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Fruits of the Mission

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA
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To All the Members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

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

"And there was no room for them."

The above title is taken from Luke’s gospel, chapter 2 verse 7, well known to all of us; it is proclaimed at the Midnight Mass of Christmas. This Advent, my brothers and sisters, I would ask us to reflect on this concept of no room left for them, no room left for others, no room. They are left out, those uncared for, rejected. Jesus himself was born into that situation and he experienced it throughout the whole of his life, even at the end, being completely rejected, condemned to die a criminal’s death on a cross.

Jesus, especially in Luke’s gospel, shows his solidarity with those rejected and marginalized. The lepers were those of his day, left out, abused, often mocked. The season of Advent, my brothers and sisters, gives us an opportunity to reflect seriously on who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are called to follow Jesus, but not at a distance, nor in his shadow. But we are called to walk on the heels of his feet; in other words, so close that we ourselves experience the spirit that motivated him to do the Father’s will.

My Christmas story for this Advent deals with an attempt to reach out to those forgotten, those left out, those for whom there was no room. Working as a formator in the mission in Panama, I would, as superior of the house, give the Panamanian confrere the opportunity to be with his family during the days of Christmas since the students were away as well. I would assume the pastoral responsibilities that we had — three to four Masses during the special days throughout the week of Christmas. To be honest, I felt the absence of my
community, both seminarians and fellow formator. I felt the loneliness.

During a number of years I would gather together during Christmas with certain people. One in particular was a prisoner who was serving a sentence for drug trafficking but because of good behavior was given permission to spend the weekends with us doing pastoral service oriented activities. Then there was the young jockey who had been forced to abandon his homeland and family for having gotten involved seriously with some illegitimate operations of a radical movement in his country. There was a young lady who lived in the interior of the country of Panama, but because of her job was not free to travel to be with her family.

With this group, and with others, we would gather on Christmas Eve, first going to Eucharist together, then returning to the house and preparing a meal that we would share with others including the street people who “lived” in our neighborhood. Afterwards we sang songs and they danced and had a good time celebrating the joy of Christ having been born in our lives.

My brothers and sisters, as we prepare to receive more fully Christ into our lives, I ask you to consider what place you give to those for whom there is no room.

I have been particularly struck, overwhelmed to say the least, in a number of my most recent visits to the Vincentian Family throughout the world, precisely dealing with the issue of the marginalized and outcast. The first experience was in Madagascar. There is a tribe that have been outcast from the society for more than 500 years. They are those whom the rest of the society consider, as one of our missionaries told me, to be like dogs. And it was precisely one of our French confreres who showed his solidarity with these outcasts by living in their midst, sharing their lives, and eating their meals. As the story was told, he then said to them, “Look, I too am a dog.” Today the Vincentian Family, and particularly another French confrere of the mission in Madagascar, is working with the children of the outcasts in order that they be integrated into the society little by little. It is a difficult task to achieve. No one wants to talk about those who are left out. No one wants to know that a problem exists.

In my experience in Congo I learned a great deal about the outcast tribe there, the pygmy, a people who only live for others. They make themselves slaves. That is what they understand themselves to be. They live on the periphery of the villages; they keep a distance from the rest of the people. When eye contact is made, they lower their heads.
Recently I read the thesis summary of one of our Nigerian confreres, who wrote about the outcast tribe, the Osu in his country. The discrimination brought against them by other people of their own country is unbelievable.

It has made me want to think and reflect: it is not just in certain countries that such discrimination occurs. In all of our societies there are those who are outcast, those who are marginalized, those it is considered taboo to relate with. In other words, it is those for whom there is no room.

The different types of discrimination, the rejection one toward another can be understood as a form of racism. Racism in itself is a form of fear, fear of the unknown, fear of those who are different from oneself. Racism consists of the intentional practices as well as the spontaneous processes, all a consequence of negative attitudes toward other social groups.

From early childhood all of us form prejudices. Prejudices are conditioned by our culture and can only be transformed when our consciences are raised. We need to come to know others, putting our fears aside. Oftentimes people are treated inhumanely with cruelty or degradation simply because they are different.

These are the major difficulties many immigrants throughout the world are experiencing. Recently I read a report concerning the discrimination that immigrants experience in Libya, or the discrimination that the Filipinos experience in many of their host countries. This type of racism or discrimination oftentimes legitimizes modern forms of slavery, exploitation often involving violence. We need to recognize that racism in itself is more than simply a feeling of racial superiority. Rather it is a structural system of social, political and economic domination. As Christians we believe in the universality of God’s love. We cannot allow nor tolerate such forms of exclusion and discrimination.

I pray and hope that this Advent might help us to deepen our commitment as followers of Jesus Christ, evangelizing and serving the poor, particularly those who are left alone, those who are left out, the marginalized. Hopefully, in one way or another, we can share their loneliness, their exclusion, their being considered less than the rest. And feeling our solidarity with them, together we might be able to live the true meaning of Christmas and feel more fully united with Him who was born into a world that had no room for Him.

Today Christ continues to be born into that situation and we are called to follow in his footsteps, close upon his heels, making ourselves one with the forgotten, the abandoned, the lonely, the outcast, the excluded.
In my most recent visit to a refugee camp in Thailand, the young people there made a plea to me which I consider a plea to us all: “Pray for us Father, do not forget us or abandon us as others have.”

The subject of those for whom there is no room, my brothers and sisters, is of utmost importance, so much so that I will continue to reflect on this throughout the year, particularly in my Lenten conference in preparation for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the universal Prince of Peace.

May Mary, the mother of God and our mother, gently guide us as we seek to conform our lives to the life of her Son.

“... and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
TEMPO FORTE CIRCULAR
(8-12 December 2008)

Rome, 12 January 2009

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!

From the 8-12 December we held our regular tempo forte meeting. I would like to share with you some of the more significant points that we discussed concerning the general operation and direction of the Congregation.

1. General Curia

- We evaluated a petition made by Brother Milton Pereira de Jesus, who after a three-month period of experience in the General Curia, had asked to return to his province of origin. I and the General Council have responded positively to his petition. The service that Brothers provide in the General Curia is not an easy service, as those who have done this know well. We as a Council have decided to make a general request to the Congregation of the Mission and to any brother, with the approval of his Visitor, who would like to give a service to the Congregation in the General Curia. We would ask a commitment of three years, but as has been our procedure, there would be a three-month probation period. Any Brother who may be interested should speak with his Visitor, and then have his Visitor, if he is in agreement, write to the Superior General with your offer.

- The Superior General and his Council decided to invite the Director General of the Daughters of Charity to an annual meeting with the Council during a tempo forte meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to help us to improve our quality of service to the Daughters of Charity throughout the world.

2. Economic Questions

- Besides the report given by the Econome General, we discussed a number of issues related to economy, particularly the world economic crisis and the impact that it has had on the
international Congregation especially with regard to its investments.

- There will be a course for Provincial Economes at the level of the Union of Economes General. Two confreres from English-speaking countries will be participating.
- We also discussed prolonging the commitment for a period of three years of Bernard Meade and Philippe Lamblin, two members of the Curia Finance Committee.
- We reviewed the annual report of each province, and the Superior General will be sending a letter regarding each of these reports. I remind those provinces who have not turned in their reports, to please do so in order that we might have that information here in the Curia as soon as possible.
- The following budgets were approved: the house budget of the Curia, the mission of Papua New Guinea, the mission of El Alto, the budget of the Vincentian Marian Youth international, the special request from MISEVI for the support of one missionary in the new mission in Angola, the History project, SIEV, the assistant to COVIAM, the Office to the United Nations, the communications office, the Office of the Vincentian Family, the Vincentian Solidarity Office. The Council also approved a donation of $1,000 for the foundation Ozanam-Vincent de Paul to publish the Acts of the gathering held in honor of Giorgio La Pira.

3. The Systemic Change Award and Mission Award

- It was decided in this General Council meeting to alternate years between the Systemic Change Award, which will be presented in January 25, 2009 and the Mission Award which will be presented in July, 2010. The following years the winners will be published in July, giving the Visitors and confreres a longer opportunity to present their projects for consideration.
- Eight projects were presented for the Systemic Change Award and three were selected.

4. Vincentian Family Report

- A report was presented of Sister Maria Pilar’s meetings in Untermarchtal, 30 September - 4 October of the Federation of the Sisters of Charity and in San Pedro Sula, Honduras 9-12 October of the Vincentian Family of Central America.
- At the CIF Program in Paris in November Father Ginete offered four conferences under the general heading of the Vincentian Family as Partners in the Worldwide Mission.
• Some of the projected activities that Father Ginete has for the coming months are: the Vincentian Family International Heads meeting in Madrid at the end of January; workshops on systemic change in Mexico in February, in Brazil in June, Cameroon in July and Bangkok in November. Father Ginete will also accompany AIC’s International Assembly in Mexico in February as well as an AIC African seminar in Cameroon, taking advantage of the fact that he will be present in these countries for the workshops on leadership. At the same time he will represent the Superior General in the COVIAM meeting to be held after the Continental workshop in Cameroon. The last major event in 2009 will be participation in the AMM international meeting in November.

5. Vincentian Solidarity Office

Brother Peter Campbell presented a report. The recent activities of the VSO can be seen on the web page www.famvin.org/VSO.

6. Report from UN Representative

We received the report from Father Joseph Foley, the UN Representative. The highlight of his report was the announcement that 2009 has been proclaimed as the International Year of Reconciliation. This is a determination to pursue reconciliation processes in those societies affected or divided by conflicts; such processes are necessary for the establishment of firm and lasting peace. It also invites governments to implement adequate cultural, educational and social programs to promote the concept of reconciliation, encouraging holding conferences and seminars and disseminating information on the subject.

Father Foley also reported on a United Nations briefing on millennium villages. These villages are an integral approach to development with the hope of creating self-sustaining African villages. Since 2005, eighty villages have been created in ten countries. Father hopes that the idea of millennium villages can be implemented through the Projects Committee for the 350th anniversary because of its relationship to our Vincentian charism and our work for systemic change.

Father Foley is working on a new website. It is in the process of being set up, and can be viewed at www.cm-ngo.org.

