense constitutes “the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia” (Fourth Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, BIRA IV, 1984).

*Challenges to Culture of Harmony.* Many situations in the Asian and Pacific reality have threatened and contradicted harmony. Financial crises hit Asia cruelly at the end of the ninetieth decade a few years ago. Indonesia was one among the most suffering countries. The death toll might not be countless. Yet, for nearly all of Indonesian people such a crisis brought a very bitter experience of living together. We saw conflicts between people everywhere around the regions. Moslems were against Christians, Buddhists, Hinduists and vice versa. Fundamentalist Moslems were against the moderate ones and vice versa. Human beings destroyed forests; and illegal logging was obviously uncontrolled. During the crisis, being far from promoting the worthy value of harmony, Indonesian people as well as others in Asia cultivated concretely a culture of violence. In time of violence people were against one another. There was somewhat *bellum omnium contra omnes* (war of all against all). In many cases women and children suffered most. There was no friendship as such. After the economic crisis people have started to enjoy an economic growth. Yet, according to the UN economic and social commission

for Asia and the Pacific, in its recent report, the improvement in living conditions and living standards has often been offset by new social problems like urbanization and the global crisis of energy and food.

### 3. RELIGIOSITY

Asia is the womb of ancient cultures as well as religiosities. Asia is also the birthplace of the world's great religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism and Taoism. Despite the common Asian world-view which perceives reality as "one," and a widespread tolerance which subscribes to a basic equality among all religious convictions, Asian religious pluralism remains a problem. The problem is acute, because Asian religions still constitute a powerful force controlling the consciences of people and influencing every area of their social life. As such, they can serve to bring together peoples and nations in unity and harmony, or cause division and fragmentation. Sadly, to a large extent, the latter has been the concrete experience of the Asian peoples.

*Fundamentalism.* As there is a strong bond between religion and culture, fundamentalism has given rise to numerous conflicts and bloody violence. Such conflicts and violence, besides having disrupted harmony, have also resulted in the loss of human lives and the destruction of sacred temples, especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, all in the name of religious affiliation and cultural patrimony. In Sri Lanka, conflicts between ethnic and linguistic groups have been a cause of continual violence and bloodshed. The events surrounding the razing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December, 1992 have demonstrated how devastating the forces of religious fundamentalism can become. In the whole of the Indian subcontinent, there have been clashes between Moslems and Hindus, during which Hindus were chasing the Muslims in Bombay, and Muslims retaliating by persecuting Hindus and destroying their temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Indonesia there were hundreds of Christian and Catholic churches burned down by fundamentalists; several houses of prayer that belonged to Buddhists, Hinduists, as well as Confucionists were destroyed; some mosques were hit by other fundamentalists. Terrorism has been one of the expressions likeable to fundamentalists. Fundamentalism in Indonesia usually comes from those people who underwent some kind of activities in the Middle East claimed as "jihad" (action to defend

God).<sup>16</sup> In the case of Islamic fundamentalism, young people who had “jihad” experiences outside Indonesia become trouble makers in the Archipelago.

*Religion and human freedom.* Religion has also something worthy of human beings. Reflections on religiosity have led me to the following “spaces” for religion in society: *First*, religion brings completion to human freedom. Most, if not all, religions speak of freedom from oppression, from evil, pain, suffering and death. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “Freedom is the measure of man’s dignity and greatness. Living the freedom sought by individuals and peoples is a great challenge to man’s spiritual growth and to the moral vitality of nations.... Freedom is ordered to the truth, and is fulfilled in man’s quest for truth and in man’s living in the truth.” Religion speaks of the language of hope, the hope of total emancipation and fullness of freedom. *Second*, religion provides the rites and rituals for institutionalization of civil society. It is Through ritual, that beliefs, values and human ordering are invested with the aura of the sacred, at least in the sense of asserting a foundation beyond ourselves for inalienable rights and common horizons. Religious rite deepens the conviction of the human person-participants in civil society by embodying the source of authority in its institution. *Third*, religion sets the way of life of loving and caring, and laying the ground for a standard of ethical behavior. Religion, especially oriental religion, is a way of life, of living in harmony with nature and with others, through loving and caring for one another. Religion addresses the heart and speaks of the transcendent source and ultimate end of all values. Religion attests to the universality of values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty. Civil society in its effort to build a civilization of love based on these universal values and in a culture of freedom needs religion as its impetus. Finally, religion founds the unity and diversity of peoples and cultures. We all belong to one family.

In Indonesia as well as India, for instance, one often hears simple people saying that all religions teach the same basic moral teachings that God is one and all have to reach Him in the end. People only take different paths to get there. The Catholic Church announced

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<sup>16</sup> The meaning of “jihad” has been somehow a confused one. The fundamentalists use the term “jihad” to encourage war against enemies of Islam. Yet, the term itself possesses a good notion indicating “an act of exerting best effort for the sake of Allah or in the way of Allah.” However it is indeed true that common people have often been more overwhelmed by the meaning of “jihad” proposed by the Islamic fundamentalists rather than by the moderate Moslems.

novel ideas through Vatican II, its historic council. It no longer spoke in harsh terms about pagans, or in a tone of self-complacency as if it alone had the monopoly to total truth about God. Vatican II documents in *Nostra Aetate* (1965) nos. 1 and 2 stated that in this age, with people drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care her relation to non-Christian religions. Aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and among nations, the Church reflects on what people have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them. *Nostra Aetate* further states that the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these (other) religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect that truth which enlightens all people. The Council brought this consciousness to many, and while some were struggling with these proclamations, it went a step ahead to instruct itself and its faithful in these words. The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. *Nostra Aetate* has given birth to what is called "inter-religious dialogue."

*Religious tolerance and dialogue.* Religious tolerance is considered as an expression of one's attitude towards other religions and to some specific religious situations. However, religious tolerance does not exist in a vacuum, but in definite concrete situations, and can vary according to the situation. This religious tolerance is studied in view of inter-religious dialogue. Religion is something that leads people to God, exhorts its followers to live good moral lives and calls people of God to be of one mind and heart; but the present state of affairs shows an inconsistency between preached and lived religion, its tenets and practices, and its doctrine and behavior. This causes an immense amount of dissonance, this time from the angle of religious beliefs. Religion here, instead of achieving its positive function of mutual love, understanding among peoples, unity, purity, etc. has in the end made them less tolerant. There is clearly an inconsistency. Tolerance goes hand in hand with intolerance. This inconsistency is one the major problems in religiosity.

#### **4. CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES**

*Be ready to collaborate with people.* Saint Vincent de Paul was never alone to give response to the needs of his time. He worked together with the *Ladies of Charity*, priests as well as religious reformers at that time. Poverty was not simply a matter of lacking

food or shelter. It was inhuman conditions. The way Saint Vincent responded to the demands was collaboration. Evangelizing of the poor was done in collaboration and partnership with the lay people, sisters as well as priests, or even with the poor themselves.

Today the call of collaboration is loud and urgent. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* emphasizes the demand that religious persons should be able to collaborate with one another and with people regardless of culture, nationality, religion or faith. Vincentians should learn and listen to other people about how the crucial problems of poverty, cultural problems and religious conflicts are to be responded to cooperatively.

The amazing phenomenon of contemporary responses to poverty in the world as well as in Asia Pacific regions has been defined as setting up the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) to be achieved together. MDGs are not just a series of common goals. They depict something deeper than just goals consented to by world leaders. Since creation human beings have been against one another. MDGs indicate a marvelous understanding of togetherness, of working together, of journeying together.<sup>17</sup> The goals are: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, develop a global partnership for development.

*Promote culture of harmony.* The fact that Asia Pacific is the cradle of diverse cultures is clear from the everyday life that we concretely experience. Diversity is worthy but also can become a source of bitter conflicts. In some places of Indonesia, let us take a look at Sampit, a small town known as the place where conflicts between the Dayak and Madurese people began; diversity is indeed something crucial. We cannot say that diversity is simply worthwhile. We have to acknowledge that diversity is also a challenge to be responded to.

The picture of the Asian situation is not altogether “doom and gloom.” In Asian Pacific civilization, we observe how the “coincidence of opposites” has been all along a characteristic way of life and thought. In ancient Chinese thought, harmony requires the interplay of seemingly-antithetical elements such as human person and nature, *yin* and *yang*, benevolence and autocracy. The two components are regarded as mutually necessary, rather than irreconcilable; the antagonistic elements are interdependent partners without whose

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> and <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml> (Accessed on June 1, 2007).

joint activities a harmonious society would be impossible. Harmony is not the attainment of an absolute standard, but the happy outcome that can be achieved when one takes account of all circumstances.

The Javanese people of Indonesia think that everyday life cannot continue unless we cultivate the sense of harmony. Each Javanese is urged to live out harmony not just with one another but also with creatures, the world, and harmony within oneself. In such kind of wisdom, the sense of self in Javanese tradition is somewhat complex. The Javanese believes in *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti* (unity of God within one's self). The sense of "unity" cannot be understood in Western notion. It says something about the harmonious presence of a human being within his/her self. And the source of harmony is nothing other than the presence of God within me (myself).

*Promote culture of peace.* As we can imagine easily people of Asia Pacific have often fallen into the trap of conflicts for many reasons such as economical crisis, socio-political disorder, or cultural rivalry. We need peacemakers. Saint Vincent did some exemplary actions of reconciling peoples who quarreled during popular mission activities. In today's condition, being Vincentian should also mean being a promoter of peace. "Peace" is not only a situation without physical conflict. It suggests a peaceful and conducive situation in which people may live in solidarity and collaboration, as well as dialogue.

*Be perseverant to dialogue of life, of concrete collaboration, and of faith.* In responding to the challenge of religiosity in Asia Pacific, inter-religious dialogue or inter-ideological/cultural dialogue is to be cultivated in any kind of circumstance. Far from being an easy task, inter-religious dialogue has often been frustrating and sweating. We ourselves cannot help but acknowledge that inter-religious dialogue seems to be more formal, artificial and pretending than a radical, genuine, and authentic movement. Those who involve themselves in and experience religious dialogue often fall into a dark corridor that they must go through. There have been so many studies, theological-philosophical-cultural reflections, countless appointments done, yet still there are vast stones, thorns and blocks. Karl Rahner conceives of "Christian Anonym"; Leonard Swidler proposes "the Dialogue Decalogue"<sup>18</sup>; C. Arrevalo suggests "indigenizing of theology";

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<sup>18</sup> **1<sup>st</sup> COMMANDMENT:** The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. **2<sup>nd</sup>:** Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project — within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities. **3<sup>rd</sup>:** Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. **4<sup>th</sup>:** In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather

Raimundo Pannikar offers the concept of “intra-religious dialogue”, and many more scholars. But, who would deny that inter-religious dialogue (at least of life and work)<sup>19</sup> is still the most urgent and necessary action to cultivate our being together in everyday life within diverse cultural traditions and socio-political dynamism of Asia Pacific region?! Nevertheless, it is still to be expressed concretely again and again with great perseverance and diligence. Inter-religious dialogue is an unfinished project or, better expressed, an ongoing formation of life itself. Oh, we have just done a good response!<sup>20</sup>

## 5. IMPLICATION FOR FORMATION: NEW SPIRIT, NEW EYES, NEW HEART

Learning from realities is the very first step of renewal in formation. Formandi, formators and those involving themselves in formation should keep on looking at realities around their everyday lives. Asia Pacific faces immense poverty. It is also blessed by great

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our ideals with our partner’s ideals, our practice with our partner’s practice. **5<sup>th</sup>**: Each participant must define himself. **6<sup>th</sup>**: Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition. **7<sup>th</sup>**: Dialogue can take place only between equals, or *par cum pari* as the Second Vatican Council put it. Both must come to learn from each other. **8<sup>th</sup>**: Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. **9<sup>th</sup>**: Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions. **10<sup>th</sup>**: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology “from within.” The “Dialogue Decalogue” was first published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in 1983 and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. It is presented here in a slightly revised and shortened version. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, Winter 1983 (September, 1984, *revision*). See also in <http://www.fiu.edu/~religion/Commandments.htm> (Accessed on June 2, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> The Plenary Assembly of the FABC at Tokyo 1986 did speak of “the phenomenon of religious revivalism” with its tendencies “to religious dogmatism, fundamentalism and intolerance in precept and practice,” leading even to “violence and serious conflicts.” Fundamentalism appears as “a defense-reaction which gives religious belief a socio-cultural, and even political role of cohesion in the face of ‘anomie’ that threatens one’s identity. Irrational religious emotions offer a simplistic force of unity and self-defense,” and thus become a source of conflict. Religious revivalism poses its challenge to us Christians towards a deeper renewal of faith.

<sup>20</sup> It is in this light that one should listen to the assertion of Pope John Paul II that the action of the Holy Spirit is operative in the lives of non-Christians not in spite of their religious adherence, but rather at its essence and foundation. *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, AAS 71 (1979): 275-276.

cultural and religious traditions. The last two things can be a set of richness but at the same time can also be reason for bitter and tiring conflicts. Now, Vincentians must renew “from within” setting up new eyes, new heart and new spirit as the very concrete aims of their formation program.

*Shifts of formandi’s mentality:*

- Way of thinking: from suspect to understanding.
- Creativity: from creating “one’s own world” to openness.
- Sensitivity: from indifference to concern.
- Commitment: from sluggish to perceiving “clear priorities.”
- Vocation: from tepid to radical.
- Prayer: from self-centered to beyond self-centered.
- Being Vincentian: from idle to genuine.
- End of formation program: from human maturity to cross/multi/pluri-cultural human maturity.

*“New spirit” of formandi and formators implies:*

- Growth in our experience of God and an on-going familiarity with the poor — their life and their spirit of love.
- New spirit of discernment as one community (formator and formandi are the subjects in formation; formator, be one of them!).

*“New eyes” of formandi as well as formators involves taking on new ways of looking at and understanding reality and new paradigms in the world (Asia Pacific):*

- Poverty – The emphasis is on poverty by unjust socio-political structure.
- Religion – The shift of emphasis (from a religion perceived as “self-serving” to a religion oriented towards the world, to the suffering people).
- Cultures – Today there is a greater awareness and appreciation of the richness inherent in different cultures. Currently the notion of multiculturalism is claiming more and more attention.
- Collaboration/partnership/networking – The emphasis has been on a more holistic (integral) understanding, i.e., touching on all aspects of life and on taking more seriously concrete contexts (contextualized), inviting others to service of *effective* love to the poor.

*“New heart” demands that formandi be sensitive to “new values” in the Church and in the world:*

- “New humility” of heart – Spending more time, attention, moment for others (confreres and people involved in apostolates and the poor).
- Partnership – Collaboration with various sectors in the Church and in the world — regardless of religion, race or gender.
- Discernment – In a world filled with a thousand voices all clamoring to be heard, discernment is indispensable for those who, following Christ, do charity.
- “Constant love” & “openness” – Cultivating a sense of love to others, being diligent and perseverant in rendering service for love.

*Renewals in formandi and those in formation team:*

- New optimism: “You can do that!”
- New enthusiasm: “Have courage and let down the nets again into deeper ocean!”
- New community: “More open... more love, unlock others’ potency.”
- New way of life: “Open to ongoing renewal of the Divine Providence.”
- New way of apostolate: “More involving others with new spirit of love and enthusiasm.”
- New way of being Vincentian: “More energizing others inspired by the spirit and charism of Saint Vincent.”

## **6. WORDS OF REFLECTION**

Let me propose words as my modest concluding reflection hoping that a few of them may hint little inspirations to our aim of formation of our beloved candidates in connection with “political charity.”

*The poor and us*

We see them, the poor, surrounding us.

We watch them in streets, houses, villages, mountains, poor coasts, television, everywhere.

We talk to and with them. Occasionally.

We share with them. Rarely.

We mingle with them. Only if needed.  
 We visit them. For school activities or exposures.  
 We share with them. For research.  
 We count them. For project proposals.  
 We discuss and analyze them. For our own benefit and purpose.  
 Thus, they are but merely an object.  
 Do we really love them? Affectively? Effectively?

*Who are they for us?*

One who has a good experience of living with them, not just for research or exposure, would find that the poor have some amazing richness. I am not talking something material as we conceive such as money or good shirts or beautiful houses. In them we find true happiness, or what we may call, true happy detachment despite suffering and unfortunate everyday life.

In them we discover humility;

We learn simplicity;

We see meekness;

We know cheerfulness;

We learn true charity.

In them we meditate what we often call “mortification” and true fasting.

We perceive a true sense of being human;

We discern a true sense of being religious;

We discover true faith;

We learn true love;

We understand being men of hope;

We see human strength.

In them we find wisdom.

We learn true obedience to God;

We experience God’s presence in the world;

We learn true hunger and thirst for divine Truth;

We study to be God’s true disciple.

In their presence we find ourselves “poorer” than what we might think of.

In their poor presence we discover the richness of spiritual life.

But, do we really put into practice our learning from them?

When they get themselves in trouble, we must not close our eyes.

When they cry for help, we must not be idle and close our ears.

When they are voiceless, we must not keep silent.

When they are hungry, we must not be doubtful to haste relief.

When they are persecuted, we should dare to defend them in proper ways.

When they suffer injustice, we defend them and promote human rights.

In brief, we do what we can possibly do for them.

We do in collaboration, in working together with them in the best way possible.

# Vincent de Paul: Patron and Client

by Guy Norman Hartcher, C.M.

To understand M. Vincent de Paul as evangeliser and worker for the poor we must understand the socio-political world in which he lived. He was a worker of political charity, both liberated by, and constrained by, the French political world of his time. His life and work supports the hypothesis that the Vincentian charism is revolutionary in its aims, but that its methods work within the existing social structures, aiming to transform them in the service of the poor. Two elements of Vincent's society delineate the world in which he lived. They are the fundamentally hierarchical nature of the culture, and the patronage system which provided that culture with an operating system to replace the by-then almost defunct feudalism.

## **A fundamentally hierarchical society**

As with most hierarchical societies, birth was the prime social locator in Vincent's world. How an individual fitted into society was determined by who their parents were. No matter what an individual's achievements were, that person was branded permanently by their birth status. The branding worked in both directions. Noble families which had been discredited or lost lands and funds were still able to trade on their status for at least a couple of generations. Peasants who had managed to lift themselves by talent and luck into the higher reaches of society were a curiosity and could be subject to overt and covert hostility, criticism and discrimination. When Cardinal Mazarin<sup>1</sup> mocked Vincent for his shabby dress at court<sup>2</sup> he was doing several things at once. He was scoring points against a sometime opponent in the unending political games in pursuit of dominance. He was 'keeping in his place' someone who represented a consistent political vision which Mazarin

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<sup>1</sup> For relations between Vincent and Cardinal Mazarin see JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, London 1999, pp. 537-540.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540.

only occasionally shared. But the underlying reality was that Vincent was a peasant — once a peasant always a peasant — and therefore a legitimate target. And of course Vincent not only admitted, but actively volunteered his peasant status.<sup>3</sup>

Part of the reason a peasant was a target was that society understood the social order as divinely ordained. The perception was that each person was placed by God in the place which would serve them best in their quest for Heaven. So each person had to work towards their salvation in the context in which God had placed them.<sup>4</sup>

### The Patronage System

The Church operated within that politico-social structure which was both feudal and Christian. Bishops swore allegiance to kings and in turn had both ecclesiastical and secular vassals who swore to them. At the same time the Church's feudal structure ran in parallel to the civil one, and in this, its own sphere, that particular structure applied to spiritual as well as material elements. The Investiture crisis<sup>5</sup> of the eleventh century had clarified both what was owed to Caesar and what was due to God — although there always existed the potential for flare-ups in clashes of competing interests. But broadly speaking the political pattern within the church and between church and secular society had been set by the end of that century.

But Vincent de Paul lived centuries later, in the middle of the transition period during which a dying feudalism was gradually displaced by the early modern state. France was the pioneering state within which that transformation first occurred. And the socio-political tool by which that transition was managed was the patron-client relationship.<sup>6</sup> That patronage system is both a survival of, and a successor to, the feudal system. Within the feudal system

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<sup>3</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 542-543 where to the Prince de Conde Vincent claims status as “son of a poor swineherd,” a lower status than his father actually occupied as a tenant farmer.

<sup>4</sup> The best understanding of the social Ordo — GEORGES DUBY's classic *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, Chicago 1980, especially pp. 66-75.

<sup>5</sup> UTA-RENATE BLUMENTHAL, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, Philadelphia 1988, especially pp. 106-134.

<sup>6</sup> A clear and specific example of the workings of that relationship is to be found in DAVID S. LUX, *Patronage and Royal Science in Seventeenth Century France*, Ithaca 1989, pp. 9-22.

every lord was also a vassal — at least in theory. Except at the very lowest level, every vassal had vassals.<sup>7</sup> And of course the rights and duties were very clearly spelled out for all participants. As the balance shifted towards the centre and the king acquired more power, different mechanisms were required for the exercise of those powers. This was not new in Vincent's century. However the bureaucratisation necessary for the development of the early modern state had not yet evolved to the point that it could carry the load. So an interim management system was needed.

The patronage system filled that need. It is not an exaggeration to say that patrons and their clients ran all levels of French society. As the ancestors of the kings had had vassals to carry out their commands, so seventeenth century kings had clients who met their needs. The royal family had families of clients, as well as individual clients, who served in return for protection and advancement. Some such relationships lasted for generations as vassalage had done. In other cases a talented individual would be "adopted" as a client; that service might last a lifetime, but it might only last a short time.

Higher level clients of course became patrons to clients of their own, extending power and protection over their clients in return for service.<sup>8</sup> A successful client, who might have begun in quite a lowly position, performing lowly tasks for the patron, might move up the ladder, acquiring position, wealth, gifts, power, and serving the patron in ever more significant ways. The rewards which the client received were also the tools by which that client could work for the patron's aims at a higher level. And of course if the client was unsuccessful, either his tasks for the patron were reduced to a level at which he could succeed (and his position with it) or he could be discarded in a way that the vassal could not have been. Clientage was a much less formal (and much less clear) status than vassalage had been. The obligations of the client were unwritten, and varied all the time.

The evolution of the patronage system throughout this period was rapid. The efforts of the crown, especially during the reign of Louis XIV, and those of a particularly able court, headed by Cardinal Mazarin, ensured that constant variations on the basic method

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<sup>7</sup> ROBERT BARTLETT, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonisation and Cultural Change 950-1350*, London 1994, pp. 45-47 and 50-55.

<sup>8</sup> A good analysis of the workings of political clientism is SHARON KETTERING, "Patronage and Politics During the Fronde," in *French Historical Studies* 14, No. 3, 1986, pp. 409-441.

appeared. Gradually the basics of a bureaucracy emerged, and as this happened, the need for clientage lessened in proportion.<sup>9</sup>

Vincent de Paul's involvement in the patronage system as patron did not include kinship elements. He seems never to have promoted the interests of his family in this way. For all the hopes his family had in his early career, his convictions did not allow him to be of assistance to them by the time his career had developed to the point that he could have been of benefit to them. As client he was often the beneficiary of kin relationships among his various patrons — the de Gondis for example.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of the system which needs to be noted in terms of Vincent's involvement is the role of clientage in bridging the local and the national,<sup>11</sup> both economically and politically. Families and individuals who were quite powerful in their own provinces could still be lacking in influence at court. Indeed, regional nobility who were quite dominant in their own region could be lacking in influence at the more stratified levels of royal government. Securing such influence could be done in either direction. A regional noble could acquire a client in the royal administration who could act as his or her information conduit and who could exert influence on his or her behalf. Alternatively he or she could acquire a patron either in the person of the king, a member of the royal family, or one of the royal ministers. For someone in the further reaches of the kingdom to create the right connection could be difficult, so the role of broker became important.<sup>12</sup> The broker's task was twofold. He or she<sup>13</sup> conveyed information both up and down the patronage ladder, and often more importantly, made recommendations both as to policy and personnel. A client who could recommend a policy action which turned out to be successful gained significantly both in influence,

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<sup>9</sup> SHARON KETTERING, "Patronage and Politics During the Fronde," p. 437 of *Patronage*. Note in the same place Lawrence Stone's assertion that a similar process was occurring in England at the same time.

<sup>10</sup> Note that Vincent's tense relationship with Cardinal Mazarin arose from Mazarin's conflicts and rivalries with the faction which numbered the de Gondis among its adherents.

<sup>11</sup> The activities of the Comte d'Alais in acting through letters to secure aid for his clients and friends (note the imprecise terminology — "friend" and "client" both use "ami") who lacked influence at court — p. 140 in SHARON KETTERING, "Friendship and Clientage in Early Modern France," in *Patronage*.

<sup>12</sup> SHARON KETTERING, "The Historical Development of Political Clientelism," VII, 425-426 in KETTERING, *Patronage*.

<sup>13</sup> And wives, mothers and sisters often acted as sponsors and brokers — and not only within the family. See SHARON KETTERING, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," V, 817-841 in KETTERING, *Patronage*.

and often in the form of gifts and promotions. A client who recommended a candidate suitable for a particular post, and whose candidate did in fact work successfully, not only gained added influence with the patron. He or she also succeeded by having a protégé of theirs given the post. That new client of their shared patron owed a debt to the broker, a debt which the broker could reclaim in either information or other services at a later date. So the skill which in the modern world would be called “networking” was closely related to the skills needed by the successful broker in the clientage system.

Among the other roles played by the Council of Conscience was one of brokerage. The Council was advisory to the Queen, and it dealt with religious issues of general importance to her and to the realm. But the appointment of Bishops and Abbots and Abbesses was one of its most politically and religiously fraught responsibilities. Although Mazarin was the President of the Council and several Bishops were among its members, Vincent appears to have been among its most influential members, because of the regard the Queen had for him, her confessor. Vincent’s aim on the Council was to further the reform of the Church and the quality of its leadership. His was the innovation by which the Council adopted criteria according to which appointments could be made, such as the rule that a candidate for the episcopacy had to have been a priest for at least a year.<sup>14</sup>

It was not only Vincent’s spiritual stance which made him the Council’s most respected member. His connections around the kingdom, and the reports of his confreres who were involved in different Provinces with parish missions meant that he had knowledge, good and bad, of candidates from around the kingdom, rather than only those candidates whose families had court connections. His work on the Council also serves as an interesting example of the way in which the clientage system was gradually being transformed into a semi-permanent bureaucracy. The establishment of general criteria for appointment and the enforcement of those criteria are indicators of the growing professionalism of the government of the kingdom, and therefore of the passing of the client system.

Vincent’s involvement in the household of Queen Anne of Austria as a client of a female member of the royal family who had patronage to bestow, gave him a position of potential influence. The members of her household were both her servants and the doers of her will.

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<sup>14</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, p. 544.

Through them she maintained a level of independence of the Cardinal and the King, Long involvement in the household of one of the great families, the de Gondis, placed him in a position to wield influence through them and through their relatives and allies.

### Patronage in Vincent's life

It is particularly notable that clergy often began their careers in the households of noble women. Richelieu himself began his rise to power and prominence when he was appointed as grand almoner in the household of Anne of Austria.<sup>15</sup> It took some time and considerable manoeuvring before he was able to parlay that appointment into one in the household of Marie de Medici, a position which placed him closer to the centres of power. Vincent de Paul began as one of the secretaries in the household of Marguerite de Valois, first wife of Henri IV.<sup>16</sup> While Marguerite was no longer Queen, she was still a powerful figure in French social and political life, and Vincent's success in securing a position in her court was his first successful move onto the national stage. He secured the position through a broker, although there are disputes over who the broker was, either M. Antoine de Clerc de la Foret or, according to Abelly, M. Charles du Fresne, the Queen's secretary.<sup>17</sup> This was a major step towards a significant career.

In the meantime Vincent had endured the crisis of faith which transformed his life, and had adopted Cardinal Pierre de Berulle as his guide and patron. Presumably it was the faith-transformation which led Vincent to transfer his clientage from Marguerite de Valois to the Cardinal. De Berulle was certainly one of the most significant spiritual figures of the French church; it can be argued that he was the father of the French school of spirituality through his writings, his introduction of the reformed Carmelites into France, the group of reform-minded clergy whom he gathered around himself, and his founding in Paris of the Oratory, a French version of Philip Neri's Italian Oratory.<sup>18</sup>

It was through his patron, the Cardinal, that Vincent became Parish Priest of the parish of Clichy-la-Garenne, a prosperous country town in which he exercised pastoral ministry for the first

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<sup>15</sup> ELIZABETH MARVICK, *The Young Richelieu*, 173-175

<sup>16</sup> SHARON KETTERING, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *op. cit.*, p. 830.