7. Report from CLAPVI

The most recent assembly that the Conference of Visitors in Latin America held, at which Father José Antonio Ubillús was present, had the election of their new team of directors. Those
elected to represent Latin America are the following: President, Fr. Daniel Vásquez of the Province of Colombia; Vice President, Fr. José Francisco Ramos of the Province of Central America; Executive Secretary, Fr. José Jair Vélez of the Province of Colombia; Members, Frs. Silviano Calderón of the Province of Mexico and Agnaldo Aparecido de Paula of the Province of Rio.

8. International missions

- We reviewed a number of reports and projects presented by the mission in El Alto. The superior reported on the situation of each of the confreres; we received a draft of the contract with the diocese. We reviewed a project for lay missionaries. Their community report and apostolic project were approved by the Council. In May 2009, the Assistant Father José Maria Nieto will visit El Alto; in August, Father José Antonio Ubillús, Assistant for Mission, will also pay a visit.

- We have good news from the mission of Papua New Guinea. A confrere from Nigeria, Justin Eke, has finally received a visa. He arrived and is in place in the new house with the superior Rolly Santo. Our confrere from the Province of Puerto Rico, Tulio Cordero, has finished his missionary experience in Papua New Guinea and returned to his home province. I want to thank both Justin and Tulio for their commitment to this international mission of the Congregation of the Mission.

- With regard to the international mission of the Solomon Islands, we have received some information regarding our new student candidates from Papua New Guinea who are presently in the formation program in Solomon Islands and the Fiji Islands under the responsibility of the Province of Australia.

- With regard to new candidates for mission, we have received requests from three confreres, one for immediate placement and two for future commitments to the international missions in 2010 and 2011. Even though the response on the part of the international Congregation to these international missions has not been plentiful, there has been sufficient interest. We are in the process of making appeals and will dialog with candidates and their Visitors.

I take this opportunity, as we close this circular on our recent tempo forte, to wish all of you a new year filled with happiness and peace and much energy to do the work of the Lord as he invites us.
I encourage you all to strive continually for a deeper knowledge of the spirit of the Congregation, returning always to the gospel and to the example and teaching of Saint Vincent, mindful that our spirit and our ministries ought to nourish one another (C. 8).

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

[Signature]

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General
Although the composition of this number of VINCENTIANA reflects a practical reason, it is still possible to find a theoretical justification. The practical reason is the gathering of some items which, for various reasons, have been left out of the bimonthly issues of VINCENTIANA. It seems fair to acknowledge the effort and emphasis by the authors. In trying to sort through them, it is easy to find them related in some way to the three purposes Saint Vincent proposed to missionaries as a target for their perseverance in the Congregation: their own perfection, the evangelization of the poor and the training of clergy. Without intending to, we have in this issue, continued the small tribute that we wanted to make to the Common Rules on the 350th anniversary of their being given to the missionaries. Issue n. 2 was devoted entirely to them, and we have continued with a study of them in each of the remaining issues of the year.

The theme of the our perfection is exemplified in the figure of the Blessed Ghebra. Antonio Furioli, M.C.C.J., in preparing his doctoral thesis on St. Justin of Jacobis, brings us closer to this figure who by his relentless search for truth and unwavering defense of the same, was exhausted to death in prison. Blessed Ghebra is undoubtedly an ideal of a faithful follower of Christ.

The evangelization of the poor is represented by a specific mission, the mission of the province of Zaragoza in Honduras, which is shared in some way throughout the province. Undoubtedly we could have chosen many other missions, all of them very worthy of attention and memory; but when we encountered this work we
saw it as a good example of a mission of integral evangelization, undertaken communally by the whole province, with the different competencies of its communities and individuals.

Finally service in the training of clergy has been treated by a man who has devoted many years of his life to this ministry. The subject is presented from the viewpoint of the importance the Social Doctrine of the Church must take in the formation of future priests. Different circumstances made it impossible for the article to be published in the previous issue of VINCENTIANA, and so it is presented in this issue.

We illustrated the mission by these examples because they represent how the objectives of the mission are successfully carried out.

VINCENTIANA closes once again for this year with a theme relating to the Common Rules. Although the Rules about the Community were not developed in terms which are used today, they are based on permanently valid principles such as the following of Christ in a community for the mission, which is built on love, the basis of a respectful and cordial service to the brothers.

Translation: Sister Mary Hale
The Most Precious Fruit of the Missionary Apostolate of St Justin de Jacobis

Blessed Gabra Mikäël (1791-1855), a Martyr for the Faith in Abyssinia

by Antonio Furioli, M.C.C.J.

"... your fathers were put to the test to see if they really had fear of... God. Abraham... precisely through testing... became the friend of God.

... and all who would please God were tested by many tribulations and remained faithful" (Jud 8:26).

Introduction

This past 30th July the Church celebrated the liturgical memorial of the dies natalis of St Justin de Jacobis, better known as abba Yaqob Märyäm¹ (1800-1860), who identified himself with the reserved, but proud, Abyssinian people, to such an extent that he embraced the cultural heritage and internalised it, personalising the friendly intuitions and wise adaptations, which make it one of the best inculcated Christian communities in Africa today.

This extraordinary adoptive son of Abyssinia² embraced and welcomed all that was valid and good in the prestigious "traditio" of the Orthodox Church, twin sister of the Church of Rome, which has "the preoccupation of all the Churches" (2 Cor 11:28), which look to

¹ "... this is the name by which I am known here" (Epistolario, 567; cf. also 557: 1473; Diario, parte II, 320).
² "... in this wonderful country, which is now my homeland..." (Epistolario, 1076); "... of my poor country of adoption" (ibid., 1225); "... the scholarly language of my second homeland" (ibid., 1273); "... this land which is also my homeland of choice..." (ibid., 1569).
her as "to her who presides in charity." Right from the start of his impassioned *diakonia missionaria*, abba Yaqob adopted the *ge'ez* rite and shared the simple authentic life of the Abyssinian people. He organised missionary residences in consultation with the local leaders, and in harmony with the socio-cultural ambience which had welcomed him. He established schools open to everyone where, in addition to general cultural material, the ancient disciplines of the almost two thousand year old Abyssinian Christian tradition were learned. Since, in virtue of his unusual apostolic ministry, he had to move continually from place to place, abba Yaqob Māryām had organised a "travelling seminary," which followed him around and learned on the spot practical pastoral care, imbued with a tireless capacity for listening and with a hands-on approach to the disregarded poor people, which is not found in the manuals. The seminarians did not learn from silent, disconnected, professorial pages of the ancient manuscripts in *ge'ez*, nor in silent and austere college halls, but from the actual example of abba Yaqob, who made himself into a *living book* of gospel synthesis for his beloved Abyssinian people.

In twenty-one years of intensive missionary life abba Yaqob Māryām, with a mind free from bias, and a sole desire of establishing links of brotherhood and friendship, accepted men and women from all levels of society, especially native monks and priests: "Many monks and priests come to me each day." In the last group, welcomed as an advance gift of communion between the two traditions of east and west, for integrated life, soundness of doctrine and the never ending search for truth, the figure of abba Gabra Mikă'el shines out, a genuine son of the soil, representative of the most authentic strand of the Abyssinian Orthodox tradition.

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4 "Besides, in the countryside our priests are no longer sufficient for the work, and I would have to make use of all the students of our little seminary for teaching the catechism to the children" (Epistolario, 1180-1181).

5 Ibid., p. 274.

6 "... perhaps the most learned man in all of Abyssinia..." (ibid., 779).

7 St Justin de Jacobis in his *Diario and Epistolario*, from the first reference on 29/06/1841 to the final one on 30/11/1858 refers to abba Gabra Mikă'el 146 times, in a total of 2,670 pages.
Biographical Sketch

Gabra Mikä’el (Michael’s servant) was born in 1791 in Dibo Didân Mehrat, in the Goggam region, to the east of the Blue Nile. His father was a certain Ato Akilo, but his mother’s name is still unknown. He was quick witted from childhood, and liked studying. Later on, in adolescence, as a result of a serious ophthalmic condition, he lost his left eye. At the age of twenty-five, a mature young man, he entered the strict monastery of Martula Måryäm, where he made his monastic profession. For about a year he lived separately as a hermit, according to the strictest observation of Abyssinian monasticism. Always seeking truth he went off to the monastery of Dabra Mosa (the Mountain of Moses) for intensive study of the Masłafa Manakosät (the book for monks), and also of the Masłafa buruk zadarsa Abû sîker (the holy book written by Abu Sakir).9

The extraordinary and demanding earthly pilgrimage of abba Gabra Mika’el will be to unravel the tiring but fascinating search for truth. This journey will be characterised by tireless research, the intimate joy of discovery, and the creative dream of his being incarnated into concrete human affairs, and the most heroic witness to Christ.

Schools of Christology

There was one disputatious area of theology which more than any other agitated and conditioned the Abyssinian Orthodox Church, and that was the age-old and complex question of Christology.10 There were three schools of Christology in Abyssinia: Karrä, Qebät and Yeseggä Lig; all of them admitted the deification of the human nature of the Word, but they could not agree among themselves on its modality. For the Karrä and the Qebät, the functions and peculiar characteristics of the human nature of the Word were annulled by the union of the two natures. On the other hand, for the Yeseggä Lig the human nature of the Word remains distinct and therefore

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9 The Abyssinian Mamheran, Scholars, speak of “gadla”, meaning “spiritual combat”, alluding to the biblical text: “Militia est vita hominis super terram” (Jb 7:1; cf. id., 14:14). [The author uses the English word “scholars”. Tr.]
separate from the divine nature. All three of the schools of Christology admitted the natural and not adoptive filiation, as the logical consequence of the deification of the human nature of the Word.

For the Kārrā school of Christology the deification took place through the union of the two natures. It affirms that the Word is the anointer, the anointed and the anointing, (the technical term in Ge'ez is wald qeb'e), in that way uniting the human nature of his distinct person, deifying it in the strict sense. For the followers of the Qebät school of Christology, the deification of the human nature of the Word took place through the anointing by the Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity the Father is the anointer, the human nature is the anointed and the Holy Spirit is the anointing, this latter understood as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Word. On the other hand, for the followers of the Yessegā Liğ school, within the Trinity the Holy Spirit is the life of the Word, while on the level of human nature he is gift. The Mamheran of this school affirm that the Father is the anointer, the human nature is the anointed, and the Holy Spirit is the anointing.