<sup>17</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-98.

time. And then, barely a year later, again at the prompting of his patron, Vincent left the parish and became tutor to the children of Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi,<sup>19</sup> Marquis of the Golden Isles, Count de Joigny, Baron de Montmirail, and General of the Galleys, and his wife Françoise Marguerite de Silly. For the rest of his life he remained a client of the de Gondi family. In the early years de Berulle continued to have influence on him, but quite quickly Vincent began to influence Mme de Gondi, and shortly thereafter her husband as well. Benefices were bestowed on him<sup>20</sup> — rewards for the successful client whose work is acknowledged by the patron. But by this time Vincent was a changed man. So much so that by the time he had his revelation at Folleville in 1617 his personal ambitions had been transformed into ambition for the Gospel. And of course it was not only Vincent who was stunned by the ignorance of people who risked damnation by not confessing their sins. Mme de Gondi was even more powerfully struck. So the famous mission sermon of January 25, 1617, from which date Vincent insisted the mission had begun, and in which he discovered his life goal of preaching the gospel to the rural poor, began the process out of which eight years later the Congregation of the Mission was founded. But this work of foundation was itself a work of his patrons. The founders of the Congregation legally were Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi and Mme Françoise Marguerite. The inspirations for the foundation were Mme de Gondi and Vincent. The contract and the funding, and the early opportunities were all provided by the de Gondis. While Vincent was director of the Congregation for life, he was still both tutor to the de Gondi children and later chaplain to the de Gondi family. This is a clear example of the way in which Vincent was to use the patronage system for the rest of his life. As the needs of the poor called him, so he would enlist his own patrons and other, auxiliary patrons in the service of those poor. The Duchess d'Aiguillon,<sup>21</sup> the niece of Cardinal Richelieu, became a long-term secondary patron for the work of the Mission. Her funds and support were always available and frequently called upon as the work of the Mission spread through France in the 1630s and 1640s.

The de Gondi family<sup>22</sup> themselves demonstrate the effective use of the patronage system. Italian in origin, Philippe Emmanuel's first French ancestor, his great-grandfather Antoine (Antonio), who had

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<sup>19</sup> PUJO, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>20</sup> The parish of Gamaches in Rouen, and a canonry of Ecouis.

<sup>21</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-294.

<sup>22</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-109.

begun life as a Florentine banker, secured the family fortunes when he was appointed Steward to the young Dauphin Henry III early in the sixteenth century. In doing so he became a client of Queen Catherine de Medici. His wife reinforced the relationship by becoming the royal governess. The careers of two of their sons indicate the skill with which their parents had served their patron, and the continuing development of the family through the next few generations indicates that the talents and judgement were inherited in the family.<sup>23</sup>

Antoine's eldest grandson Albert became Marquis, General of the Galleys and Marshall of France, and later in his life Duke de Retz. At different times he was Governor of three different Provinces.<sup>24</sup> In a step towards the promotion of the family which is too symmetrical to be other than deliberate, Antoine's second grandson Pierre became Bishop of Langres, and later Bishop of Paris. Sufficiently involved in royal politics to become a confidant of Henri IV, he was entrusted with the King's negotiations with Pope Clement VIII to secure pardon for his sin of heresy. Later he negotiated Henri's annulment of his marriage to Marguerite de Valois. For his reward for this success he became Cardinal de Retz.

Albert had ten children. In a further upwardly mobile career his son Charles, the second Duke de Retz, married a member of the royal family, Marguerite d'Orleans. Philippe Emmanuel inherited the secondary titles of Marquis of the Golden Isles and Count de Joigny, as well as the military career and Generalate of the Galleys.

The ecclesiastical side of the family "business" was continued by Albert's other two sons. Henri became Coadjutor Bishop to his uncle Pierre in 1596, succeeded him, and later became the first Cardinal de Retz. His younger brother Jean Francois became a Capuchin and succeeded Henri as Bishop of Paris in 1623. He became the first Archbishop of Paris when the see was promoted to Metropolitan status.

By the time Vincent became a client of the General of the Galleys the de Gondi family ranked among the Grand Seigneurs of the kingdom. Even though Philippe Emmanuel joined de Berulle's Oratory in 1627 after the death of his wife, he continued to exert influence on behalf of the family, on behalf of his client Vincent de Paul, and on behalf of the Oratory of his Superior the Cardinal.

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<sup>23</sup> For an excellent, and complete, five generation family tree of the de Gondi family see the endpapers of J.H.M. SALMON, *Cardinal de Retz: The Anatomy of a Conspirator*, London 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Provence, Metz and Nantes.

From Vincent's point of view, even after the death of Mme de Gondi and the retirement of Philippe Emmanuel, as a client of the family he could still exert influence. Of particular importance in terms of the development of the Congregation of the Mission, the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity was the influence he could exert within the Archdiocese of Paris. A stream of approvals for the different Rules and other legal documents were readily available from Jean Francois, and then from Jean-Francois Paul, the second Cardinal de Retz and Coadjutor Archbishop of Paris from 1643. Vincent had been tutor to him as to Philippe Emmanuel's other sons. Jean-Francois Paul may be regarded as one of Vincent's failures. His ambition, his political manoeuvrings and his sexual liaisons made him a prince-bishop in the old style rather than in the reformed style of the Council of Trent. Nevertheless, his family relationship with Vincent and Vincent's interest in him and efforts on his behalf ensured that the Archbishop continued to act as Vincent's patron and supported his works in return for Vincent's clientage.

Vincent's apostolate to the galley slaves was one of the noblest and most frustrating of his many apostolic initiatives. It was also one in which the workings of clientism are readily visible. Vincent himself was appointed Chaplain Royal to the Galleys in 1619 and he remained in the position for the rest of his life. The appointment was made directly by the General of the Galleys, who was of course Vincent's patron. The galleys were one of the principal arms of French military influence in the Mediterranean, and as the century wore on and conflicts with Spain and problems caused to Mediterranean trade by corsairs from North Africa grew, the importance of the galleys grew too. The rowers of the galleys were criminals who were sentenced to a term at the oar. As the needs of the fleet grew, sentences were lengthened, and applied to more classes of crime to ensure that the fleet had sufficient oarsmen. The conditions were so severe that service on the galleys was very often equivalent to a death sentence.

In his customary manner Vincent initially moved slowly and gradually until he had appraised the extent of the problem and devised his own solution. Before 1639 his efforts were fragmented and were aimed at the improvement of the worst of the situations facing the prisoners<sup>25</sup> so that his efforts simply added to the list of those working on behalf of the convicted.

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<sup>25</sup> The Missioners conducted missions for the prisoners in Paris before they were sent south to the galleys; he attempted several negotiations to secure visits by different charitable groups, and twice he secured better quarters in Paris for those awaiting transfer to Marseilles.

Then in 1639 a large bequest (6000 livres) from the estate of M. Corneul, President of the Ministry of Finance, and intended for the alleviation of the conditions of the galley slaves, provided both initial resource and impetus for a major assault on the whole problem. First the Daughters of Charity were sent in to look after the material welfare of the convicts, and a dangerous and difficult work it was. Then a major mission for all the galleys at once was launched in Marseilles. Five Vincentians led by Vincent's faithful collaborator M. Francois du Coudray were assisted by Jesuits and Oratorians and the bishop and clergy of the diocese. But these were exercises in crisis management. The next stage, following Vincent's usual pattern, was to permanently improve the situation. So two construction projects occupied the first half of the 1640s — the construction of a hospital for the convicts in Marseilles, and the establishment of a house of the Mission to provide permanent spiritual care for the galley slaves, including quinquennial missions. The position of Chaplain Royal, with the right of appointment of chaplains for the galleys, was vested in perpetuity in the Superior of the Congregation of the Mission, and delegated by Vincent to the priest in charge of the house in Marseilles.<sup>26</sup> The work continued to be difficult and dangerous. Daughters of Charity and Vincentians and some of the clergy who assisted in the initial mission (including the Bishop of Marseilles) died of various plagues and diseases caught from the convicts.

So much for the problem. How did the patronage system bear upon it? Vincent's initial appointment was an act of direct patronage by Philippe Emmanuel, General of the Galleys. The continuing work of providing actual chaplains was a work of patronage also — Vincent as patron appointed clergy clients of his to the posts. Some were Vincentians, some were local parish clergy. A significant variation in the usual operation of the system occurred after the retirement of Philippe Emmanuel when the de Gondis lost the position of General of the Galleys to the opposing faction led by Cardinal Richelieu, who bestowed it upon his nephew the Duke de Richelieu. In the normal course of events the Chaplaincy Royal would have changed hands also, to a client of the Duke. But by this time Vincent had achieved sufficient status that he could claim connections on all sides of the political and patronal struggle. In the reconstruction of the facilities for the galley slaves and their care Vincent acted as co-ordinator, and enlisted the services of patrons from all sides of the aristocratic scene. Thus the queen supplied

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<sup>26</sup> ROMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 497-502.

funds as did the Duchess d'Aiguillon, and, probably through her agency, the Cardinal himself. With the crown, the King's chief minister, the Cardinal's party, and the opposition represented by Vincent himself and supported by Cardinal de Retz who had not yet begun to lose power, Vincent had enlisted all the major players in support of the great work. So Vincent once again took the prevailing model and reshaped it into a form which could achieve his hopes for it on behalf of the Gospel.

Writings about Vincent often seem to assume that he was an independent agent responsible only to Pope and King. But the examples I have cited (and they can be echoed in his other activities when they are closely analysed) show that he was enmeshed in a cooperative socio-political system. His skill in using the structural systems of government and society in support of his revolutionary goals is what made him so formidable. His spiritual sons and daughters need to learn his skills of cautious analysis and engagement in the equivalent political and social systems of the twenty-first century.

# Political Charity and Vincentian Spirituality Today

by Charles Pan, C.M.

## **INTRODUCTION: THE STORY OF MY VINCENTIAN VOCATION**

Before I get into my topic, I would like to first share with all of you some of my own life experience. It was not until the last year of my Senior High School that I first came to know something about the Catholic Church. Fr. Hermans (a Dutch Vincentian priest working in Taiwan) was the one who brought and lead me to really know Jesus Christ. It was because of this Jesus crucified that I was attracted to want to be close to the altar and which inevitably led me to become interested the Priesthood.

Because of my relationship with Fr. Hermans, I chose to enter the Vincentians. And during my years as a seminarian preparing for the Priesthood I often asked myself the question: "Why has God called me to enter the Priesthood as a Vincentian?" For a long time, I prayed about this as I continued my studies. And still I was unable to really meet the Heart of Jesus. It was not until my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Theology — during the summer — when I was sent to a local hospital to take part in a CPE (CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION) program — that I began to see the light. In the hospital where I worked, I came in contact with some of the poorest of the poor in Taiwan. It was in their presence that I lost the security of all my studies. Why? Because no one of these poor souls in this situation understood anything about the Theology I was professing. It was here I lost the safe and secure identity that I once possessed because in this situation no one really knew who I was. It was here that I lost my own sense of dignity because no one respected me simply because of the title I held. Finally, it was after I was rejected by a patient in that hospital 12 times that I saw myself as a big failure. And as I sat in the big lobby of that hospital 'licking my own wounds' and feeling sorry for myself I surprisingly discovered that in meeting many homeless people sleeping in the park or out on the street I was no different than they were. It was in this situation that I really experienced for the first time my own deep poverty. This kind of

poverty caused me to feel very uncomfortable, uneasy, and helpless. Although in my own reasoning I clearly knew that Jesus became one of us and was incarnated in the most useless and worthless of human beings, still in my own heart it was difficult to understand and fully comprehend why Jesus would incarnate Himself in these people. Every cell in my body was reacting against all that Jesus did in accepting the most pitiable of people. Helping or reaching out to these kinds of people, I can easily do. But accepting the reality that I am one of these rejected people and the poorest of the poor and that Jesus came to save and show compassion to me too was literally impossible for me to fathom and accept. Yet Jesus had chosen this way to show me how to reach out with love to others.

### **THE POLITICAL CHARITY OF JESUS CHRIST**

As an Apostle of Charity, Jesus Christ was the rule of the life of Vincent de Paul, and was considered as the center of his life and his whole activity. Jesus Christ is a model of perfect charity.

Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God the Father. The filial union of Jesus with the Father is expressed in the perfect love which he also made the principal commandment of the Gospel: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Mt 22:37-38). As we know, to this commandment Jesus attached a second, "like the first," that of love of one's neighbor (cf. Mt 22:39). He proposed himself as a model of this love: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). He taught and gave his followers a love patterned on his own model.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus did not live on his own behalf, but so that the world might be saved and the Kingdom of God might come. He said: "I came that men may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Christ Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." He was God's servant, certainly, but at the same time servant to his brothers and sisters, to give them life and to fulfill the kingdom of God among them by showing them the love of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Jesus Christ Is a Model of Perfect Love*, General Audience, August 31, 1988.

In a foundational text from St. Luke's gospel (4:16-21), we witness Jesus on a Sabbath day in his hometown Nazareth. "As he usually did," Jesus came to the synagogue for worship and he was invited to read. He took the scroll of Isaiah the prophet, searched out its mighty missionary text (61:1-2) and proclaimed: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord." Then, after a dramatic pause, Jesus made the astonishing announcement: "This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening" (Luke 4:18-21).

As Superior General, Fr. Gregory Gay comments about this text: Here we have a passionate social justice text, which Jesus deliberately chose to launch his work. So passionate was Jesus about justice and God's Kingdom, that he wanted the heavenly harvest to begin right here on earth, in and through him. The Kingdom of God is what life would be like on earth if God were in charge. It is God's dream, God's passion. Jesus was so passionate about fulfilling God's dream that he lived and died for it. It is the dream for this earth of Vincent de Paul's and of ours.

## **APOSTLE OF CHARITY: THE WAY OF VINCENT DE PAUL**

### **1. *The beginning:*<sup>2</sup>**

Before the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, in spite of the wonderful interior journey and fruitful work, Vincent's life was defined in relationship to Bérulle and the Gondi family and temporary appointments arising from these relationships, such as his position as chaplain and almoner to Henry IV's former wife, Queen Marguerite de Valois; his service in the parishes of Clichy, Folleville, and Châtillon-les-Dombes; and his role as chaplain general to the galleys and missions on the Gondi estates. His one lasting initiative, prior to the founding of the Mission, was the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity beginning at Châtillon in 1617. With the founding of the Mission and the care of the Confraternities of Charity before him, his life's work was in place.

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<sup>2</sup> H.F. O'DONNELL, *Vincent de Paul: His Life and Way*, in F. RAYN - J.E. RYBOLT, ed., *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995, pp. 24-25.

## **2. *The foundation of the congregation of the mission:***<sup>3</sup>

Once Vincent had gotten the aid from the Gondis to found the Congregation of the Mission, all his efforts went into obtaining official recognition. The archbishop of Paris recognized the new community on 24 April 1626. Seven years later, after considerable negotiation and a number of difficulties, the Congregation of the Mission received papal approval. The congregation grew slowly at first. In the early years of the congregation they had to rely on their neighbors to keep an eye on their residence, the Collège des Bons Enfants. By 1632 seven priests formed the congregation and they moved to larger quarters, the immense priory of Saint Lazare.

## **3. *The Response of new situation:***<sup>4</sup>

During these years, the development of the Confraternities of Charity occupied a place of primacy along with the development of the mission. From their beginning at Châtillon, the charities were organized at the local level and, consequently had the flexibility to respond to new situation as they arose. Beyond caring for the sick poor, as they had been founded to do, they began to respond to the needs of beggars, then of prisoners and galley convicts, and eventually of young indigent couples and victims of famine and war.