Another much debated matter was the number of Christ's births. Followers of the Kārrā and the Qebät held that there were two births of Christ: birth from the Father from all eternity and birth from Mary of Nazareth in the fullness of time and of history. On the other hand, the followers of the Yessegā Liğ school hold that there were three births: from the father, from the Virgin Mary and from the Holy Spirit through the anointing received in his human nature, by which Christ became the firstborn of all creatures (cf. Rm 8:29, Col 1:15-18). Abbā Gabra Mika’el had been happy as an adherent of this last theological school, even if he did not agree with all and every one of its positions. He demanded more of himself than of others, and threw himself headlong into the study of the Haymānota Abaw (Fides Patrum), but even this did not give an answer to his most intimate requirements. A deep personal crisis began for him, which plunged him into a painful interior solitude, because of his insatiable thirst for God: "Make me know Him whom my soul loves; I am, in fact, wounded by your love" (cf. Sg 3:2-4; 4:9; 5:8-16; 6:3; 7:11). Here we are dealing with that precise type of "insatiable interior dryness" which affects only the greatest souls, and which can never find complete satisfaction in this world. "I stretch out my hands, like

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11 Among his many students was the son of the Negus Teklè Ghiorgghis († 1817), the future Atziè Yohannes III (1840-1855), Rās of the Shoa.

12 This is a work on Christology translated from the Arabic around the middle of the 15th century.
"thirsty ground I yearn for you" (Ps 143:6). Such souls are constantly seeking the fountain and, having found it, drink thirstily from it, but in doing so they experience always an on-going thirst. In trying to cope with their thirst they will yearn with inextinguishable desire for Him for whom they will always have more thirst, continuously drinking Him in: “You have created us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

In the life of the contemplative vision of the good, there always follows the piercing problem of how, in actual fact, to pursue it; this is the gap between the thrilling intuitive moment which sees clearly, and the tormented discursive moment which works out slowly and tiringly. For this intellectual restlessness of his abba Gabra Mikā‘el took the decision no longer to ally himself to any of the above Christological schools, but to restrict himself to accepting truth as rigorously contained in Sacred Scripture alone.

A beggar in search of Truth

The bitter disillusionment in the face of the accepted teaching of his former mamheran, divided and sectionalised among themselves into opposing positions, and the intense “interior burning,” decided him to make himself a beggar in search of truth. The love and thirst, which he enthusiastically sought, are an interior wound which heals very slowly: “O God, you are my God, I seek you at dawn, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh pants for you, like arid, waterless, desert land” (Ps 63:1-2). He spent some time in the monasteries of Debra Barārē, Gundagundē, Debre Bizen, etc., and went through all their libraries, avidly poring over the pages of each book, entering deeply into the subtle presence of Someone who, silently, was present there and who alone gave meaning to the wisdom of those human words. Gabra Mikā‘el understood that he had to get himself into the religious listening mode, training himself in deciphering the Word, in choosing between subjective and objective inclinations, in dedicating himself to the burdensome welcoming of the Truth, and to its purifying obedience. As time went on the monk, transformed by the Spirit into a real cooperator Veritatis, came to understand that the books were useful, but that by themselves were not enough. This led to his decision to begin again, in the places where Jesus

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13 St Augustine, Confessions, Bk I, 1.

14 The Imitation of Christ teaches that the Christian should always be “semper paratus doceri” (Bk IV, ch. XVIII, 4). Note that the verb is in the passive voice, because of the context.
had lived and died. It was necessary to go right back to the origins of Truth. He therefore made his way to the port of Massawa, arriving in November 1840. He waited seven weeks there for a ship that would take him to the Holy Land, but it was an unsuccessful wait. Then a peremptory order from Webe, the dagiyat (general, governor of a province) reached him. He was to be a member of an important delegation, headed by abba Yaqob Māryām, which was on its way to Cairo to obtain from the Patriarch of the Orthodox Coptic Church an Abun for Abyssinia, which had not had one for thirteen years. On 17 February 1841 the ship on which the delegation was travelling set sail from Massawa for Cairo. On several occasions during the voyage abba Gabra Mika'el was able to share his doubts and his on-going research with abba Yaqob. Justin explained to him the centrality of conscience, and the importance of conscience which is unconditional opening up to Truth, which has an intrinsic link with Truth, and is uninterrupted listening to Truth. He also told him that personal conversion is never completely ended, because the "yes" which the Christian says to the God of Jesus Christ is never completed.

When they arrived in Cairo in May 1841 they went to the elderly Coptic Patriarch Petros who, after a few days of reflection, designated abba Andreas, an Egyptian monk barely twenty years of age, as the new Abun of Abyssinia. On the following 24 May he was consecrated bishop, taking the name Salāmā (peaceful), the third Abun to bear that name. This name indicated a whole programme, difficult to carry out given the actual situation in which Abyssinia found itself then.

Abba Yaqob had previously agreed with Webe that the delegation, once its business in Egypt had been concluded, should go on to

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15 The French historian and thinker Ernest Joseph Renan (1823-1892) wrote: "The Holy Land is the Fifth Gospel."

16 "Their [Christians'] teaching was not discovered by reflection and the research of men who loved novelty, nor are they basing themselves... on a human philosophical system" (Epistle to Diognetus, ch. 5; in Funk, 397).

17 In Eastern spirituality there was a huge class of persons (in Abyssinia the Batawi, in Russia the Stranniki) who spent their lives visiting sanctuaries, churches, monasteries, Mount Athos and the Holy Land. They were seeking God by means of this never-ending pilgrimage along the roads, to link up with the holy places of popular devotion, and so go through life in faithful imitation of the Galilean Wanderer, detached from everything and everyone, sticking to the programme of the one thing necessary (cf. Lk 10:42; see The Story of a Russian Pilgrim).

18 "... our Abuna is too young..." (Epistolario 869); "... in the hands of a young Coptic prelate..." (ibid., 1002).
Rome, followed by a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, before its final return to Abyssinia. Having obtained the necessary authorizations, the Abyssinian delegates set sail from Alexandria for Rome on 17 July 1841, arriving in Rome in the dead of night on 12 August. On the 15th, the feast of the Assumption, the delegation of important Abyssinians was invited to participate in the solemn pontifical celebration in the patriarchal basilica of St Mary Major, in the presence of Gregory XVI. On the 17th, the Pope warmly welcomed the members of the delegation at his summer residence, Monte Cavallo (today the Quirinale). Gregory XVI, who had been Prefect of Propaganda Fide, dialogued with them on their missions, showing a lively interest in what they had to say. At this event he was presented with a letter from the dagiyat Webe. At a second audience on the 29th, once again at the Quirinale, Gregory gave to the official representatives of the Abyssinian delegation his reply to Webe’s letter, together with costly gifts for himself.

The Abyssinians left Rome on 12 September 1841 and made a short visit to the [Vincentian] community, via dei Vergini in Naples, where abba Yaqob had been a student at first, then director and finally superior in 1838. Then “the delegation of Abyssinian nobles” was received by King Ferdinando II (1810-1859). On 5 October they set sail from Naples for Egypt, from where they were to go onwards to the holy places. All through their time in Christ’s homeland they were the guests of the “…charity of the most praiseworthy Fathers of the Holy Land;” “gratitude obliges me to let you know that the Frs of the Holy Land, whether in Jerusalem, Cairo or Alexandria, have showered on us the most generous and kindly attentions.” In the Constantinian basilicas of Jerusalem and Bethlehem abba Yaqob Māryām celebrated the Eucharist at which all the pilgrims participated. “We would willingly have stayed on in Jerusalem for a year, if their guide... had not prudently suggested leaving.”

On 15 December the pilgrims made their final farewell to the Holy Land and, even though with sad hearts, set out on the return journey.

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19 “Abba Ghebrè Michele. One of the most learned Deferi or teachers in all Abyssinia and third delegate” (ibid., 349).
20 Ibid., 312.
21 Ibid., 1054. Clement VI (1342-1352) in the Bulls Gratias agimus and Nuper carissime, in 1352 canonically established the Custody of the Holy Land, entrusting it to the Franciscans, administered by the Father Custodian.
22 Diario, parte ii, 292.
This double pilgrimage to Rome and Palestine proved more revealing than a course in theology. On 12 January 1842 they reached Cairo, paying a courtesy visit to the Patriarch Petros. On this occasion abba Gabra Mikä'el obtained an official document from him, which licensed him to teach the twofold generation of Christ, eternal and temporal, and his anointing by the Holy Spirit. In the Egyptian capital they became aware that abuna Salāma, contrary to the promise he had made to wait for them and make the journey together, had left for Abyssinia eight months before, in June 1841.

To be convinced only by evidence

Knowing full well the grave danger to which he was exposing himself, abba Gabra Mikä'el, in order to promote unity of faith among his co-religionists, headed for Gondar. He wished to hand over to abuna Salāma the official document which he had received from the Egyptian Patriarch Petros, which authorised him to teach, as the official creed of the Abyssinian Church, the doctrinal definition of the real nature of the Word: "We believe that Christ received the anointing of the Holy Spirit." In order to rescue him from the anger of the Abun, the empress Menen Leben Amede (1840-1853) had personally to intervene. The noisy failure of his plan, and the searing disillusionment which followed, decided the monk to take the crucial step, a decision which had been maturing, and to which he had been giving a lot of thought, for quite some time.

For abba Gabra Mikä'el, love of truth and the search for it, were the same thing as love of the true Church of Jesus Christ, and the search for it. In silence he held himself in a listening mode, and this interior waiting accustomed him to recognise the imperative from the Word. When he understood with absolute certainty that Catholicism was the natural development and legitimate complement of the Christian doctrine existing in the ancient Church of the beginning, abba Gabra Mikä'el decided to join the Catholic Church.

In September 1843 abba Gabra Mikä'el went to Adwa. There, after five months of mature reflection, a radiantly joyful abba Yaqob Māryām received him into the small community of Catholics in that mission. The old manher was welcomed into Christ’s humble sheepfold, witnessing to the fact, without the slightest shadow of doubt, that a conscience which left itself open inevitably led in that direction. From that very moment his existence would be indissolubly linked with that of abba Yaqob, a far-seeing father and reliable spiritual guide.
An able and loyal collaborator

In May 1844 abba Yaqob, accompanied by Brother Abbatini and assistant missioners abba Gabra Mikä'el and abba Melkisadek, began a reconnaissance tour of Tigray province in order to set up a new mission somewhere. After looking around for a long time abba Yaqob finally bought some land in Gwala, on 10 December 1844, for the mission which he proposed to set up. This was in the Agamè region, and he bought the land from the Irob Bocnèito people. His indigenous priests proved decisive as mediators in the purchase of this property. “They graciously offered to their fellow-countrymen what would never have been conceded to de Jacobis.” It was here that in June 1845 abba Yaqob inaugurated the College of the Immaculate Conception, which served as seminary and college for the young men of the surrounding areas. The teaching of the seminarians was entrusted to abba Gabra Mikä'el, a task for which he was particularly suited: “The Lord has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge and with all craftsmanship, to undertake and carry out projects... for work in every kind of skilled craft... and he has inspired him to teach...” (Ex 35:31-34). And the apostle Paul’s good wishes for his beloved disciple Timothy may suitably be applied to abba Gabra Mikä'el, as if they came from the very heart of abuna Yaqob: “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:16). Truth, mental enlightenment, invited his heart to follow, and became hidden strength; in this way the laborious apprehension of Truth turned into a coherent practice of Charity. Gabra Mikä'el came to understand that a person is not satisfied by knowledge alone, but wants to love; in other words, to be in a positive, and opportune, relationship with all he knows. In this way he becomes wise, achieving a vital synthesis of truth and virtue, and contributing to the genuine renewal of the society in which he lives.

Gwala, because of its favourable location and because of the diocesan seminary, would become, with the passage of time, the hub

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24 People noted for their generosity and hospitality. Although they were part of the mainly Islamic Saho nation, they were Christians “As soon as we arrive among them, our cordial and hospitable Irob people always welcome us with a feast, and having spread out the ox hide for the meal in the place of honour in the Hovel... kindly invite us to accept this seat of honour” (Epistolario, 792).

of the apostolic activity of abbà Yaqob Māryām and the Vincentian missionaries. After Gwala had been set up came the turn of Alitiena, in the eastern part of Agamè province.

First imprisonment

Abbà Gabra Mikā'ēl resolved to love God above all things, and to follow Him unreservedly. For this very reason he took on the missionary responsibility of his faith, apostolic ministry. He continuously probed the mystery of salvation. In addition to this he recognised the indispensability of dogma, totally rejecting the reduction of the Christian faith to mere religious feeling.

He was not happy in the new seminary in Gwala because of on-going internal squabbles. He therefore asked for, and was granted, a change to Gondar in order to undertake an intense and systematic apostolate, helped by abba Teklē Ghiorgis and the devoted layman Amariē Kenfū. Abuna Salāmā, secretly informed of the departure of the three missionaries from Adwa, had them arrested and thrown into prison. They remained imprisoned for ten weeks. Prison conditions were particularly hard on abbà Gabra Mikā'ēl, who became infected with a painful condition from which he never recovered. Abbà Yaqob took the imprisonment of his faithful collaborators very hard, but at the same time was proud of them, because they had been successfully tested in their love of Christ. The prisoners would certainly have died if the dagiyāt Webiē had not intervened for their release. Once freed, they returned to Alitiena where the small Catholic community, led by abbà Yaqob, welcomed them as intrepid confessors of the faith.

Ordination to the Priesthood

The cruel imprisonment of abbà Gabra Mikā'ēl, the brutal devastation of the Gwala mission and the growing insecurity in which the Catholic community was living, decided abuna Yaqob to ordain the elderly mamher, who was fifty-nine years old. (Abuna Yaqob had been secretly ordained bishop by Mgr Guglielmo Massaia, O.F.M.Cap., on 7 August 1847 in Massawa.) On 1 January 1851 the old monk received major orders and priesthood in Alitiena church, "on the title of Religious poverty in the Order of St Anthony the Abbot."²⁶ "... I have the courage to admit simply that I am proud of

²⁶ Diario, 913. Tonsure and minor orders had already been conferred on him on 28 December 1850: "Today, with first tonsure, we also conferred the four Minor Orders on Abba Ghebrē Michele" (ibid.).
this ordination, I cannot express with what strange pride." "... today I am very happy indeed to have ordained him, and at his being the first man to have been ordained by me." Meanwhile the situation was continuing to worsen, especially in the Agamè region, deciding abuna Yaqob to move even further north, towards Akkalaguzay, which seemed to guarantee greater security and freedom of action. Halāy, located on a wide and beautiful plateau, was selected as the hub. Halāy, in fact, situated between Saganeiti and Addi Caieh, offered possibilities for missionary expansion, which the narrow and arid valley of Alitiena was unable to give.

In the re-assessment of the missions and the re-location of missionary personnel, necessitated by the problems of the moment, it was decided that Fr Biancheri, abba Gabra Mika'el and abba Tekle Haymāot from Adwa,29 would constitute a difficult, but necessary, missionary outpost in Gondar. Here abba Gabra Mika'el took up once again his ministry, which he had exercised on other occasions in the past, although with poorer results. He had, however, the happiness of receiving into the Catholic Church his former disciple the Negus Johannes III, followed shortly afterwards by three monks.

Abuna Yaqob's scruples and abba Gabra Mika'el's humility

Having given a lot of thought to serious and well-founded doubts about the validity of abba Gabra Mika'el's baptism, abuna Yaqob had decided to confer all the sacraments on him, conditionally. For the bishop it was a real weight to be taken off his conscience, but for the old "pseudo-priest" a real gesture of humility and obedience. Abuna Yaqob left Halāy on 17 February and reached Gondar on the fourth of the following month.30 On leaving Halāy he had an uneasy feeling that he was heading into dangers never previously encountered, and was now close to the supreme test of his fidelity to Christ and his Church (cf. Mt 10:39, 16:25, Mk 8:35, Lk 17:33, Jn 12:25, 15:13). In order to conceal from people that he was in the city, abuna Yaqob entered Gondar in the dead of night, in the company of his always faithful disciple abba Teklē Haymānot of Gwala. After he had

27 Epistolario, 1096; see also 1383.
29 There were two men named Teklē Haymānot: a) a native of Adwa, called junior or minor (cf. Epistolario, 1111). He was a fellow prisoner of abba Gabra Mika'el and the first biographer of abuna Yaqob; b) the other one was from Gwala, and was called senior to distinguish him from the other man with the same name.
30 "... I had to go to this Capital of the ancient Abyssinian Empire to regularise the ordination of an old native Catholic priest" (Epistolario, 1280).
baptised abbā Gabra Mikā'ēl and ordained him priest,30 abuna Yaqob decided to stay on in Gondar until the situation was defused and attitudes calmed down.

Settling accounts

Kāsā Haylūt, the future Emperor Tewedros II (1855-1868), rose rapidly to power by innumerable lightning military victories. It was not possible in Abyssinia to achieve political power without the backing of the religious authority. Kāsā and abuna Salāmā had need of each other. The long awaited moment of revenge for the Abun had at last arrived. Having been out of sight, for calculated political and opportunistic religious reasons, he returned in triumph, recalled by the powerful and feared Negus Neghest (the King of Kings).

On 4 July 1854 Kāsā and abuna Salāmā had a meeting in Gondar to abolish all the schools of Christology and impose on everyone belief in the sole divine nature of Christ. An imperial edict obliged the priests of all the churches, and the monks of all monasteries, to appear before the Abun, and each one to place in his hands the oath of acceptance of the official Church position. July 25th was fixed as the day for the solemn public ceremony. This was the occasion, which he had not expected, for the Abun to affirm his authority, whilst for Kāsā it was a good time for him to rid himself of Moslems and Catholics at one go. On the evening of July 25 Abuna Yaqob and all who were with him were arrested and thrown into prison. Abuna Yaqob was placed in a separate prison, whilst the others were chained in pairs and brutally tortured so that they would agree to the one creed. On 28 July the ghend31 was inflicted on abbā Gabra Mikā'ēl. All attempts by Abuna Yaqob to get himself put with the prisoners were unavailing. Their being separated was explicitly deliberate, so that the frenji (foreigner) would not incite the others to resist. The cruel suffering inflicted on the prisoners had a huge effect also on public opinion. Mgr Massaia, Vicar Apostolic of the Galla region, wrote about it to Pope Pius IX, who in turn wrote an

30 “In Gondar therefore I had regularised the doubtfully conferred ordination of a priest” (ibid., 1298).
31 This was a horrible instrument of torture, one metre long and 35-40 cm thick, made of heavy hard wood, in which there were two large holes, through which the prisoner’s feet were thrust. Then two wedges were inserted which had the effect of gripping the ankles so tightly as to dislocate them. As the prisoner was no longer able to stand up he was forced to remain seated or to lie flat.
Apostolic Brief to abuna Yaqob encouraging him, and all the prisoners, to remain steadfast in the faith.

On 27 November 1854 Kasā and Salāmā decided to expel abuna Yaqob from the Empire. In order to be sure that the order would be implemented an armed escort was to accompany him to the frontier between the province of Sennar and Sudan, from where he would have returned to Italy, his homeland.

The supreme test

Tewodros' opponents gave way, one after the other, before his overwhelming power. To this invincible leader only one individual stood up, a skeletal little man, completely defenceless, abba Gabra Mika’el. At all costs he had to be trapped or eliminated once and for all. On 14 March 1855 Tewodros convened a solemn assembly of important persons, clergy and people, before whom the monk was to be finally arraigned. After his umpteenth refusal, the emperor gave orders for the old arrogant and stubborn monk to be scourged with a jiraikechine (a giraffe tail) of hair as cutting as the sharpest razor blade: "...a thick whip which Abyssinians are accustomed to use on oxen yoked to a plough." The effect of the public whipping on a delicate body which had already been treated harshly was so devastating that his life was feared for.

The punishment decreed by the emperor went on for two hours, but was not successful in overcoming the monk’s steely will, supported by an unbreakable faith. This irritating moral loss of face for Tewodros and abuna Salāmā was even more embarrassing than a politico-military upset or a schism. As the emperor had to set out on a new, and by no means final, military expedition, he ordered that abba Gabra Mika’el should follow him, on foot and in chains: “The precursor of our Confessors, the illustrious old man, abba Gabra Mika’el, was forced to follow the army, in chains.” The march was exhausting and debilitating for an already weakened physique, but in Christian logic love is always to give oneself, and giving oneself is to forget the self.