## **4. *The expansion of the work:***<sup>5</sup>

In 1628, when the bishop of Beauvais decided to have a few days of retreat for priesthood candidates to prepare them for ordination, he had come to this decision in conversation with Vincent, whom he then asked to take responsibility for the retreat. This was a great innovation at the time. In 1633, in collaboration with some priests of Paris, Vincent established the Tuesday Conferences. Vincent chaired the meetings, and after a period of prayer the priests shared their thoughts and convictions about what it meant to be a priest. Their interaction was mutually encouraging; on leaving these meetings, all felt charged with renewed zeal. The Tuesday Conferences bore great fruit in promoting high ideals of priesthood and in fostering mutual support among the priests. Many future bishops attended

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> H.F. O'DONNELL, *Vincent de Paul: His Life and Way*, in F. RAYN - J.E. RYBOLT, ed., *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

the conferences, which gave Vincent an opportunity to become acquainted with them firsthand as it gave them an opportunity to deepen and purify their priestly commitments.

### **5. *The foundation of the Daughters of Charity:*<sup>6</sup>**

In the work of charity what was needed was a heart, a soul, and an unconditional fidelity. In response to this need, Louis de Marillac recognized her mission and eventually, with Vincent, founded the Daughters of Charity. Vincent and Louise became father and mother to the Daughters of Charity.

### **6. *The new and Urgent Work:*<sup>7</sup>**

In 1638, Vincent undertook the care of abandoned children. In the beginning Vincent entrusted some of the children to Louise, and before long Vincent and Louise embraced the entire work. A dozen Daughters of Charity were assigned to this work and thirteen houses were built to receive the children.

### **7. *The first great crusade of charity:*<sup>8</sup>**

At the beginning of 1639, Vincent became aware of the extreme distress of the province of Lorraine, ravaged by war, famine and plague. He appealed to the Ladies of Charity, and during the next ten years he did not stop sending help. Centers of assistance were set up and funded to provide food and shelter for the hungry and homeless and to nurse the sick. From St. Lazare, Vincent exhorted, consoled, advised, and begged all to be patient. He organized missions for the refugees, received young women in danger, and mobilized assistance for the impoverished nobility of Lorraine. He also took advantage of his contacts with the prime minister, Cardinal Richelieu, and other influential people to plead for peace.

### **8. *The significant influence on Church and the royal family:*<sup>9</sup>**

In 1643, Vincent undertook an entirely new set of responsibilities. After the death of her husband, Louis XIII, and during the minority of Louis XIV, Queen Anne of Austria formed the Council of

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> H.F. O'DONNELL, *Vincent de Paul: His Life and Way*, in F. RAYN - J.E. RYBOLT, ed., *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: Rules, Conferences, and Writings*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Ecclesiastical Affairs, to which she immediately appointed Vincent. In these meetings Vincent exercised significant influence on the selection of good and worthy bishops, oversaw the renewal of monastic life, dealt with Jansenism, and was able to keep the plight of the people and the poor before the government of France.

After following the footprint of the charitable way of Vincent de Paul, we know that Vincent did a great deal of charitable work for the poor. One could say the entire basis of Vincent's spirit was to recognize in the poor the face of Christ, and to serve in the poor our Lord Jesus Christ. But we often neglect another aspect of his legacy. St. Vincent, however, has left us a particularly beautiful gift. That is his creativity which resulted in a methodology adapted to the times in which he lived, and which is still relevant in our time.

Vincent's zeal for the service of the poor was such that he appreciated the need to create sustainable ways of serving the poor. To do this, he had to humbly invite the collaboration of others. He had to inspire them through his spirituality and release in them their own creativity and talent for the service of the poor.

Not only this, he brought together all available resources for the service of the poor, old and young, men and women, clerics and laity, royal family and peasants, wealthy and poor, etc. All are mobilized to his task.

Vincent recognized the potential both of the laity and of women and their role in creating a just world. This is a new concept which emerges in him, at a time when there were few expectations of the laity, and women had an inferior place in society.

Vincent by these means planted a seed. In his lifetime this seed was already a flourishing sapling. He was himself very influential. Today that plant is a mature tree. There are 260 religious communities or lay organizations which bear his mark. In fact, one can see that much of the contemporary service of the poor in the Church is heavily influenced by this 17<sup>th</sup> century French Saint.

In the poor, Vincent saw and tried to console Christ himself. The message of Vincent has a source, a strength, and an unmistakable focal point which is specifically theological: it is born of Christ, it is nourished by the thirst for Christ, it tends towards Christ. Union with Jesus Christ: this is the goal of the untiring and insatiable search seen in the existential trajectory of Vincent de Paul. He is a man who always searches for the will of God and pays attention to it, and lives a Christocentric vocation in the Holy Spirit.

## COMING ALIVE TODAY

Vincent de Paul makes the perennial timeliness of the Gospel come alive. Each one is like a living parable of that phrase in the Letter to the Hebrews: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). Today, just as two thousand years ago on the roads of Palestine, Christ is walking at our side and calling us: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). Today, as then, each and every person can rest his head on Jesus' breast and listen to the heartbeat of God's love for his creatures (cf. Jn 13:25). Now, let us see one concrete example, St. Anne's home which is alive with the spirit of political charity.

Father G. Beunen, C.M., came to Taiwan in 1951 from Holland. He took the post of Head of the Communications Department of the Vatican Embassy to Taiwan and head of the Dutch Vincentian Mission in Taiwan. He established the Catholic Parish of Shipai in 1962 and actively developed pastoral work at the Veteran's Hospital. When preaching around Taiwan, he saw many handicapped children living without proper care. The idea of setting up a nursing home just popped out of his head. However, there was not enough financial support in Taiwan. Father Beunen therefore came back to Holland to raise more funds. Finally, with more contributions from the churches and the kind-hearted people in Holland, Father Beunen built St. Anne's Home faithfully in 1972 in Taiwan.

Over these decades, the children receiving St. Anne's help increases. St. Anne's Home keeps facing the problem of insufficient financial and human resources. To congregate more resources from our society, St. Anne's Home officially registered in March of 1998.

The current Supervisor of St. Anne's Home, Father Van Aert, has followed the spirit Father Beunen insisted on, Jesus' words: "Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me." He continues to provide a loving "home" where the seriously retarded children are well taken care of, where the children share the warmth of a family. In order for us to be of more service to the handicapped, we have established the Beunen Foundation.

In fact, St. Anne's Home was founded in the 70s in Taiwan precisely because the local people and government were neglecting the plight of the handicapped in the Taiwanese society. With the presence of St. Anne's Home, there was a clear sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God. St. Anne's Home has become a kind of teacher and a conscience for the government and the local people and continually reminds both the government and the society of the welfare and immediate needs of the handicapped in Taiwan.

## CONCLUSION

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Benedict XVI encourages us who repeat at every Mass: “Give us this day our daily bread,” “to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries. In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through practical education in charity and justice.”<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Aparecida, Brazil, 13 May 2007, “The Church is the advocate of justice and of the poor, precisely because she does not identify with politicians nor with partisan interests. Only by remaining independent can she teach the great criteria and inalienable values, guide consciences and offer a life choice that goes beyond the political sphere. To form consciences, to be the advocate of justice and truth, to educate in individual and political virtues: that is the fundamental vocation of the Church in this area.”

As Vincentians, we are sure that the contempt that some people have for local no-hopers, for those unable to cope, is present also on a global scale: contempt for the vast poor in Mainland China, many people and families in recent tsunami incidents in Asia, AIDS sufferers all over the world and many millions of others. Someone has to speak for them, in the name of Christ, and this is part of our vocation. If necessary someone has to be a countersign to the modern pattern of thought which says ‘If they are not useful, if they do not produce anything, then they do not count.’ We cannot see how this can any longer be an optional extra to our proclamation of the Gospel; any gospel we proclaim which does not have this cry for justice somewhere in it, will be faulty, defective.

“Hate evil, love good, let justice reign at the city gate.”

(Amos 5:15)

“Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.”

(Lk 6:36)

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<sup>10</sup> BENEDICT XIV, *Sacramentum caritatis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007, no. 91.

These invitations of God always give Vincentians a big challenge and help them to imitate Jesus Christ as Saint John Gabriel Perboyre prayed:

O my Divine Saviour  
Transform me into Yourself.  
May my hands be the hands of Jesus.  
May my tongue be the tongue of Jesus.

Grant that every faculty of my body  
May serve only to glorify you.

Above all,  
Transform my soul and all its powers  
So that my memory, will and affections  
May be the memory, will and affections  
Of Jesus.

I pray to you  
To destroy in me  
All that is not of you.

Grant that I may live  
But in You, by You and for You,  
So that I may truly say with St. Paul,  
“I live now, not I,  
But Christ lives in me.”

# Vincent de Paul and the Court

## Responding to the Politics of Power

by Daniel Franklin Pilario Estepa, C.M.\*

### 1. Introduction

When I joined the community in the early 1980s, the Philippines found itself in a crucial political turmoil. The dictator Marcos was asserting his military power and resistance to his Martial rule was growing among the citizenry. People were divided. So was the Vincentian community. On the one hand, many confreres were allies of the Marcoses and their cronies. Some were even present at many palace functions. On the other hand, there were many confreres who found themselves in street demonstrations or worked behind the scenes to help topple down the repressive regime. What amazed me was that both sides used St. Vincent to support their stand. One side rhetorically asks: Was Vincent not friends of those in power? Did he not bridge the gap between the rich and the poor? The rich also are persons. They are also poor — emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Did St. Vincent not call us to serve them too, as he himself did? Those on the other side ask: When we dine with them, ask them to donate to our projects or celebrate Mass in their gatherings, are we not condoning their injustices? Each side was not convinced of the response of the other.

Today, even as we find ourselves in a different context, the substance of the questions remains. How should Vincentians deal with the politics of power? This paper intends to do three things: (1) to investigate the contemporary theories and discourses on power especially in socio-political contexts; (2) to inquire how Vincent de Paul dealt with the politics of power in his own context; (3) to explore its implications to contemporary Vincentian life and the formation process.

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In order to situate our discussion, it is our methodological option to start with contemporary issues and questions. How does contemporary social science see political ‘power’? It is through this lens that we intend to read Vincent’s politics in the hope that we begin to discern for our own times how to concretely negotiate with power and do ‘charity’ in political contexts.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Theorizing Power: Contemporary Theories

How crucial is the question of power to the contemporary mind? Just to get a sense of it, I tried to do a google search on the term ‘power’ and I got 785M hits in 0.17 seconds; in the yahoo search engine, it was higher. I got 1.24B in 0.31 seconds.<sup>2</sup> Since this might include electric or mechanical power and the like, I narrowed my search down to the term ‘political power’ and I got 228M hits in 0.07 seconds for google and 116M in 0.28 seconds in yahoo. Considering this data, the question of power must be a relevant concern in today’s society.

Contemporary social science discourses provide us a wide range with which the notion of power is understood. Let me go through some of these uses: (a) power as domination; (b) power as empowerment and resistance; and (c) power as solidarity.

### 2.1. *Domination: Power Over*

In a classic study in political theory, Steven Lukes points to the three ways in which power as domination is theorized in political contexts.<sup>3</sup> The ‘one-dimensional view’ takes the individualist perspective. Domination is “power of A over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.” In other

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<sup>1</sup> For this methodology, see my articles: “Inculturing Congregational Charisms: A Methodological Proposal for the Vincentian Family,” *Hapag: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research* 2 (2005): 169-207; “Inculturing Vincentian Charism and Ministry in the Asia-Pacific Contexts: A Methodological Proposal,” in *Formation for Mission: In Search of Contextualization of Vincentian Formation and Charism in Asia Pacific*, ed. Armada Riyanto (Malang, Indonesia: Widya Sasana Publication, 2005), 139-173; reprinted in *Vincentiana* 51, No. 4 (July-August 2007): 287-315.

<sup>2</sup> Just for the sake of curiosity, I compared it to the word ‘sex’. ‘Sex’ sites were very much lower — 397M/.07 seconds in google and 554M/.10 seconds in yahoo. Can we say that contemporary minds are more concerned with ‘power’ than with ‘sex’?

<sup>3</sup> For this, see STEVEN LUKES, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Palgrave, 1974). This work was revised and expanded in 2005.

words, power is seen to reside in the actor(s) who can exercise overt and visible dominance in situations where there is conflict of interests. In the 'two-dimensional view', the conflict need not necessarily be overt; it can also be covert and concealed. It is not necessary that the dominant group make open decisions against the minority. It is enough that they keep quiet on certain issues, thus, in effect preventing that specific issue to surface in open discussion. This view thinks that dominance can be exercised over others by one's capacity to control the political agenda. Beyond the first two types, there is a 'three-dimensional view' or radical view to which Lukes subscribes. For Lukes, the previous two conceptions are too individualistic, i.e., too faithful to the tradition started by Max Weber who viewed power as residing in individuals realizing their wills despite the resistance of others. The two views are also conflict-centered — be it overt or covert conflicts. Beyond individual action (i.e., power of A over B), Lukes contends that power also includes "socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups and practices of institutions."<sup>4</sup> Beyond actual observable conflict, power is also present in manipulated social consensus. In other words, the dominant system can in fact influence, shape and determine — through media, schools, churches — what its people should like and want. And through everyday formation processes — or what sociology also calls 'socialization' — the hegemonic agenda begins to be accepted as legitimate, normal and natural. There is no observable conflict since the interests of the dominant order have been imposed on and seemingly consented to by those it tries to exclude. Social consensus, thus, is both voluntarily concurred but also subconsciously imposed.<sup>5</sup>

The radical view of power in Lukes is influenced by the notion of 'hegemony' by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). For Gramsci, political legitimacy is gained in two ways: force and consent. The first approach is through the use of coercion and force (e.g., police, courts, prisons, etc.). But since this is not always effective as it creates widespread protests, the dominant power also uses persuasion (others also call this 'brainwashing') through media, educational system, churches and other institutions in order to convince the people of its own legitimacy. In other words, the

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<sup>4</sup> STEVEN LUKES, *Power*, 22.

<sup>5</sup> The radical view of power in Lukes is influenced by the notion of 'hegemony' by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). For Gramsci's discussion on hegemony, see JOSEPH FEMIA, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

dominant goes about ‘manufacturing consent’, to use a phrase of a famous philosopher and political activist, Noam Chomsky. In both cases, the dominant order exercises power over the dominated. However, the dominated also participates in such a construction — as they no longer voice their dissent. On the surface, hegemony, therefore, is the ‘whole lived social reality’ which is artificial as it is manufactured but which people also take for granted as natural and legitimate.

In recent times, however, there is one view of power which goes beyond the radical view of Lukes and Gramsci. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) — a French philosopher famous among the postmodern writers — conceives of power as ‘governmentality’. First, against the previous three views, power is neither a possession of individuals nor of institutions; sovereignty does not reside in the monarch nor in the people; it is all over. “Power must be analyzed as something that circulates,” he states. “It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as commodity or piece of wealth.”<sup>6</sup> Second, power is not only repressive; it is also productive and reproductive. It is a set of practices, technology or strategy dispersed throughout the whole system so that bodies of subjects are rendered docile to its logic and functioning. In effect, bodies can be effectively ‘governed’, thus also acquiring the capacity to reproduce themselves and the whole system. This is what he calls the ‘micro-physics of power’.

What is the bottom-line assertion in the above theoretical discussion? Regardless of their differences, the theories of power from Lukes to Gramsci to Foucault agree on one thing. Power is “power over”. It consists of individual acts, everyday practices, institutions, technology, strategies or embodied micro-practices of domination over known or unknown others.

## **2.2. Empowerment and Resistance: Power To**

Beyond domination, however, there is another tradition of conceiving power in terms of positive capacity. Power is not just ‘power over’; it is also ‘power to’. As the Latin *posse* suggests, power is ability, capacity, strength actually put forth, effectiveness. Beyond domination, power is a transformative capacity, an act of empowerment. In the context of a powerful dominant power at the center, what capacity do the margins possess? True, the hegemonic

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<sup>6</sup> MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 98.

power is all-pervasive. But there can never be a “dominant social order, and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy and human intention.”<sup>7</sup> There is always a dimension of our human and social existence, which the dominant social order “neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize.”<sup>8</sup> It is this dimension which puts into question, threatens or exerts pressure on the hegemonic. Raymond Williams, a British neo-Marxist philosopher, identifies this sphere as the locus of alternative, oppositional and emergent voices of the excluded, the locus of resistance among those marginalized by the system. Michel de Certeau, another contemporary French philosopher, calls this the ‘tactics of the weak’. While *strategy* refers to calculated action of powerful institutions whose possession of a ‘territory’ needed to regroup or recharge for the next moves places it in an advantageous position, *tactic* is the scheme of resistance available to the weak. Bereft of place, the ‘weak’ can only play within the terrain of the ‘strong’. It has no time to strategize and its attacks depend only on the possibilities afforded by cracks and fissures along the structure of its powerful adversary. “It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.”<sup>9</sup> It thus turns its own smallness into gain and cunningly transforms the enemy’s size and visibility into utter disadvantage.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.3. *Solidarity: Power With*

For some contemporary feminists, however, the military metaphors of tactics and strategies, of dominance (power over) and resistance (power to) are all masculine notions. They argue that the

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<sup>7</sup> RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 125.

<sup>8</sup> RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> MICHEL DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> This reminds us of the Greek *metis* — a sense of cunning intelligence valuable to the Pre-Socratics but came to be suppressed by the dominant Greek narrative from Plato onwards. In certain activities like navigation, medicine or hunting, the Greeks value a type of intelligence which combines “flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experiences acquired over the years” as they are made to bear upon the “transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous situations.” In front of such an overwhelming power, this type of oblique resistance is the only way to survive. See DANIEL FRANKLIN PILARIO, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 2005), 21-25, 249-250, 534-535.

experience of women ushers in a totally new conception of power: “power with”. Virginia Held, a feminist author, suggests that “the capacity to give birth, and to nurture and empower could be the basis for new and more humanly promising conceptions than the ones that now prevail of power, empowerment and growth.”<sup>11</sup> Another feminist, Jean Baker Miller says: “There is enormous validity in women’s not wanting to use power as it is presently conceived and used. Rather, women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than, diminish, the power of others.”<sup>12</sup> Yet as early as the 1920s, Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933) already advanced the notion of ‘power with’. “Genuine power can only be grown,” she argues, “it will slip from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control.... ‘Power-with’ is what democracy should mean in politics or industry.”<sup>13</sup> But this is not a monopoly of feminists alone. The notion of power as solidarity already finds its echo in the writings of the political philosopher, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) who argues that “power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert.”<sup>14</sup> What is envisioned by these different discourses is a nurturing, affective power, not controlling power; power of creative solidarity not of aggressive domination; power that gives of itself not one that oppresses.

### 3. Reading Vincent’s Responses to the Politics of Power

From the lens of the above theoretical discourse on power, we now ask how did St. Vincent deal with political power in his own context? Some might ask if this method is not anachronistic. Are we not asking questions which Vincent himself had not asked? Are we not projecting our prejudices and biases into Vincent’s world? The answer to all of these questions is probably yes. And we should not be guilty of doing so! For as Hans-Georg Gadamer also says: “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

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<sup>11</sup> VIRGINIA HELD, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 137.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Baker Miller (1992) as quoted in “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” in <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/> (accessed 06.24.2007).

<sup>13</sup> MARY PARKER FOLLETT, *Creative Experience* (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1924), xiii, 187.

<sup>14</sup> HANNAH ARENDT, *On Violence* (London: Penguin, 1970), 44.

to us.<sup>15</sup> In other words, thanks to our questions, prejudices and biases, Vincent de Paul comes alive for us. It is only through them that we can read him.

### 3.1. *“A true servant of God and of the Prince”: Was Vincent Co-opted?*

How did Vincent deal with elite political power? One way of looking at it is that he was co-opted by it. In this view, Vincent was a willing collaborator of the absolutist *Ancien Régime*. He served as the monarch’s spiritual director, adviser, companion, friend. From the Marxist perspective, he provided a theological and ecclesiastical legitimization to the oppressive regime. Read from the prism of Gramsci, he had unwittingly made the Congregation and the church as a whole to be institutions at the service of monarchial hegemonic dominance.

This is the way the famous contemporary philosopher, Michel Foucault, read Vincent de Paul in a classic philosophical and sociological study of mendicancy and madness in 17<sup>th</sup> century France. According to Foucault, the Church played a great part in the “great confinement”, the royal edict of 1656. This decree establishes the General Hospital to house all the beggars, the poor, the sick, the insane all together. Foucault contends that the program to control and contain the misfits of society — those who did not fit the new standards of the Age of Reason — was even started earlier as signaled by Vincent’s taking over of St. Lazare. Foucault writes: “Vincent de Paul reorganized Saint-Lazare, the most important of the former lazar houses of Paris; on January 7, 1632, he signed a contract in the name of the Congregationists of the Mission with the ‘Priory’ of Saint-Lazare, which was now to receive ‘persons detained by the order of His Majesty’.”<sup>16</sup> Foucault, therefore, insinuates that Vincent unwittingly placed himself at the disposal of a system that reproduces itself by violently rounding up and incarcerating the poor.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> H.-G. GADAMER, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), 9. See also *Truth and Method* 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998), 269-277.

<sup>16</sup> MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. R. Howard (New Pantheon, 1965), 42.

<sup>17</sup> This generalized allegation by Foucault needs to be nuanced. The everyday life details in Saint-Lazare give us another impression. Saint-Lazare was a big institution of all sorts — from halfway house for the poor to temporary lodging of bishops, lay people and religious. It served as the mother house of the missionaries (that is why we came to be called ‘Lazarists’). But it was also a training institution for seminarians and priests.

But how far did Vincent really collaborate with monarchical political powers? Quite much, that is, if we also listen to some of his contemporaries! This is how Louis Abelly described Vincent in a section of his now famous biography: “Monsieur Vincent preserved always an inviolable fidelity to the king and a constant devotion to his service even during the most perilous and difficult times” (Chapter 13, Section 10).<sup>18</sup> In this section, Abelly points out that Vincent de Paul risked his personal life, material welfare, and that of his Congregation in order to be of service to the King since, for Vincent, “the measure of the affection and fidelity to one’s prince is found in one’s attachment to God.”<sup>19</sup> Vincent was a man of his times. Like his contemporaries, he also believed that to be faithful to the will of the king is also to obey the will of God. Vincent’s close and personal dealings with the palace are well known. To be called to the deathbed of Louis XIII is a sign of a trustful relationship. At one point in those deathbed conversations, the king said: “M. Vincent, if I recover my health, I will see that all the bishops spend three years in your house.”<sup>20</sup> But Vincent was much closer to the Queen. She is a key person in Vincent’s works of charity. There was even a plan to found a Confraternity of Charity in the court and the head of which is “the sacred person of the Queen”.<sup>21</sup> This is how Vincent regarded

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The Tuesday conferences were done here and Vincent was a regular attendee. There was also a church where liturgy was celebrated daily and a place where soup and bread were served for those who cared to come. So, it was not just some sort of prison — an impression which Foucault wanted to give. It is true that there were inmates with mental handicaps and young persons who were voluntarily sent there by their parents (with the permission of the magistrates) for purposes of reform. But this arrangement is no different from what we now call institution of ‘rehabilitation’, and in their case, with the confreres as equivalent to present-day spiritual directors, counselors or psychiatrists. Vincent insisted that these ‘inmates’ be called ‘boarders’. They were not prisoners of His Majesty as Foucault insinuated. They were in fact ‘paying boarders’, thus, they are served exactly the same food — if not better — as the community had. Those who recovered went home, got decent positions in society, lived normal — if not — exemplary lives. Abelly had this to say: “It is extraordinary that several had almost a complete change of heart when they were sent to Saint Lazare. The charitable care they experienced enabled them to leave in an entirely different frame of mind, as good as new.” LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, Book II, 265.

<sup>18</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, Book II (New York: New City Press, 1993), 395.

<sup>19</sup> L. ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul*, Book II, 396.

<sup>20</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, trans. Joyce Howard (London: Melisende, 1999), 531.

<sup>21</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 529.

her to which the Queen also returned the same, if not more, esteem and admiration. One day, a nobleman commented to Queen Anne of Austria: "There are few persons, like Monsieur Vincent, attached to the service of the King and state with such a sincere, constant and disinterested fidelity." "You are right," the Queen replied, "Monsieur Vincent is a true servant of God and of the Prince."<sup>22</sup> She chose him to be a member of the Council of Conscience — the present counterpart of which is the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Though it was Mazarin who acted as the President of the Council, he admits that Vincent had more influence with the Queen than he had. "Even I who know more about her Majesty's intentions than anyone, dare not intervene until M. Vincent has studied the matter as much as he wishes," Mazarin confessed.<sup>23</sup> Vincent was not only known by Cardinal Mazarin but also by Cardinal Richelieu before him. One incident can tell us how concerned Vincent can be with his image among those who hold power. He once heard of being accused of acting against Richelieu's interests. He wasted no time to clear his name. "My Lord," he explained, "here is the miscreant that people are accusing of acting against Your Eminence's interests. I have come here in person so that you may dispose of me and all the congregation in what way you please."<sup>24</sup>

These and many other stories, of which we have no space to mention here, tells us that Vincent was frequently walking in the corridors of power and hob-knobbing with those who wield it — Kings and Queens, Ministers and the nobility, their wives and children.

### **3.2. "Throw yourself to the sea": Humble Pleas and Open Defiance**

Despite his close affinity with the authorities, Vincent did deliberately oppose government policies and articulated them. One of these incidents happened in the disaster wrought by the protracted war in Lorraine (1635-1643). Famine and disease abound. The

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<sup>22</sup> ABBÉ MAYNARD, *Virtues and Spiritual Doctrine of St. Vincent de Paul* (Niagara: Niagara Index Publishing House, 1877), 216.

<sup>23</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 543. The French minister and a friend of Mazarin, Le Tellier knows that as in the case of French benefices, the Queen only relies on the opinion of Monsieur Vincent: "As for M. Vincent, she feels obliged to follow his advice that if the cardinal nominated as bishop somebody that M. Vincent thought was unsuitable, then she would accept the latter's decision and neither the recommendation of His Eminence nor of anybody else would prevail over M. Vincent's decision." *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 526.

reports spoke of men competing with animals to eat grass. In the midst of this unimaginable suffering, Vincent easily identified the root cause: Cardinal Richelieu's foreign policy. Together with the extensive fund-raising, the heroic work of the missionaries on the ground and the acts of penance done in the communities, Vincent never wasted time and confronted the dominant powers. He thought it helpful to visit Richelieu. He knelt down on his knees to plead: "My Lord, give us peace. Have pity on us. Give peace to France!" After giving him a sigh, the Cardinal Minister replied: "Ah! Monsieur Vincent, I desire peace just as much as you; but peace does not depend on me alone."<sup>25</sup> Was Richelieu sincere? Or was it mere rhetoric? Shrewd politician that he is, did he say this just to placate his sincere guest? For, in reality, was he not bent to pursue his political plans of French political expansion regardless of the collateral damage? On second thought, maybe Richelieu's reply was a keener assessment of the situation. Vincent's 'one-dimensional view' of power tells him that Richelieu is the single root cause. He might have thought that the Prime Minister's unilateral decision is powerful enough to let the troubles come to an end. But Richelieu is a more perceptive politician. He knew that power is not a game of an individual alone. Once the hegemonic political machinery has been set in motion (through its policies, functionaries, systems of execution, penal processes, etc.), there is no way for it to stop. The powerful system of the absolutist regime has gained a life of its own — and not even its very creators have the power of control.

A parallel event happened in the War of the Fronde (1648-1653) — a civil war between the old aristocratic nobility, the Parlement, and an absolutist monarchy. During these troubles, the poor are the unwilling victims. As the popular saying goes, "When the elephants play, the grass dies." Out of concern for the victims, Vincent placed his life on the line once more. He knew the root of the problem: the person of Mazarin, the Queen's Prime Minister. At the early dawn of January 14, 1649, Vincent set out early in the morning accompanied by Brother Docournau to Saint-Germain where the royal household moved to escape from the people's ire. The trip proved to be full of dangers but he suffered it all. He was also apprehensive that the Queen might not be receptive to his pleadings as she is heard to send away people who criticized her Prime Minister. When admitted to her presence, Vincent told the Queen that Mazarin should go. "Peace! Peace! Give us peace. Your Majesty, pray send him away for a while."

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 369-370. There is no specific date for this incident. Coste calculated it happened sometime between 1639 and 1642.

While the Queen listened, she also did not like to confront Mazarin. So she instructed him to talk to Mazarin himself. “Your Eminence,” Vincent told the Cardinal, “sacrifice yourself, withdraw from the country to save France.”<sup>26</sup> “Submit to the present state of affairs. Throw yourself into the sea to appease the storm.”<sup>27</sup> Vincent did not succeed. Mazarin became more influential on the Queen who also needed him more than ever. But Vincent pursued his efforts for peace. He continued to dialogue with both sides — the royal power and the nobles. When the negotiations broke down, he even wrote the Pope to intercede. And in one daring political move, on September 11, 1652, he wrote the Cardinal to refrain from going together with the young King and the Queen mother as they enter Paris in order to talk with the people. He did this for, in his mind, Mazarin is the real problem. This did not please Mazarin. As a consequence, Vincent was dismissed from the Council of Conscience.<sup>28</sup> It was the price he paid for his act of open defiance to dominant power.