On 29 May 1855 the newly arrived English consul Walter C. Plowden turned up at the place where Tewodros and his army were encamped. After a hasty conventional welcome, revealing annoyance at the interruption, Tewodros took his revenge by inviting the consul to be present at the interrogation of abba Gabra Mika’el, worn out

32 Epistolario, 1402.
33 Ibid., 1355.
physically but victorious morally. At the monk’s umpteenth refusal to accept the official creed, the emperor requested from the judges a severe exemplary sentence, which would serve as a warning to all the prisoners. The judges found the popular mamher guilty of lèse-majesté, a crime which carried the death penalty. This sentence went beyond what the despotic Tewodros was expecting, but he ordered that the sentence be carried out at once. The British consul Plowden intervened on abba Gabra Mikā’ēl’s behalf, requesting the commutation of the death sentence to hard imprisonment for life. Tewodros consented to this totally unexpected plea from his guest, though with bad grace. Plowden had achieved his first diplomatic success, and could depart justly proud of it, because never before had it happened that peremptory orders of Tewodros were reversed.

When abuna Yaqob was told of his beloved disciple’s unbudging firmness, he rejoiced in the depths of his being, even though he would have wished to be with him, sharing the suffering and humiliation. Sometimes death of the heart is more trying and insupportable than the severest physical suffering. As it was impossible for him to travel, abuna Yaqob arranged for short messages and small concrete gestures of solidarity to reach him: “Best wishes to my good old man and newly ordained priest, Abba Ghebré Michele.”

No one has ever given an account of abba Gabra Mikā’ēl’s final moments, so we are borrowing from the ancient “gesta martyrum,” matching as far as possible with regard to circumstances and the element of drama: “United in chains with Christ Jesus, I hope to greet you, if God’s will should judge me worthy to reach the goal. But I am afraid that your love for me may be dangerous if you speak in my favour to the authorities. It is easy for you to obtain what you want, but it would be difficult for me to reach God if you do not have compassion for me. I do not want you to please men, but God alone. In fact you are pleasing to Him. And I will not have any opportunity but this one to reach God. And even yourselves, if you keep quiet, would never be able to endorse a better work. If you keep quiet I will become a word of God; but if you take pity on my flesh I will once more be nothing but an empty sound. Leave me alone in this: may I be sacrificed to God while the altar is ready. Only then, united in love in a single chorus, sing to the Father, in Christ Jesus, since God has been kind enough to look at this poor monk from Abyssinia, calling him westwards from the Orient. It is beautiful for me to travel far from the world in order to rise again in Christ.... Only when the

34 Ibid., 1116.
world no longer sees anything of my body will I be Christ's disciple.... Now, in chains, I am learning not to desire anything else.... Through the maltreatment by the soldiers I become an evermore true disciple.... May fire, cross, wild beasts, torture, wounds, gashes, dislocations, mutilations, crushing of the entire body, the devil's most evil torments, come upon me provided I can meet Jesus Christ!... I seek Christ who died for us; I want Him who rose for us. The moment in which I will be born is imminent."

Abba Gabra Mikä'el was by now no longer able to stay on his feet, weakened as he was by his long captivity and the cruel sufferings inflicted on him. He could no longer move, and even less ride. "Even though he is in irons our incomparable Veteran in years and valour, Abba Gabra Mikä'el, is still miraculous in his heroism."  

On 28 August 1855, at Tchiretcha Ghebabá, at the far limit of the borderland with the Wollo territory, the heroic confessor of the faith finished his long and difficult day. He was sixty-four years old. His martyrdom had lasted thirteen months and fourteen days, following his second arrest. He was buried in Berakit, near a huge stone, as if chosen without realising it to mark his resting place as he awaits the final resurrection. A gigantic Abyssinian sycamore extended its shade and protective branches, as if to perpetuate in time abuna Yaqob Maryam's fatherly love for the best of his disciples and for the most precious and mature fruit of his apostolate in Abyssinia, which had become a land sanctified by the martyrs and confessors of the faith. "Our indigenous priests are persecuted, imprisoned, brought before successors of Annas and Caiaphas.... We die with our priests.... Everyone here who is suffering for the faith recommend themselves to your prayers."  

In a long letter to his brother Dom Giuseppe, a professed monk in the Royal Carthusian monastery of St Martin in Naples, abuna Yaqob described Abba Gabra Mikä'el's martyrdom admirably: ... our venerable septuagenarian Abba Ghebrè Michele, who accompanied me on my visit to you in your Carthusian monastery in 1841; later he was the first Priest ordained by me in Abyssinia. He, then, after a year of the most severe blows suffered for the faith, after being whipped to death by

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35 Cf. Letter of St Ignatius to the Christians of Rome, 1-2; 4-6. The underlined italicised text has been altered by me; the original refers to "the bishop of Syria."

36 Epistolario, 1359.

37 In spite of all the efforts made in the past, the precise spot of his burial has never been found.

38 Epistolario, 996-998.
four strong [men] on the eyes, on the most sensitive parts of the body, until the lictors were exhausted from whipping, the sufferer with his eyes split and healed instantaneously, as if miraculously, was forced to follow the tyrant on foot on his expedition, and died from all this... in chains.... Having thus earned the palm of martyrdom our revered Priest is consecrated Protomartyr of the restored faith in His Fatherland...."  

On 29 July, three years after the terrible events, abuna Yaqob Maryam notified the superior general of his Congregation of the tragic death of abba Gabra Mikäël. He wrote: "I have added an epigraph in Latin to this picture of Abba Ghebre Michele the martyr, in which I refer to him as a seminarist of the Congregation. In fact he was only a postulant, since the period of his vocation could be counted only from the moment when he would have begun his intern seminary; but at that moment he was already in prison; nonetheless, in his heart he already belonged to the Congregation." In another letter he used the words "... the martyr Ghebrê Michele, our novice."  

We can borrow the words which St John gives to the angel of the church in Thyatira, in the marvellous vision which he had on the island of Patmos, because they can be applied to abba Gabra Mikaël; they seem to be a wonderful balance between his active life doing good and his ability to give the supreme form of witness: "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first" (Rev 2:19).

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49 Ibid., 1482-83. The title Protomartyr, given by the Master and Father to his beloved son and disciple is authoritative.  

40 This important evidence from Justin establishes the existence of the only known portrait of Blessed Gabrâ Mikäël, and an exhaustive search in the archives should be able to bring it to light. There should be, however, more reproductions of this unique portrait, because in writing to the [Society for the] Propagation of the Faith in Paris de Jacobis expressed himself as follows: "... the servant of God, whose portrait you are receiving with this, a portrait which has no merit other than... that of being the work of a young Abyssinian Catholic man, who has never studied drawing; and it is, in the end..., a sort of miraculous work, when it is looked at here because of its exact conformity and resemblance to the Martyr, its original" (ibid., 1512-1513).  

41 Epistolario, 1518. But already on 10 January 1856, writing to the Italian assistant general in Paris, Fr Pier Paolo Sturchi, Justin had used the following words: "So, the already accomplished martyrdom... of our holy Abyssinian priest Abba Ghebrê Michele, should give a special joy to the double Family of St Vincent, since he had been admitted into it while in prison" (ibid., 1379).  

42 Ibid., 1534. At the request of de Jacobis abba Gabra Mikaël had been accepted by the superior general as a Vincentian novice, meaning a seminarist. During the negotiations with Fr Jean-Baptiste Etienne Gabra Mikaël was imprisoned, and later died for the faith.
Official confirmation

In the name of the Church, Mother and Teacher of all peoples, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) recognised the heroic virtues and martyrdom "in odium fidei" of abba Gabra Mika'el, beatifying him on 3 October 1926. This authoritative statement by the magisterium means for us that "The Church follows Christ in a special way in the person of those who fight for the faith right up till death." In one section it deals with the treatment meted out to the Martyrs over a period of two millennia: "They loved everyone and were persecuted by everyone. They were unknown and they were condemned. They were sentenced to death, yet precisely by that they obtained life.... They were despised yet in being despised they found their joy. They were damaged in their reputation, whilst they gave witness to their innocence. They were insulted, and returned a blessing, they were treated with ignominy, and changed it into honour. Although doing good, they were treated as evildoers; when they were punished, they rejoiced as if they were given life.... But all those who hated them could not explain their opposition.... Christians love those who hate them.... Christians, exposed to sufferings, increase in number each day."

Jesus repeatedly taught, on various occasions: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:5); and again: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life" (1 Jn 5:12). These statements are a sign of an unheard of audacity and contradiction. Whoever recognises Jesus becomes his disciple, whilst anyone who misinterprets him is far from the Way which leads to the Truth and so to Life. Jesus died on the cross so that this seeking would be rewarded with success.

But the drama did not end with Jesus. It continues right up to today in his disciples: "A servant is not greater than his master" (Jn 15:20); for this reason "... they will drive you out from the synagogues, and so the hour will come in which anyone who kills you will believe he is giving honour to God" (Jn 16:2).

So, this is what the promise of the Defender, whom Christ will send to his followers "from the Father" (cf. Jn 16:26), means. His mission is not merely to inspire the disciples in such a way that they know how to defend themselves before human tribunals (cf. Mt 10:20), but to take care of them when their faith will be put to severe testing. Because of the world's opposition to them, the

41 St Augustine, Tracts on John, Tract 124, 5, in C.C.L. 36, 685.
42 Epistle to Diognetus, ch. 5-6; in Funk, 399-401. The great Tertullian has a similar expression: "Sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum" (Apologeticum, 50, 13; in C.C.L. I, 171).
disciples of Christ will be exposed to scandal, they will feel the temptation to desert, they will experience doubt and unease. And it is precisely at that moment that the Spirit of Truth will intervene. He will bear witness to Jesus in the intimate heart of his disciples, will confirm them in the faith and invite them to remain faithful under pressure. In that way, even they "will bear witness" to Jesus, in just the way that abba Gabra Mikā'ēl, Christ's faithful witness in Abyssinia, knew how to do it.

A favourable forecast, and a final prayer

The rich exchange of gifts between the Church of Rome and the ancient Church of Abyssinia is happily exemplified in St Justin de Jacobis and Blessed Gabrā Mikā'ēl. Today the church in Abyssinia breathes with two lungs, symbolised by the twofold rich traditions of East and West in these two authoritative witnesses of the faith.

We, the Christians of the West, ask the Vincentian Fathers and the Bishops' Conferences of Ethiopia and Eritrea, to set out again, with determination on "the canonical route" for the hoped for canonization of Blessed Gabrā Mikā'ēl, martyr, because just as they were intimate friends during life "... as they were united in our souls, by the union of belief, and more so by charity...." In this way they may help the two twin-sister Churches of Rome and Abyssinia to become One in Christ Jesus (cf. Jn 17:21 ff.). This is also abuna Yaqob Māyām's hope, and it could not have been otherwise: "We see about doing what we can, so that, with God's help, with the closure of one plague on true Belief, there will be no opening of another one... no less pestiferous and lethal than the first." And to end up "... on the need to reunite in one single Fold under the care of the same Shepherd...." as Abuna Yaqob comments: "What a lovely day! How I long to see it! Blessed are the eyes that will have seen it...."

May the Father, so much loved by Abyssinians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, borrow our eyes to see that time of union; these eyes of ours, if we wish it, may bring to realization the provocative but salutary prophecy of "Ætiopum semper servus."

Translation: THOMAS DAVITT, C.M.

45 Ibid., 1330.
46 Ibid., 1115.
47 Ibid., 1037.
48 Ibid.
Missionary Commitment in Cortes (Honduras)

by Corpus Juan Delgado Rubio, C.M.

I. The Province of Zaragoza takes on a missionary commitment in Honduras

In September, 1989, the Province of Zaragoza assumed the pastoral care of the parish of Puerto Cortés (Department of Cortés, Honduras). In this way the Province responded to the longed for commitment of the Provincial Assemblies: to minister in a concrete mission area in some part of a country on the path to development.

The Province of Zaragoza established itself in Honduras at the request of Bishop Jaime Brufau, C.M., bishop of San Pedro Sula and the Provincial of the Province of Barcelona which until that time supported the parish of Puerto Cortés.

The people of Puerto consider Father Jaime Nadal, C.M. (a missionary from the Province of Barcelona) as the founder of the parish even though previously the parish had been juridically established. Father Jaime Nadal carried out the construction of the old church — a model of solid construction even now — and the different phases of the school building which resulted in the present building. His work was continued by various confères, also from the Province of Barcelona and here we mention in a special way Father Antonio Quetglas, C.M., and Father Antonio Cárcel, C.M.

The first missionaries from the Province of Zaragosa who established themselves in Puerto Cortés in October 1989 were: Fathers Raphael Hernández, superior and pastor, José Luis Echarte and Angel Echaide. They were later joined by Father Javier Irurtia and Father Jesus Eguaras. Later, in accord with the ordinary organization of the local communities of the Province, many other missionaries shared and alternated in accepting different responsibilities as is the custom among us.

In 1993 the missionaries were joined by a new team of missionaries who ministered in Cuyamel (also in the Department of Cortés). Later, in 1998, a new house was formed and this area was
established as an independent parish on February 27, 2005 (parish of Santiago Apóstol [parish of Saint James the Apostle]) but formed one community with the missionaries in Puerto Cortés.

The Provincial Assembly of 2003 established: We shall maintain the missionary team and elaborate an evangelization plan for the whole mission. With this in mind the missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza held several community reflection meetings focusing on the meaning of their evangelizing presence. The Provincial Council dedicated several sessions to the study of their proposals which were gathered together in a document titled: The Evangelizing Plan of the Missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza in Honduras.

II. The Evangelization Plan of the missionaries of the province of Zaragoza in Honduras

This plan, which has as its starting point the social, cultural and religious reality of Honduras and is in accord with the guidelines of the Church in Latin America, the Ratio Missionum of the Congregation and Lines of Action of the Province, attempts to establish common criteria for the evangelizing activity of the missionaries, criteria that are in accord with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and which also recognize the fact that the missionaries are members of the Congregation of Mission, followers of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor.

Using this plan as a starting point, the missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza in Honduras draw up annual plans and programs together with the Visitor on the occasion of his visit to the mission.

The plan has a general objective: to encourage the proclamation of the Good News in each one of the parishes in Honduras that has been entrusted to our care so that people can encounter the living Jesus and thus are able to explain their faith; to encourage the establishment of ecclesial communities that are true homes and schools of communion, committed to the vision of charity that results in an effective solidarity with those people who are most poor and in the style of Saint Vincent de Paul.

This plan has five specific objectives from which arise lines of action and activity. The specific objectives are:

1. Strengthen the evangelizing dimension of our presence and action and of each one of the communities and groups and different lay ministers (catechists, leaders of the assembly, etc.) in such a way that all effectively promote an encounter with the person of the living Jesus.
2. Encourage the integral education (basic education and faith education) within the community, groups, programs and ecclesial institutions and provide for the specific formation (specialized formation, theological and Vincentian formation) of the pastoral ministers and those responsible for our works and projects.

3. Promote attitudes and structures of communion through the creation and consolidation of ecclesial communities, the collaboration and witness of the unity of the laity, consecrated men and women, pastoral ministers, missionaries, the diocesan and universal church and responsible participation in the community, parish and diocesan councils and assemblies.

4. Cultivate in the communities a commitment with those who are most poor, promote the development of an organized social pastoral ministry, respect for family and social values, specifically the inviolable value of human life and the dignity of the person, solidarity and the transformative power of work, and ministering on behalf of the most disadvantaged so that they become architects of their own development.

5. Help people express their faith in festive community celebrations that involves the participation of different lay ministers and the integration of local cultural elements in such a way that these elements are evangelized and able to produce fruits of unity and solidarity.

To promote the work of evangelization, numerous groups of missionaries from the Province (together with missionaries from other Provinces and even other Congregations) have made their presence felt on three occasions: in 1991 during La Santa Misión (the holy mission) promoted by bishop Brufau in preparation for the fifth centenary of the beginning of the evangelization of the continent; in 2003 in the preparatory Misión on the occasion of the establishment of the new parish in Cuyamel; in 2006 during La Santa Misión on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Bishop Angel Garachana's ministry as bishop. The most visible fruit of these extraordinary missionary activities (in our parishes and in the Diocese as a whole) was the establishment of a large number of ecclesial communities. It is impressive to witness the participation of so many Catholics and their growing commitment. Such growth in the number of ecclesial communities presents us with a great challenge and so it becomes necessary to accompany the members of these communities and offer them on-going formation.
III. Community life in the mission

From the time of their arrival in Honduras, the missionaries formed a community of life, prayer, apostolate and spirit. The day begins with an hour of community prayer. Meals are also eaten together.

Work is organized in such a way that one day a week (usually Monday) everyone comes together: to share time together, play sports, lunch with the confreres from the Province of Barcelona in San Pedro Sula, participate in formation meetings and community discernment, and celebrate family feast days.

During the week, the missionaries live in community in two houses. Each day one of the missionaries travels to the mountains and returns some time the following day. Then another missionary departs in the same way. Thus there is always a community and community life.

This way of living and working certainly increases the consumption of fuel but also assures the community dimension of our missionary life.

Each year the community dedicates several sessions to evaluation, reflection and planning with the Visitor on the occasion of his annual visit to the Mission. This visit of the Provincial sustains a sense of belonging to the Province and reminds us of our mutual obligations.

For the Province, a mission orientation is a destiny that forms part of its ordinary organization (even though obviously this requires a positive predisposition to the mission and certain physical and health characteristics).

The missionaries are aware that they are destined for the mission for a specific time and indeed one of the riches of the mission consists in the fact that some members go and others return from the mission thus making the ministry more fruitful. Each year some one goes and comes, an experience that makes the Province more and more missionary oriented.

IV. The promotion of vocations and lay ministers

From the beginning the missionaries have cultivated the promotion of vocations. In November, 2002 the Etapa de Acogida (the phase of welcoming or receiving), as it is called here, was established in Puerto Cortés. This phase provides candidates with a time for vocational discernment and they are able to become involved in the life of the community of the Congregation. The candidates for the Congregation are accompanied by Father José
Luis Induráin who is assisted by other members of the community. The candidates rise each morning and travel to the Catholic University of San Pedro Sula where they study psychology. The afternoon is dedicated to personal study, participation in the pastoral work of the parish and progressive integration into the life of the community.

The candidates for the Congregation initiate this phase after having participated in meetings and gatherings and after having been accompanied by one of the missionaries. They must have completed the studies that will enable them to enter the university.

The mission is a shared commitment with other pastoral ministers. The collaboration of four Daughters of Charity from the Central American Province, a Sister from North America, the commitment of one hundred ten Leaders of the Word and catechists, the participation of some lay ministers and volunteers, social pastoral ministers and members of apostolic groups (among others, the Marian Youth Groups and the International Association of Charity) are insufficient to respond to the Christian communities that day by day are growing. As a result the missionaries dedicate their efforts to the promotion and the formation of Leaders of the Word, catechists, and those leaders responsible for the ecclesial communities.

Lay missionaries from Honduras and other communities in Spain also collaborate in the works of the mission: some for a short period of time and others for a more prolonged stay. The province signs an agreement with each one of these volunteers and mutual obligations are outlined.

Because general access to education is decisive for human promotion and empowering people for ministry, the missionaries support children, adolescents, and young women and men with limited resources so that they can continue their primary and secondary education. The education assistance program supports more than 200 children and young people and helps them cover transportation, registration and school supply costs.

V. The parish of Puerto Cortés and its works

The parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Puerto Cortés has a population of about 100,000 inhabitants who live in seventy-six centers (urban and rural). As a result of the Santa Misión more than three hundred ecclesial communities have been established.

The missionaries travel weekly to each one of the neighborhoods in the city of Puerto Cortés. The communities beyond the reach of
our radio transmission and the rural communities are visited either bi-weekly or monthly.

During recent years the missionaries have consolidated a significant number of social works.

- **School and Institute Sagrado Corazón de Jesús**: is responsible for kindergarten and the primary education of 335 students and the secondary education of 531 students. There are 46 professors, 7 administrators and service personnel. The school is integrated into the Iberian-American Confederation of Catholic Education.