### 3.3. “If we use force we could be going against God’s will”: *Oblique Resistance*

Let me go back to the project of the General Hospital. The royal edict of April 27, 1656 seeks to prohibit begging and idleness which pose as social ills of the city. Around ten buildings all over Paris were allotted for this: *La Salpêtrière*, *La Pitié*, *Le Refuge*, *La Scipion*, *La Savonnerie*, *Bicêtre*, etc. The ‘archers of the hospital’ — some sort of ‘policemen of the poor’ — were also organized to round up beggars and bring them to any of these institutions. Edicts of the subsequent years prohibited begging all throughout the city “under the pain of being whipped for the first offense, and for the second, condemned to the galleys if men and boys, and banished if women and girls.”<sup>29</sup> This is what Foucault calls the “Great Confinement”. The General Hospital was not a medical but a ‘police’ institution. It is a semijudicial

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<sup>26</sup> PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, trans. Joseph Leonard (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952), 92.

<sup>27</sup> PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 2, 448.

<sup>28</sup> Roman says that we do not know the specific date of Vincent’s dismissal from the Council. But when Alain de Solminihac — the bishop of Cahors — wrote him on October 2, 1652, he congratulated him for having been relieved of the job though it was also a great loss of the Church. Thus, the retirement document must have been issued before October 1652, that is, right after the September 11 letter.

<sup>29</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Madness and Civilization*, 49.

structure with “quasi-absolute sovereignty, jurisdiction without appeal, a writ of execution against which nothing can prevail — the *Hôpital Général* is a strange power that the King establishes between the police and the courts, at the limits of the law: a third order of repression.”<sup>30</sup> The directors for life possess administrative, police, corrective and penal powers over all of the poor in Paris — both inside and outside the General Hospital. They have access to “stakes, irons, prisons, and dungeons” inside the hospital in order to execute their mission. It was noted that within a few years after the edict was issued, the General Hospital already housed 6000 persons, a good 1% of the total population.

What is Vincent’s involvement in this project? Years before the royal edict, in 1653, the Ladies of Charity, all aristocratic influential women, already presented to Vincent the idea of organizing all the beggars of the city. They wanted Vincent to undertake the work since he was well known for institutions of this type. They assured him of sufficient money allotted for the project. Even *La Salpêtrière* was given by the Queen for their use. But Vincent tempered their haste. He wanted them to discern more. “The works of God,” he counsels, “come into being little by little, by degrees, and progressively.”<sup>31</sup> The Ladies were quite annoyed by his slowness. But this may be his way of circumventing something he did not like in the whole idea: the use of coercion and force. The Ladies wanted it on a big scale; thus, the need to forcefully compel the beggars. Vincent wanted to accept only those who came voluntarily. Force should not be used to bring them in. “If we use force,” he says, “we could be going against God’s will.”<sup>32</sup> As the Ladies were waiting in discernment, the Royal Edict came out and was promulgated. The work went to the men assigned by the Parlement following the conditions that Foucault described above. It was to Vincent’s great relief that the work was not given to him and his community. In a way, his discerning slowness prevented him from undertaking a work which he thinks is repressive. It is this discerning slowness that also served as a skillful dilatory tactic. But also, the same ‘slowness’ averted a possible clash with his long time generous collaborators, the Ladies of Charity, especially the Duchesse d’Aiguillon who was hell bent to pursue the project. As we say today, he had hit two birds with one stone. Within the Vincentian spiritual tradition, Vincent’s slowness has always been interpreted as a sign of his sensitivity to the voice of Providence. In this specific context, it

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<sup>30</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Madness and Civilization*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, 302.

<sup>32</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 637.

also proves to be a ingenious and cunning tactic of oblique resistance to overarching dominant power.

But Vincent's problems were not yet over. Not long after the 'Great Confinement' had taken off, he came to know that it was stipulated in the royal decree that the priests of the mission serve as chaplains. Around 20 of them were requested. How could Vincent defy the King? He met with his community and denied the request on the pretext of "its many community commitments."<sup>33</sup> That sounds to be a lame excuse. If Vincent were convinced, he could have re-channeled personnel as he did with his other projects like, for instance, his strong resolve on the Madagascar mission. But even as Vincent refused the King's wishes, he instituted some ways which, on the surface, appear to conform to the Royal program. This was done maybe in order not to appear openly defiant against so great a power. First, he also endorsed other priests who might be available for the work — one of them, Louis Abelly, who served there for only five months. Second, he suspended the soup kitchen at Saint-Lazare in deference to the program. One day, a beggar confronted Vincent at the door of Saint-Lazare: "Father, did not God command that alms be given to the poor?" "That's quite true, my friend," he replied, "but he also commanded us to obey the magistrates."<sup>34</sup> Traditional interpretation sees in this event an example of Vincent's unconditional obedience to authority. But given the context, I could see the sarcasm in his face or a wink in his eyes as he said these words. For, right after, Saint-Lazare also resumed the distribution of soup and bread! Vincent was totally unconvinced that the poor be incarcerated; neither should begging, a work of mercy dear to the heart of the Christian tradition, be totally abolished. One day, a beggar told Vincent: "Father, everyone in Paris is abusing you because they think you are the cause of the poor people being shut up in the big hospital." "Oh, very well," Vincent replied, "I will pray for them."<sup>35</sup>

While official propaganda praised the "Great Confinement" as the 'greatest charitable enterprise of the century', Vincent consciously

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<sup>33</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 638. At around March 1657, Vincent wrote to one of his friends about the Chaplaincy of the General Hospital: "They [the King and the Parlement] have appointed the priests of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity to serve the poor under the authority of the archbishop of Paris. *We have not yet undertaken the actual work for we do not yet know for sure if it is the will of God for us. If we do begin this work it will at first be an experiment to see how it goes.*" LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God*, Book I, 229.

<sup>34</sup> PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Book II, 302.

<sup>35</sup> PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Book II, 301.

distanced from it not in open defiance but through what I call ‘oblique resistance’, a tactic available to the weak in the face of so great a power. As the court wanted to eliminate its social eyesores through superficial window-dressing in confinement, Vincent did all he could to respond to the deeper causes of people’s misery as he also tried to mitigate its impact in their lives. Foucault’s structural analysis of history might be helpful to see the greater dynamics at work in hegemonic politics, but it is unable to perceive the oblique resistances present in the everyday life and decisions of actual persons on the ground, in this case, Vincent de Paul. A late 19<sup>th</sup> century author described Vincent this way: “We may compare him to that remarkable mechanical invention known as the screw. It works its way through without fret or noise; it does not split or spoil the material, but slowly, peacefully, progressively and steadily bores through wood, stone or even steel, for nothing can hinder its progress.”<sup>36</sup>

### **3.4. “Look at how M. Vincent comes dressed to court”: Embodied Dissent**

In the now classic study on French aristocratic life, *The Court Society*, Norbert Elias (1897-1990) argues that cultivation of outward appearances is crucial to the reproduction of court life.<sup>37</sup> Etiquette, for instance, is not just a matter of ceremonial; it is symbol and instrument of power. “If power exists but is not visible in the appearance of the ruler, the people will not believe. They must see in order to believe.”<sup>38</sup> Rank existed in its everyday outward representation; specific etiquette marks the status and position of an individual courtier. This position granted by the monarch had to be defended on two fronts. One needs to demonstrate subservience to those higher in the monarchial ladder and a sense of superiority to those below him. Those above need to be appeased in order to be always showered with their graces; and those below should be kept in their proper places so as not to disrupt the structure’s functioning. This status needs to be defended at all times by the careful cultivation of one’s etiquette: manner of dressing, speaking, walking,

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<sup>36</sup> ABBÉ BOUDIGNON, *Saint Vincent de Paul. Modèle des hommes d'action et d'œuvres* (Paris, 1886), 75, quoted in *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>37</sup> “An elaborate cultivation of outward appearances as an instrument of social differentiation, the display of rank through outward form, is characteristic not only of the houses but of the whole shaping of court life.” NORBERT ELIAS, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> NORBERT ELIAS, *The Court Society*, 128.

etc. “To exist in luster of aloofness and prestige, that is, to exist as a court person, is, for a court person, an end in itself.”<sup>39</sup>

Vincent de Paul finds himself in this Court often. Was this courtly status his major concern? Not at all! A very famous encounter with Mazarin illustrates my point. Cardinal Mazarin has considered Monsieur Vincent as a threat to his political ambitions.<sup>40</sup> Thus, to put him down in matters of courtly etiquette might temporarily placate the Cardinal’s political insecurities. With Vincent’s simplicity of life, he is content to come to court in clean but simple attire — or, to use the words of Abelly, in “his good manners which were both simple and humble.”<sup>41</sup> But one day, Vincent came with a raveled girdle. Mazarin seized this opportunity to mock him: “Look how Monsieur Vincent comes dressed to Court and what a beautiful girdle he wears.”<sup>42</sup> Vincent was quiet and did not respond to his tirades. Traditional interpretation reads in this incident a sign of Vincent’s humility and detachment.<sup>43</sup> I propose to see this event from the perspective of systemic power analysis. Beyond an act of individual virtue (like humility), Vincent’s non-conventional ‘courtly’ etiquette was an act of resistance to the seemingly formidable dominant power that reproduces itself even in courtly bodies. In other words, Vincent’s embodied ‘habitus’ (to use Bourdieu’s famous sociological category)<sup>44</sup> does not at all share in the ‘aristocratic habitus’ nor intends to entrench itself there. Thus, unlike Mazarin’s, it is not preoccupied to conform to the discipline of courtly bodies. In effect, its self-assured presence unwittingly poses itself as a threat to others who compete for this highly contested space, in particular, the court of *Le Roi Soleil*.<sup>45</sup> Vincent’s presence becomes an embodied dissent to

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<sup>39</sup> NORBERT ELIAS, *The Court Society*, 156.

<sup>40</sup> For a balanced interpretation of the relationship between Mazarin and Vincent de Paul, see JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 538-540.

<sup>41</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God*, Book III, Chapter 13, Section I, 210.

<sup>42</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God*, Book III, Chapter 18, 274.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, after quoting this, Pierre Coste remarks: “He was indifferent to the marks of deference shown him. A man’s character is often changed when he attains a prominent position, but his remained the same. ‘M. Vincent is always M. Vincent’, a bishop remarked, and nothing was truer.” PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, 88.

<sup>44</sup> See PIERRE BOURDIEU, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52-79.

<sup>45</sup> There are also incidents of other nobles making fun of Vincent. While he was riding on his horse from Saint Denis, a group of noblemen pursued him and fired their guns in his direction saying that when the danger is gone, he

the highly charged contest of power. If you prefer a more religious language, his simplicity poses itself as a prophetic challenge to the power-hungry and position-conscious environment around him.

### 3.5. “*These are my burden and my sorrow*”: *Solidarity*

Vincent did a thousand and one things: kneel down at the feet of Cardinal Ministers or Queens, risk his good name or the resources of his community, etc. What motivated Vincent to place his life on the line in danger of being crushed by dominant political power? There is no other reason, but the passion of his life: solidarity with the person of the poor. He played with dominant power (power over) and mobilized all sources of resistance to it (power to) — all in the name of solidarity with those who are marginalized by the system (power with). The whole political machinery works against their favor, from fiscal policy to international relations (Alsace and Lorraine), the fight among nobles and royalty (the Fronde) to courtly extravagance. Vincent stood up against this powerful machine because he knows the poor are helpless. They have nowhere else to go. “The poor people who do not know where to go and what to do, they are suffering and their numbers increase every day — these are my burden and my sorrow.”<sup>46</sup> For the system to which they were told to belong has outrightly excluded them.

Of course, Vincent was not a naïve romantic. He does not idealize the poor. Sensitive as he is to power dynamics among the ruling élite, he is not also a stranger to power games among the poor and others whom he serves. In one of the scenes in the movie *Monsieur Vincent*, there was a beggar who created trouble because he was not given help during the distribution. Vincent took him aside and told him to stop begging and that he needed to work. In another instance, Vincent was happy that one ungrateful poor person would not come back to see him again.<sup>47</sup>

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will first go to a church to thank God for the protection against the robbers. Vincent actually did, as they guessed. PIERRE COSTE, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul*, Vol. 3, 88-89.

<sup>46</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 559.

<sup>47</sup> He wrote to the community of the Daughters of Charity in Valpuiseaux: “That poor man came yesterday morning to collect his things at the door without either coming in or speaking to anyone except the porter. You can rest assured, Sisters, that you will never see him down there again with my consent; and if he is so unthinking as to go back, I ask you to let me know immediately so that I can see to his removal. I do not think he will ever come to see me again, for which I will be very grateful.” PIERRE COSTE (ed.), *Saint Vincent de Paul: Conférences, Entretiens, Documents*, Vol. V (Paris: 1920-1926),

Thanks to this down-to-earth appraisal of the poor, we are sure that his concern for them is grounded and realistic. Despite all their failings, his heart still goes out to them. When he talks about them, he speaks with the language of his heart — in all care, love and tenderness. “God loves the poor, and thus surely he must love those who love and serve them. When we also love someone, we love his friends and servants. The little Company of the Mission strives to serve the poor tenderly. God loves them so much, and so we have reason to hope that because of them God will love us as well. We then have, my brothers, a new reason to serve them. We should seek out the poorest and most abandoned. We must recognize before God that they are our lords and masters, and that we are unworthy to render them our small favors.”<sup>48</sup> What comes to mind is the third notion of power as solidarity. Beyond ‘power over’ which Vincent acutely analyzed and responded to, or ‘power to’ whose sources of resistance he powerfully deployed, the feminist sensibility of a ‘power with’ — one that nurtures and cares, one that empowers and connects — is quite alive in Vincent. “When we go to the poor,” he tells the missionaries, “we should so identify with them that we share their sufferings.... We must open our hearts so that they become responsive to the sufferings and miseries of the neighbor.”<sup>49</sup> Such a spirit of compassion has to fill our hearts, our attitudes, our language, and lastly, our actions: “We must help them as much as we can to bring about a partial or complete end to their sufferings, for the hand must be directed as much as possible by the heart.”<sup>50</sup> Such a solidarity is not only ‘affective’ but also ‘effective’, to use one of Vincent’s famous distinctions.

#### 4. Repercussions to Vincentian Mission and Formation

What follows are my initial attempts to enumerate some repercussions of the above reflections in contemporary Vincentian mission and formation. Far from being exhaustive, these reflections are provisional.