- **Center of Integration and Professional Formation for Youth, Fredrick Ozanam**: this center serves 100 young people in four specialties: automobile mechanics, electricity, refrigeration, and welding. A young teaching staff (average age being twenty-five) dedicate themselves to promoting young people at risk. A department of pedagogical resources provides for the formation of these young people in the area of values. This same formation is also provided for their parents and families.

- **Maestro en casa (Teachers at home)**: through radio, the parish supports two groups of adults in their education, facilitating the installation of equipment and personal support for more than six hundred persons. Government formation programs for adults need institutions, like parishes, in order to achieve their goals.

- **Home for children**: receives thirty street children or children at risk and provides housing in two homes: San Ramón and San Martín. A team of eight teachers under the leadership of a Daughter of Charity accompanies the children in their process of integration and formation.

- **Nursing home**: receives twenty-nine persons (six women and twenty-three men) who are cared for by a group of workers under the leadership of a Daughter of Charity. Another Daughter is responsible for the kitchen. In order to be admitted into the home the individual has to show that he/she has no family.

- **Parish Medical Clinic**: assists an average of fifty persons daily: medical, clinical analysis, pharmacy. Those who come to the Clinic have previously participated in a formation session on health and hygiene which is accompanied with a simple reflection on the life of faith. A Daughter of Charity is responsible for this work.

- **Workshops for the promotion of women**: volunteers from the International Association of Charity coordinate different workshops in the area of sewing, baking and beauty care.
- **Office of Social Ministry**: functions every day with the collaboration of social and solidarity ministers from each community. They receive people, study their more urgent needs and plan the most adequate response. They also coordinate the educational process for those in prison so that they can obtain their primary and/or high school diplomas.

Radio Luz Cortés functions together with our social works: this radio station is becoming more autonomous in its programming and brings the life of the parish, as well as formation programs, to every corner of the parish community. A new transmitter will extend the reach of the station to the area of Cuyamel.

**VI. The parish of Cuyamel and its works**

The parish Santiago Apóstol consists of 63 communities situated between the city of Omoa and the Guatemalan border. It has a population of about 35,000 inhabitants. More than half the communities are located in the mountains and the only access to these communities is by foot. The missionaries visit these communities four times a year and follow an exact schedule. These visits occur during the time when the rains do not wash out the roads. Depending on the terrain it can take from two to five hours to reach these communities (and about the same number of hours to return home). It is easier to travel to the 25 communities that are located on the sides of the highway especially now that the work for leveling and laying asphalt has been completed.

The formation of the Leaders of the Word constitutes one of the most important works. These leaders are responsible for gathering the community together each week and for the community outreach programs. Each of these leaders travels from his/her village on a monthly basis and comes to the center for a day of formation, meetings, and community building.

The solidarity ministers and groups discover the more urgent needs of each village or neighborhood in order to resolve these problems and coordinate different projects and programs that focus on promotion and assistance with the Social Action Office. Monthly assemblies provide common criteria for action and above all, provide a parish identity in the midst of reality where there are situations of extreme need.

The program **teachers at home** makes it possible for 140 young people who were unable to complete their studies to do so at home through the use of the radio. Each Saturday they come to the parish for personalized assistance from the professors.
A number of social works have also been developed in Cuyamel. In conjunction with Medicus Mundo Bizkaia a series of projects have been initiated, projects that now depend on the parish:

- **Parish Medical Clinic**: attends to 40 people daily and makes available pharmacy services.
- **Optician**: offers eye examination and glasses.
- **Poultry farms**: in the center one thousand egg-laying chickens are raised on a permanent basis and two thousand chickens for consumption. The slaughterhouse and the elaboration of concentrated fodder complete the program. Seventy women in the villages, after having learned the technical aspects of the business, have established eleven poultry farms and are able to dispose of the income as they see fit.
- Assistance is provided to **midwives and health care personnel** in those villages where there is no medical or nursing service.
- **Latrines**: 596 latrines have been constructed in 21 communities. There are plans for projects that will open wells for garbage disposal and provide a network for the transportation of water.
- **Schools**: construction or rehabilitation of schools so that there is a school in every village.
- **Crops**: program of distribution of fruit trees so that these might be planted in the villages and contribute to better nutrition.
- **Workshops in sewing and cooking** for young women and men who do not have the economic resources but who desire to enter the labor market.
- Support to the development projects in the rural area: agricultural formation, providing running water, construction and reconstruction of houses, reconstruction of roads.

VII. The Social Action and Evangelization Funds

In order to assist the different projects that have arisen in the mission and in order to support the missionaries in their works and given the fact that these project are unable to sustain themselves, the Social Action and Evangelization Fund has been established. It functions with an annual budget that is presented by the missionary community and is approved by the Provincial and his council.

The Social Action and Evangelization Fund is nurtured by contributions from the Province of Zaragosa, and donations and subsidies obtained through presenting these projects to other entities for financing.
The parishes entrusted to the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission of the Province of Zaragosa and their different social works are able to obtain co-financing through the Social Action and Evangelization Fund. The management of the projects co-financed through the Social Action and Evangelization Fund are managed by the administrative councils of each work. The administrator of the Social Action and Evangelization Fund forms part of the council of each one of the social works that is co-financed.

Each parish and each social work does its own accounting, thus everyone becomes co-responsible in the management of the project and in moving these projects toward self-sufficiency, toward generating their own funds, and seeking support in their own country and presenting these projects to other outside entities for financing.

VIII. El Puente de Fraternidad (The Bridge of Brotherhood)

Each year in our communities here in Spain we celebrate the Campaign for Honduras, also known as El Puente de Fraternidad. El Puente de Fraternidad does not simply move in one direction (economic assistance for the missionaries and their projects). The life of the missionaries and the Christian communities that they serve is an invitation that urges us to live our lives from the perspective of those who are most poor, from the perspective of effective solidarity and in this way we are able to energize our communities and groups with the fresh air of the Good News that is embraced with simplicity and docility.

Aware of the fact that the solidarity of our communities in Spain with our missionaries in Honduras cannot be reduced to economic assistance during the days of the campaign, Puente de Fraternidad attempts to sustain the missionary commitment through formation, information and action by each one of the groups and communities in our parishes, in our centers, and in the Vincentian Family. In all of these same groups we seek to foster volunteers who will serve as missionaries and promote interest for the missions and for the projects of the missionaries.

The human dignity of all persons and all people, the quality of a truly human life for all people and the achievement of conditions of sustained and lasting development - all of these demand something more than alms, no matter how generous, from our communities in Spain and the people and the groups that we pastorally accompany. They demand from us a style of life and a way of thinking that is consistent. This is the greatest challenge that our mission in Hondu-
ras places before our communities in Spain and that El Puente de Fraternidad continually reminds us about.

Therefore, both there in Honduras and here in Spain, our mission in Honduras is a grace filled event for the Province of Zaragoza.

IX. Through the Paths of Hope

Recently the Episcopal Conference of Honduras addressed a Pastoral Letter to government officials, political parties and members of the civil society. This letter is titled: Through the Paths of Hope. After analyzing the reality that pains us and questions us and pointing out the ethical criteria upon which a just and peaceful society must be established, the bishops propose priorities on which all must focus: eradicate poverty, encourage a social economy, resolve the question of land reform, provide better health services for all people, consolidate democracy, transform the Justice system, eradicate corruption, guarantee the security of the citizens, protect and rationalize the use of natural resources, strengthen the national identity, act on behalf of a culture of responsibility. These priorities not only illustrate the reality that the people of Honduras live but also indicate a direction in order to open paths of hope.

The diverse works that our missionaries encourage and which we, as a community, support and feel are our own works—all these works must be viewed from the perspective of opening paths of hope.

While these works have a wide scope, they are not the fundamental concern of our missionaries. Their true concern, that which constitutes their passion and desire, that which claims their hearts and consumes their energy is the gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, encouraging the communities, celebrating their faith, the formation of pastoral ministers and groups, drawing near to people who year after year become more numerous and each day become settled over an area that is more vast and more difficult to travel to.

On the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of his being named to minister in this diocese, the bishop of San Pedro Sula described his service to the Diocese and used the symbols of word, home and bread. These same symbols express the life of our companions in the mission of Cortés, Honduras.

- Word: embraced in prayer, lived in community, strengthened in formation, shared in catechesis and preaching, expressed in welcoming others, especially those persons who are most poor.
- Home: a community of followers of Jesus Christ, living as friends who care for one another and who are open to receive
other brothers and sisters so that they can multiply themselves in ecclesial communities built on the unity and participation of everyone.

- Bread: shared in fraternal gatherings and distributed in so many works and services on behalf of our sisters and brothers and their development. The Eucharistic bread is lived and celebrated, shared and presided over for the good of our sisters and brothers.

As proposed by the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Aparecido, our missionaries in Honduras and our entire Province want to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that in him our people might have life.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.
The Social Doctrine of the Church in the Sphere of Priestly Formation in the Vincentian Major Seminaries in Colombia

by Daniel Arturo Vásquez Ordóñez, C.M.

1. Introducing the theme

From the start let me hasten to assure the reader that I am no specialist in the handling of Church social doctrine as such. As an expert more within the depths of Catholic morality, the theme has always interested me not only from an academic and systematics point of view, but above all from my continued, deep concern for pastoral, ecclesial and Vincentian action. With everything else I do consider that my not inconsiderable experience as formator both of diocesan clergy and of our own confreres, and my serious and conscientious work in the area of social apostolates have all helped me to gain some fair and adequate understanding of the role of Church social doctrine in the formation of priests. Let me add that I have worked as clergy formator only in Colombia.

I think it is equally important here to state that the philosophical and theological mindset of our diocesan major seminaries fulfills in every way what is endorsed by the bishops. For this reason the philosophical and theological curriculum of our formation houses differs from that of the diocesan only in the marked emphasis given by the Vincentian charism and in some specific Vincentian contents. Given all of these things I do maintain that in Colombia the Vincentian tradition of clergy formation does not set out any special program pertaining to Church social doctrine in the major seminaries. On the other hand one should note the conscious and serious concern with conveying to future presbyters the entire and fully updated teachings of the Church’s social doctrine. In this sense, it is fitting to keep in mind that the Colombian Vincentian missioners, in their role as rectors of major diocesan seminaries and of our own, do sit at the table of OSCOL, the Organization of Major
Seminaries of Colombia, which in turn forms part of OSLAM, the Organization of Seminaries of Latin America. At this moment in the Church, the Colombian Province has contributed enormously to the wider group involved in the formation of clergy in Colombia and Latin America, while at the same time being enriched throughout its long career of clergy formation.