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594 quoted in THOMAS DAVITT, “Less Publicised Facets of Saint Vincent,” *Colloque* 17. Henceforth, SV.

<sup>48</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God*, Book III, 117.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

#### **4.1. *The Need for an Analytic of Power***

If charity is to be effective in socio-economic and political contexts as the theme of this whole Conference wants us to consider,<sup>51</sup> then, it is in need of a viable analytic of power. Socio-political contexts are so charged with power that, without a practicable framework to analyze these dynamics, we will end up with ‘pious’ works without real impact in society or ideologically motivated programs that ironically end up oppressing the poor whom we intend to help in the first place. A well-grounded and, hopefully, effective response can only come from a realistic assessment of the situation. In his work for the poor, Vincent did not have just the bible in hand and a good heart. He had all the analytical resources that came from his experience and his knowledge of human nature but also advice coming from all persons whom he thinks can be of help. Furthermore, society has quite changed from the reign of Louis XIII to the present reign of global capitalism. If there is anything significant, the mechanisms of oppression and exclusion have become more systematic and flexible. All the more should the analytic of power becomes necessary.

What are the characteristics of such an analytic? (1) First, it needs to be responsive to the sensibilities of the poor. It should bear out an analysis from the perspective of the victims of the system. Those holding political and economic power have their own analysis; the IMF-World Bank also presents another; as well as those who make ‘culture’ their main business (media moguls, lifestyle gurus, fashion designers, etc.). Our analysis should have a specific bias — not the bias of the powerful but of those excluded from power. The bottom-line question is: “What do the poor say when we analyze society this way? Is this their perspective as well?” (2) Second, the analytical framework needs to be critical. Since we intend to unmask the complex mechanisms of power, the analytic must be judicious and critical. (3) Third, it must be scientific. We need all the resources that the present human and social sciences can give us in order to understand poverty, the systemic mechanism of exclusion that causes it, uncover its hidden dynamics, and search for more effective ways towards helping the victims. (4) It must also be effective and practicable. Our analytic of power should not stop on the level of analysis (and paralysis). It should also provide a way to think of practical actions in order to alleviate the suffering of the victims. The poor are not so much interested in our theoretical discourses. They always ask the practical question: “So, what shall we do now?”

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<sup>51</sup> See Call for Papers to the Indonesian Joint Meeting.

What consequences have this practical analytic to our way of dealing with those in power? For one, it is about time to do away with a simplistic reply common among Vincentians: that we should make the poor and the rich come together — so that the rich may share their abundance with the poor and the poor become rich in the eyes of God! As we have seen, it is not that simple. On the one hand, sharing out of one's abundance can sometimes be a legitimization of a mechanism that keeps the poor at their places and poses permanent hindrance for their liberation. It can serve as an act of 'sprinkling holy water' on their injustices, to use a phrase from Marx. On the other hand, we have also seen that the poor are not 'saints'. Critical analysis of power makes us see where in society God already works and where the Good News still needs to be preached.

#### ***4.2. Openness to Multiple Responses***

As we have seen, Vincent was open to multiple and flexible responses. He can talk with the King or prostrate in front of the Queen or her Ministers. If these do not work, he can tell them directly to resign since they are the root of the problem or write them letters suggesting courses of action that can pacify or mitigate the impact of their presence. In all these multiple lines of actions, there was just one guiding principle: the response should be able to help alleviate the suffering of the poor.

This tells us that it is salutary to integrate helpful aspects from different, even opposite perspectives. One does not have to rely on one direction alone. The Spirit of God blows where S/he wills. Some recent frameworks of social analysis — either from the left or the right — have become quite dogmatic and doctrinaire. When theories and systems become fixed, they will become idols. Idols demand unquestioning obedience and wholehearted worship. Such uncritical stance has produced the Gulag or Auschwitz, Cambodian killing fields and Philippine Martial Law, the 9/11 event and 'axis of evil' discourse. 'Flexibility' has always been a crucial political virtue — and a Vincentian virtue as well.

#### ***4.3. The Centrality of the Concrete Person***

Beyond all efforts to come to a practical and strategic analysis, what still proves crucial to Vincent is the concrete human person in front of him — his/her actual needs, his/her specific concerns. All theories must be able to advance the well-being of the concrete person. This is the lacuna of Foucault's analysis. Even as he is

sensitive to macro-micro dynamics of the hegemonic system, he also neglects the fact that there are relatively free agents — concrete persons — who can exert some acts of resistance. This point challenges us to put a concrete face to our analysis. A concrete name, a concrete need, a concrete face is always a reliable check on the effectiveness of our analysis.

For all his many works — from the world of the court to ecclesiastical circles, from visiting his foundations in far-flung places to taking care of the Daughters or the confreres — Vincent never failed to do one crucial thing. He made it a point to personally serve or have some time to listen to the raw complaints or actual stories of poor persons in the gates of Saint Lazare every time he comes home from a trip. For him, the concrete person is the endpoint of all our strivings. There is one side-note that catches my attention in Roman's biography of St. Vincent. After having convinced the Ladies of Charity that the work of the Foundlings had to continue, the Daughters had to distribute them to the houses of different foster mothers all over Paris since they could not be accommodated in one house. Louise de Marillac, who was directly in-charge, kept a register of the different placements of children. And Roman wrote: "Vincent checked this register and (a touching detail) signed it with his own hand."<sup>52</sup> This means that Vincent did know where each individual child went, who the foster mothers were, and their concrete whereabouts. It was a 'detail' but it was crucial for him. Vincent did not serve the 'universal poor' or an 'abstract humanity'. Each concrete child, each concrete beggar, the concrete sick person — was the reason to all his numerous undertakings.

#### ***4.4. The Reality of Power and the Formation of our Candidates***

There are two things I want to stress with regard to the issue of power in the formation of our candidates. First, our students need to be acquainted with recent trends in social analysis and apply them to their contexts. They need to be critical to the social, economic, political and cultural movements of our times and how these impact on their lives and those of the poor. They need to be taught how to read newspapers or listen to TV news critically. We should not only train seminarians to faithfully read their breviaries and pray their rosaries. For, as we have seen, even religion and spirituality can become institutions of hegemonic oppression. The dominant power is so inventive that it penetrates all aspects of contemporary life. And

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<sup>52</sup> JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, *St. Vincent de Paul: A Biography*, 489.

if we listen to St. Vincent, charity (that is, political charity) — if it is to counter such a flexible oppressive machine — it also needs to be inventive unto infinity.

Beyond critical social analysis, however, there is also a need to learn how to discern power at work in our own lives. It is only when one is self-reflective that s/he can critically discern the power dynamics at work outside, i.e., in the socio-political spheres. A famous psychologist, Rollo May,<sup>53</sup> outlines five levels of power at work in the life of a person: (1) 'exploitative power': a type of power as force which is resorted to in extreme inequality between two peoples or groups; (2) manipulative power: a desire to control beyond brute force and is done through manipulation, exploitation or trickery; (3) competitive power: impulse to either crush the opponent or excel in one's potential, thus, it is ambivalent; (4) nutrient power: power used for the benefit of the other though not to one's equal; (5) integrative power: a power with the other person as equal, one which is characterized by mutuality and respect. Formators shall help the students to discern their location in the above continuum of power leading them out of their experience of exploitative compulsions towards nurturing and integrative power or, to go back to our framework, from the ambivalent fields of 'power over' to the empowering horizons of 'power with'.

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<sup>53</sup> ROLLO MAY, *Power and Innocence* (New York: Norton, 1972).

# STUDY

## *350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Delivery of the Common Rules*

### The Spirituality of Work According to Saint Vincent de Paul

by José Ignacio Fernández H. de Mendoza, C.M.

#### **“HE DISTRIBUTED THE BOOK OF OUR RULES”**

On May 17, 1658, Vincent de Paul spoke before the community of Saint Lazare about the observance of the Common Rules. After stating with great emotion the motives and means to put them into practice, he reminded the missionaries that, in imitation of Jesus Christ who began to do before he taught, the Company had observed these rules for thirty three years (1625-1658). The Saint, not being able to contain his sentiments, manifested before the community his personal convictions, those proper to a man of faith, about the origin of the Rules. They must be attributed to God, and only to God. They were being pieced together, one after another in the measure that new situations required. Finally it seemed appropriate to have them written down and distributed to the members of the Community. The event occurred, as has been said, May 17, 1658. It has been three and a half centuries since then. In May 2008 we celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this solemn act. Those who recount the event say that those who heard San Vincent “were not able to contain their tears and they felt diverse movements of joy in their souls” (SVPEs XI, 331).

The Common Rules contain the fundamental directives of Saint Vincent, referring to the life of perfection of the missionaries. They

have had a determining repercussion on the life of the Congregation for three and a half centuries (1658-2008). Today we find them printed in the same volume as the Constitution and Statutes of the Congregation. They lack judicial value, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they continue to be a place of reference for the sons of Saint Vincent.

**“WORKS DIRECTED TO THE SALVATION OF THE NEIGHBOR”  
(CR I, 1)**

The Common Rules are comprised of twelve chapters, each one with a distinct nature. Reading them carefully, we observe here and there the diverse ministries of the missionaries. At no time did Saint Vincent pretend to name all of the activities or ministries that in 1658 were carried out by the missionaries, much less put down in the Common Rules detailed reference to the occupations of the missionaries. To get to know them better, we have other writings of the founder: conferences, letters, prayer repetitions and rules. Truthfully for one reason or another there are numerous works mentioned within the texts of the Common Rules. The catalogue is extensive. The Congregation of the Mission proposes to imitate Christ “in the works directed towards the salvation of our neighbor... to preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas [and] to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue so that they can be effective in their ministry” (CR I, 1). What is stated refers to the general program of the Company, in order to achieve its own goal: to follow Jesus Christ evangelizer of the poor.

It is a function of the clerics “to travel through the towns and villages breaking the bread of the divine Word by preaching and catechizing” (CR I, 2). They are equally responsible to hear general confessions, settle disputes, establish the confraternity of charity, staff the external seminaries, give retreats, convoke conferences for the priests in their homes and perform other activities in conformity with the works enumerated. “The lay members help in these ministries like Martha” (CR I, 2).

We have before us a very complete design of the activity of the missionaries. But not all is said. In the following line the Saint will tell us that the Spirit of Jesus Christ shines through us in “the love for the sick,” in the missions and other activities (CR I, 3). “We will practice indifference including in the way we direct, teach and preach” (CR II, 11); poverty and chastity are to be practiced before all, “in our works and in the missions” (CR III, 2; CR IV, 1). Avoid idleness; mother of all vices, “always making good use of his time” (CR IV, 5).

Chapter VI is rich in allusions to a specific activity: the attention given to the sick of the house and those outside. It is concretized in visits to them and in the corporal and spiritual help given. There must be great efforts made “to found and visit the confraternities of charity” (CR VI, 1). It is the duty of the missionaries “to encourage others to receive and participate frequently in the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist” (CR X, 6). In Chapter X, Saint Vincent limits the penance of his priests because of “the continuous work of the missionaries” (CR X, 15). Following this he talks about another ministry: “Catechize the poor, especially the beggars, whenever the occasion presents itself” (CR X, 20). It will be in the following chapter that he will talk about the missions and other ministries of the Congregation in favor of our neighbors. We limit ourselves in enumerating the diverse activities that are mentioned here: spiritual direction, missions and retreats (CR XI, 2.5.6.7), preaching, catechism, hearing confessions and resolving disputes (CR XI, 3.4.8). The ministry of the missions must be the first and principal work for our neighbor (CR XI, 10); we must also “direct the Daughters of Charity” (CR XI, 11). We must not disregard many other activities: “In our homes with the external ecclesiastics, especially those who are to be ordained and the seminarians, and with those who make retreats” (CR XI, 12).

In Chapter XII, Saint Vincent offers some considerations in carrying out assertively some of the ministries mentioned beforehand: intention of pleasing God alone (CR XII, 2), never be dominated by vanity if our results are obvious, nor distressed if they turn out wrong (CR XII, 3); always be simple in the missions, in preaching, catechism and services to the clergy (CR XII, 5.6). A decisive point is the one which Saint Vincent reiterates often: it is bad to have the “undisciplined craving for learning,” but students “are not to neglect, because of this, their dedication to the studies necessary in order to carry out properly the activities of a missionary” (CR XII, 8).

One must be attentive to two vices that threaten us. The first one is the spirit of laziness that, according to Saint Vincent, leads us to search for comfort and the extreme care of our health, to the detriment of an interest in work. The second is an exaggerated zeal that places the person at the border of emptiness and cause them to act harshly towards themselves and towards others (CR XII, 11).

When he was finishing the text for the Common Rules, Saint Vincent reminds us of the five virtues which “make up the spirit of the Mission” (CR XII, 12). The missionaries will appreciate them, but “overall in the exercising of our ministries” (CR XII, 12). The founder

wants missionaries who are given to their works, to certain ministries, to the established order and true to the mission of the Company.

The Common Rules state, as we have seen, the path on which day by day the activities will make their way for the members of the Congregation.

## VINCENT DE PAUL: TIRELESS WORKER

An example is worth more than a hundred sermons. Vincent de Paul spoke on diverse occasions before people, in and out of the community about work. But his words were consistent with his personal example. He was a man fully given to his work: "Let us love God, my brothers, love God, but with the strength of our arms" (SV XI, 40). "Some are happy enough talking to God in their prayers, but when it comes to work for God, of suffering, and mortification of instructing the poor... all falls down and their strength is gone. Let us not lie to ourselves. *Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit*" (SV XI, 41-42). He expressed his convictions about work with authority because he did more than what he said. There were no empty spaces in his agenda.

The first biographers, as well as the recent ones, tell us of Saint Vincent's occupations: the list is broad. We give, in a brief synthesis, the general lines of his occupations. He was the Superior General of the Mission and responsible for Saint Lazare. He followed day to day the formation of his missionaries, paying particular attention to his major work, the Mission. He did the same in relation to the Daughters of Charity: founding, orientation and spiritual formation. He followed step by step the evolution of the new Company. On the other hand, he assumed responsibilities related to new lay groups: Ladies of Charity and the Confraternity of Charity. He dedicated time to the clergy with the Tuesday conferences and retreats for those to be ordained. He did all of the above mentioned without leaving other occupations: services to the nuns of the Visitation, the council of conscience, chaplain to the galleys, help in devastated regions and missions in the towns in which he participated well into his later years. These and other activities kept him fully employed. During the thirty years that he lived at Saint Lazare, he rose at four in the morning and went to bed at nine in the evening, after working ten to twelve hours. He dedicated many hours to correspondence — about thirty thousand letters to diverse addressees — and to the preparation of speeches to various groups: Daughters of Charity, missions, clergy and laity.

An incentive to personally work and at the same time to teach about this to his followers, he used, on the one hand, a saying from Mr. Duval: a priest must have more work that he can accomplish (SV X, 202) and on the other hand the example of the laziness of the religious and the idleness of the clerics of the epoch. The mendicant orders had lost their proper spirit, converting the petition of alms to a pretext to live at the expense of the work of others. Even in the Mission there were some backsliders in carrying out some of the works begun by the Founder: "It might happen that after my death some spirits of contradiction and easy-going confreres may say: Why should I take care of those hospitals? How can I take care of those people ruined by war...? ... some may criticize these works" (SV XII, 89-90).

Vincent de Paul, moved at seeing the poverty of his contemporaries, started many works in favor of the poor. Vincent counted on collaboration with other persons such as missionaries, Daughters of Charity and laity. It has been said that it is easier to do work on your own than to involve others but this is not the case for Saint Vincent. He personally worked hard and successfully involved many others in being fully committed in this noble enterprise.

## **A SIGNIFICATIVE CONTRIBUTION**

We have said repeatedly that Saint Vincent was not a systematic theologian. This was not what he pretended to do and he did not give any doctrinal treaty elaborated to perfection. This does not mean that his contributions, in what refers to our reflection about work, can be called insignificant. We can say, to start with, that in his writings, his speeches and his practical work we can always find a place for it. He was personally, as it was said, an untiring worker and he was surrounded by men and women workers. He fed the spirituality of his missioners by frequently alluding to the obligation and the grandeur of work. More so, he supported his convictions in this respect on the firm base of the divine revelation: the creative activity of God, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and the responsible collaboration of humanity.

Vincent de Paul knew the theological reflection of his time about work. Without being original, he offered us some orientations that were specific and valuable. Whoever goes to the biography of the Saint and consults the passages that refer to work will be pleasantly surprised. He did not limit himself to a certain school or system, but knowing them, he elaborated and gave a synthesis with his own color, a synthesis constructed upon materials taken from the Holy

Scripture, theological tradition and an “in situ” reading of the signs of the times, the poor in particular, who had to be liberated in their corporal and spiritual needs, culminating in this way the creating work of God and liberating gesture of the incarnate Son of God. As long as there are poor, both things are incomplete. For the poor, it is worthwhile to start the task, to eliminate all that obscures the creative and redemptive work of God.

## **FUNDAMENTAL INDICATIONS**

The Common Rules of the Mission contain, as we have said, an extensive catalogue of the activities proper to the missionaries although they are not rich in commentaries about human work in itself. What refers to work is found in the letters and conferences to the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity. Among the testimony preserved, one is more noticeable, by its length, solidity and reasoning: the conference given on November 28, 1649 to the Daughters of Charity. Its title is “*On the love of work.*” Gleaning here and there, we can see some pointers that the saint makes with major emphasis. What he deals with are the powerful, thoughts about the meaning of work and the obligation to work.

## **GOD HAS NOT SPENT “A SINGLE MOMENT WITHOUT WORKING”**

Vincent de Paul took advantage of the theological conclusions in reference to work from humanity, shaped by the long Church tradition. However what was received from other hands, provides a step forward in order to give a solid foundation to his personal convictions about work. With this purpose he turned to, among other things, the word of God, where he found valuable paradigms, and was able to extract practical conclusions.

In the founding bull for the Congregation, he reminds us “that we are bound to honor the mystery of the Trinity” (CR X, 2). From the mystery of the Trinity he is going to take in this case, a life lesson: “God himself worked continuously, continuously He has worked and works. God works through all eternity within himself for the eternal generation of his Son, which will never cease to engender. The Father and the Son have never ceased in their dialogue, and that mutual love has produced eternally the Holy Spirit, through which they have, are and will distribute all of the graces to humanity” (SV IX, 489).

Vincent de Paul directs, in this case, his vision toward the transcendence of the God, One and Triune. In remembering the

explanations he had heard in the classroom about the inter-Trinitarian relation, he extracts the first conclusion: in imitation of God, that is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who works in his being, we are compelled to work with the sweat of our brows.

The founder of the Mission continues his discourse: “*God works, also, outside of Himself in the creation and preservation of this great universe, in the movements of the heavens, in the influences of the stars, in the productions of land and sea, in the nature of the atmosphere, in the regulation of the seasons and in all that beautiful order which we observe in nature, and which would be destroyed and would return to nothing, if God was not constantly guiding it*” (SV IX, 489). Vincent de Paul calls, in the next moment, to God the creator, and following the established theological guidelines, also conserver. God does not stop taking part in the work realized by his hands. God is involved continuously in sustaining it. God is present in the history and the outcome of the events. The project that God created and maintained is unfolded here among us. From what is said we can extract a lesson: collaborate like good workers in the procreative work of God: “*Humanity created in the image of God, through his work, participates in the creative work of God*” (*Laborem exercens*, 25). Human work here finds its reason for being.

Vincent de Paul, who has looked upon the creative God, offers us new shades of meaning: “*In addition to this general work, God works with each individual, with the draftsman in his workshop, with the woman in her housework, with the ant, with the bee, to do their collecting, and He does so constantly and continually. And why does He work?... for us*” (SV IX, 489). In other words, humanity collaborates in the transformation of the work created by God and it is in this collaboration that we find the dignity and authentic meaning of work. The Second Vatican Council teaches us: “*Humanity with its works develops the work of its creator, serves the good of its brethren and personally contributes in the carrying out of God’s design in history*” (*G. et S.*, 34). The Vincentian thought coincides, then, with the conciliar teaching. Let Vincent be the one to conclude this section “*how reasonable it is, that we, God’s creatures, should work, as He has said, in the sweat of our brows!*” (SV IX, 490).

### **“WHAT DID OUR LORD DO WHILE HE LIVED ON EARTH?”**

The “*imitatio Christi*” occupies a central place in the Vincentian spirituality. The language of the founder in this respect is multiform: to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, to conform our sentiments to his, to work as our Lord worked, Jesus Christ is the invisible frame to

which we have to form our actions. The resources in the following of Jesus Christ are many: in the virtues, sufferings, work, through which path life and Christian behavior, as Vincent tells us, gain meaning and security.

*“What did Our Lord do while he lived on earth.... He led two lives on earth. One, from his birth until His thirtieth year of age, during which he worked with the sweat from his divine brow to make a living. His trade was that of carpenter; he carried the hod and served as an unskilled laborer and as bricklayer. From morning till night he worked in his youth and continued until his death.... The other stage of the life of Jesus Christ is from the age of thirty until his death. During these three years what did he not work at day and night, preaching at times now in the temple, at other times in a small town, without rest, to convert the world and win over souls for God his Father?”* (SV IX, 491-492) Vincent de Paul, in consonance with the life of the Son of God on earth, after contemplating his holy humanity, extracts another practical conclusion: Christ, the working man, asks that we be the same. In this respect he will say: this is the behavior of the Son of God; “we see him living by the work of his hands and in the lowliest and most arduous occupation in the world. And we, wretched, miserable creatures, are we going to be useless?” (SV IX, 492) we must share “in imitating the conduct of our Lord on earth; and earning a living in this manner, without wasting time, to earn a living as our Lord did” (SV IX, 492). On January 5, 1964, Paul VI left us, in Nazareth near the house of the carpenter, this message: “We want to greet all of the workers of the world and to offer the great model, our divine brother, the defender of all the just causes, in other words, Christ, our Lord.” In summary, human work contains a positive value in supporting the life of Jesus Christ the worker.

**“HE USED DAY AND NIGHT TO DO WHAT HE NEEDED TO DO, ASKING NOTHING FROM ANY ONE”**

A frequent resource for Saint Vincent was the example of Jesus Christ and the group formed by the persons that surrounded him during all his life in this world: Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, the holy women, the apostles and Paul of Tarsus. All of them form a theophanic picture that must be an obligatory reference: “We must work to imitate our Lord, his holy mother and Saint Joseph who worked all of their lives” (SV IX, 485).

Vincent de Paul had measured without a doubt, the reach of the biblical indications about Saint Paul the worker: “For we did not

act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone, but day and night through hardships and fatigue, we worked so that we would not be a burden to any of you” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8); Paul was housed in the home of Aquila and Priscilla “and since he practiced the same trade, he stayed with them and worked for them. They were tentmakers by trade” (Acts 18:3); “you know that these hands provided for my needs and those of my companions” (Acts 20:34).

In the prior reflection made by the Church about human work, the example of Saint Paul, just as they are presented in the passages just mentioned, has occupied a preferential place; it has been an obligated place of reference in dealing with this subject. Saint Vincent is not an exception. He is in tune with the example and the teachings of the Apostle of the people: “Saint Paul, the great apostle, the man full of God, the elected vessel, earned his living by working with his hands; in the midst of his heavy labors, of his important ministries, of his continual preaching. He took time, day and night, to be self-sufficient so as not to have to ask anything from anyone” (SV IX, 492-493). Saint Paul concludes his discourse about his condition as a worker with an invitation: to these “we recommend and exhort, in the name of Lord Jesus Christ, to work quietly and to eat their own food” (2 Thessalonians 3:12). Taking this for granted, Vincent de Paul also asked of his followers that they, following the example of Saint Paul, value the work for their own good and for all others: “Who would not be full of shame at such an example?” (SV IX, 493).

## **WORK: HUMANITY’S VOCATION**

The life and the teachings of Saint Vincent have little to do with a pessimistic vision of work in itself. According to the founder of the Mission the person who works rejoices in honor. In general terms his valuation of human work is high. God mandated humankind to make a living “by the sweat of their brows” (SV IX, 486). It deals with an “express mandate God gave humankind.... So specific that no one can be exempted from it” (SV IX, 487). This mandate does not seem to be a punishment or malediction on God’s part. It has to be considered for what it is, a fundamental human vocation: the work realized by humanity “to reach better life conditions, considered in itself, responds to the will of God” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 34). On the other hand, because of sin “work serves us as a penance by the fatigue it causes the body” (SV IX, 487); “*the farmer we see behind the plow tilling the soil and producing the grain that will feed people, fulfills this*

*commandment, for their bodies suffer from it and toil at it with the result that sweat often pours from their faces*" (SV IX, 487); *O God, "what a lesson you give us in the farmers of the field, the artisans in the city, the soldiers who go to war! They work unceasingly and suffer greatly for things that perish with them"* (SV VIII, 112). Certainly work has its limitations, for example, the inadequacy existing between the efforts and the results, the logic of the permanent obligation and the fatigue inherent in human activity. That fatigue offers humanity the possibility of participating in the paschal mystery: "Supporting the fatigue of work in union with Christ crucified for us, humanity collaborates in a certain way, with the Son of God in the redemption of humanity" (*Laborem exercens*, 27).

## **OTHER VINCENTIAN CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WORK**

### ***You Will Work with Your Knowledge and the Strength of Your Arms***

In Greek society not all human activities were considered equally dignified. Reason, culture and the marketplace had priority before the work that was proper to the artisan. Intellectual work prevailed over manual work. This hierarchy of the human activity has influenced Christian thought, even though the biblical concept of work was adapted to other measures. All work has identical dignity. There are no reasons to undervalue corporal work or to overvalue the activities of the spirit. Vincent de Paul considers all activities as equally dignified "You will work not only with your mind, but also with your hands, with your arms and your entire body, and will work so hard that sweat will fall from your brow" (SV IX, 487).

### ***Work in the Service of the Community***

The theological reflection about work has definitively reclaimed one aspect, which is recognized by the ecclesial magisterium. Human activity unfolds fraternally for help and promotion in support of the community. Saint Vincent will say: "*Thirdly, you must do it with the thought that you are working in the service of the neighbor, which is so cherished by God, that he considers as done for him, whatever is done for the relief of others*" (SV IX, 497). This aspect of work is the one most sought out by Vincentian spirituality. The goal for Vincent de Paul for the groups which he founded coincides at a central point: we exist and are for others and in particular, for the poor. Everything moves around this principle: people, time, work, ministries and goods.

An example taken from nature illustrates what we say: “The ant is such a little creature to which *God has given such foresight, that it takes to the community all that it can accumulate in the summer and in the harvest time*” (SV IX, 488); “*the bees do the same during the summer. They store up the honey, gathered from the flowers, so they can live on it during the winter and, like the ants, they bring it also to the community*” (SV IX, 489). “*And if the bees do this, as we have said before, by gathering the honey from the flowers and taking it to the beehives for the nourishment of the others, why are you, who must be heavenly bees, not going to do it?*” (SV IX, 490). The thinking of Saint Vincent coincides with recent directives of the magisterium: “Work seems to multiply the patrimony of all the human family, for all of the people who work in the world” (*Laborem exercens*, 10). Through work, the individual personally realizes himself, is integrated in society and shares bread with others around the common table.

### ***Work in not an Absolute Value***

Human beings have suffered in relation to work in two temptations. At times it has idolized it; people have exalted production and competition to the point of desiring success and money over all other good things. On occasions they have converted it into the undeniable center of life, the supreme value. Work, instead of being a means, became a goal itself.

The word of God dismantles this fallacy. God created the world in six days and on the seventh day He rested. It is said that work does not represent the totality of human life. Jesus, on the other hand, in the parable of the rich man (Luke 12:13-21) puts the overvaluation of human work into perspective. Neither work nor production is capable of guaranteeing life. Vincent de Paul moves in this same direction: “I am sure, Father, that you are suffering from having been deprived for such a long time of doing the principal works of the company; but, aside from the fact that you do them in part, in so far as you are serving souls for eternity and are showing priests how they should act, by the virtues you practice, you *also have the means of honoring the inactivity of Our Lord by not forging ahead — I mean with all your zeal — in the enormous tasks of apostolic workers*” (SV VII, 489). In similar terms John Paul II expresses himself, “humanity must imitate God in work and in rest, as God has desired also to present his own creation under the form of work and rest” (*Laborem exercens*, 25).

The second temptation invites us to underestimate work, to accept it with resignation, as something lacking in meaning. Saint Vincent

de Paul finds himself at odds with this version. Frequently and energetically he comments in his speeches about the vice of idleness: *"I confess that idleness can be a frequent stumbling block and that missionaries more than any other person in the world must avoid it, because they are made for work"* (SV VII, 488-489); to the lazy person, *"they will be pleased to sit close to the fire or not move very far from it"* (SV IX, 463). Effectively those who underestimate work, impede the circulation of the divine mandate: "You will eat your bread in the sweat of your brow" (Gen 3:19) and cut off the creative capacity that God has given us.

The gospel of Matthew reminds us that the owner of the vineyard went out to hire workers and said "why do you stand here all day idle?" (Mt 20:6-7). In the vineyard, it is the same now as it was before, there is always work. The poor of the world are legion. This is motive enough to accept the universal law of working together. It is ours.

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