These relevant points now made, I plan to develop the matter in three parts. First of all I will try to gather together some data that will allow us to see that the Church’s social teaching has indeed been conveyed in our Colombian seminaries. Secondly, I will propose a series of key moments in the development of the Church’s social doctrine, moments which bring us naturally to a value judgment of our own educational and formation practice. Finally, with hope set on a vigorous resurgence of the Vincentian charism, I will formulate some criteria for a Vincentian reading of the Church’s social doctrine.

2. Some data concerning how the teachings of the Church’s social doctrine have been imparted in our major seminaries

2.1. Before Vatican Council II

For their resource in teaching Church social doctrine, formators and professors most frequently turned to the reading and explanation of the documents of the Magisterium, especially the social encyclicals from Rerum Novarum on. Many periodicals and publications, for example L’Ami du clergé, offered deep and extensive commentaries of the pontifical social documents, which served to orient the professors and formators. To facilitate the academic work involved they also relied on the publication of so-called encyclicals or social documents as pamphlets or in something more voluminous that would gather everything together from Rerum Novarum until the last one known. There was little treatment of the social teachings of Pius XII, given that his famous Christmas messages did not circulate in written text among us as did the encyclicals. It was sufficient to make reference to the encyclicals. For some time La Código Social de Malinas — published in 1927 and re-treated in 1934 and 1948 — was used as a kind of social doctrine text. There were various books used frequently as textbooks: La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia by C. van Gestel, edited by Herder; La Doctrina Social de la Iglesia by Perre Bigo, edited by ICES in Barcelona. It is no less important to recall that first in France and later, with repercussions in Latin America, the fifties were marked by P. Lebret’s influence with his analysis about economic progress and development. Not a few professors and
formators, including some who were among us, availed themselves of P. Lebret's contributions to orient their own lessons on the Church's social teaching.

Generally the theme of social doctrine was dealt with within the framework of theological studies, granting it no more than one semester. At times the matter was relegated to a course within philosophy because one could notice a certain closeness to introductory sociology classes. Instead of having the matter of Social Doctrine linked with Moral Theology in its social side, it tended to be associated with Pastoral Social Theology. Keeping in mind that neither the contents of Pastoral Theology nor the methodology for explaining them enjoyed any real clarity and coherence, it was frequently the case that any reference to Social Doctrine was only random. It was common to see a subject as sensitive and important as this reduced to praxis or practices of social pastoral theology. On the other hand there were no professors or formators properly prepared in Social Doctrine. In addition, the importance of Social Doctrine went unnoticed. It seemed an optional subject or one reserved to enthusiasts or experts. For this reason it was often the custom to have a seminar or brief workshop in order to be absolved of this subject, as important as it is.

2.2. As of the Second Vatican Council

Due to the theological and pastoral impact of Vatican II, and the teaching of John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II, a beneficial change could be noted, little by little, in the putting forth of Church Social Doctrine into the formation of future priests. With the great contribution of Latin-American teaching, above all that of Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo, the need to fully and responsibly assume the task of teaching Social Doctrine in seminaries became obvious. In effect, the bishops in Puebla took care of Church Social Doctrine in all its depth and breadth. It is also necessary to recognize that the rise of Liberation Theology, with its normal development and the clarifying debate that came along with it, all enriched enormously the spreading of the teachings of Social Doctrine. (cf. Instruction Concerning Various Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation," by the SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE FAITH, Vatican City, 1984, and Instruction Concerning "Christian Freedom and Liberation," by the SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE FAITH, Vatican City, 1986). One can point out, with no hesitation, that with the

1 Cf. The Documents of PUEBLA, 472 f.
recognition given the Church's Social Doctrine by John Paul II in his own rich and varied official teaching, and out of the reflection and action of the Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace, created by his predecessor Paul VI, Social Doctrine was consolidated into the theological formation stage in our major seminaries.

Admittedly, there continued an exaggerated use of appealing almost exclusively to the sources, to papal or episcopal documents, and to thematic courses, all in place of having a systematic exposition of Social Doctrine in the Bible (where it is so obviously supported), in Tradition, and in both theological and general pastoral practical reflection.

In any case one should recognize since then the "corpus" of the Church's Social Doctrine did begin to be put forward with greater freedom and seriousness within the circle of professional theologians and as an integral and indispensable part of theological formation for candidates to the priesthood. In this sense it is worthwhile pointing out that Social Doctrine has fully come to occupy its rightful place in the theological mindset.

With all that, it still is a notorious fact that there is no institutional concern to provide an integral and competent formation of professors and formators in the area of Social Doctrine. It is interesting, that shortly before and after Vatican Council II some importance was given to the preparation of conferees in the study of sociology. Perhaps this was related to the boon of the so-called helping sciences in the study of theology. But it seems to me that there was lacking a needed critical evaluation of sociology, valuable in itself, and of relating it with Social Doctrine in such a way that, on the one hand, one would not fall into a certain sociology-ism when expounding Social Doctrine, and that, on the other hand, one could succeed to giving Social Doctrine both a sociological basis and a systematic framing. Unfortunately at this moment in time, and for many reasons, we tend to abandon the practice of forming and of preparing conferees in the social sciences.

In ending this first part I consider it opportune to make one value judgment. To do so there is nothing better than to start from an official text of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. It concerns "The Theological Formation of Future Priests" from February 22, 1976. In number 114 the text reads: "Naturally, for a complete theological formation, other materials of great importance take part, for example, Liturgy, Canon Law, Church History and

\[1 \text{Laborem Exercens, 1981; Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1988; and Centesimus annus, 1991.}\]
THE AUXILIARIES, such as Spiritual Theology, CHURCH SOCIAL DOCTRINE, Ecumenical Theology, Missiology, the Sacred Arts, etc. THESE either flank the pastoral subjects or remain framed within the SPHERE OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY" (the emphasis is mine). The document I have alluded to and specifically quoted took as its objective to establish parameters for "an adequate and updated theological preparation of candidates for the priesthood," as it states. Following the tone of this referenced document, one easily deduces that Church Social Doctrine was not considered principal material in the basic program of theological formation of future priests. Burdened with relegation Pastoral Theology, it is now thought of in general terms.

Following the data just developed, although not exhaustively, I think that for what concerns Colombia, Social Doctrine in the major seminaries — diocesan or our own — has not been a priority, either theologically or pastorally. Nor can it be said it was given any emphasis.

This judgment is worrisome, and given the testimony of the very same documents of Medellín (1969), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992), and "Ecclesia in America" (1999), the reality of poverty, injustice and violence is alarming, and constitutes an enormous sign of contradiction facing the whole of a continent which is itself majority Catholic.

Finally it can be affirmed that the academic treatment given Social Doctrine was neither systematic nor contextualized in a real situational framework of the country, as asked by Paul VI in Octogésima Adveniens. As a consequence it was hardly acceptable that newly ordained priests would leave the major seminary without the conviction that the Church, the expert in humanity, does offer in her social doctrine a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directives for action, so that the profound changes required by the situation of misery and injustice, may be carried out in such a way as serve the true good of people.

3. Key Points in the Development of Church Social Doctrine

3.1. To begin this second part of my work I quote Fr. Ricardo Antoncich, S.J., in his article: "The Evangelization of Politics." He states "Social Doctrine arises as a response of evangelization to the challenge of modern industrialization. Industrialization means not

only a transformation of technologies that change nature and place
nature at the service of men, but also the rise of new social groups
and of new economic and political interests. The Church rejects as
invalid the accusation that she protects the interests of the rich and
forgets about the poor: ‘There is no lack of those who slander the
Church placing her on the side of the rich versus the proletariat,
something that constitutes an injustice most atrocious...’ Social
Doctrine is incapable of causing, then, whether objectively or
subjectively, the effects or the impression of defending the interests
of the rich and forgetting the struggle of the poor. If this were to
happen, it would be a contradiction against its deepest intentions.”

I consider that the sensible considerations made by Fr. Ricardo
Antoncich could serve as a guide in an attempt to trace the
milestones or most relevant points of the Church’s Social Doctrine.
From my own modest point of view, the Church’s Social Doctrine
knows five crucial moments, reflecting nothing less dramatic than a
radical shift in direction in our society from the middle of the
nineteenth century until our own time.

3.2. The Response to the Social Question

Pope Leo XIII with his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* gives a
response, both relevant and hoped for, and one that looks to
fundamentally improve the fortune of workers in the industrialized
world. But it also makes one notice aberrations of ideologies then in
vogue: capitalism and communism. No one doubts the importance of
this historical landmark. But one has to keep in mind “Church Social
Doctrine is not horn with *Rerum Novarum*. Perhaps this encyclical is
the clearest expression of Social Doctrine at the dawn of a new era,
the industrial; but the principles which should govern social,
economic and cultural coexistence are hidden like roots in the very
same Holy Scripture, in the tradition of the Church Fathers and in
the great theologians such as Thomas Aquinas.”

Just as did Pius XI (*Quadragesimo Anno*), so also Pius XII (with
his Christmas radio messages) would follow the steps of Leo XIII and
face the situation of war and of totalitarianism. All the work
completed by Pius XII is quite relevant to establish and build up the
relationship between *morality and law* as a basis and frame for a just
society. Without denying the universal validity of stated principles

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4 *Quadragesimo Anno*, 44.
5 *Cf. Richard Antoncich, op. cit.*
and established criteria, it is at least fair to make two comments: first, the pontiffs had before their eyes principally the European situation; secondly, the basis for argumentation is constructed from a philosophical mediation (resting on the doctrine of natural law), and the language would seem more targeted to theologians, bishops, and the academic world.

3.3. Opening the Social Question to World Level

With the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* begins a second moment which is considerably decisive in the development of Church Social Doctrine. John Paul II, Paul VI and Vatican Council II each shed light on the whole of reality: The world as social, as cultural, as political, as economic, in conflict, all seen with the light of the Gospel. In this way the "corpus" of Social Doctrine increases and is invigorated. In addition mechanisms are created to nurture its vitality and expansion: The Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace (now the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace), the World Day of Prayer for Peace (January first of each year), and the Message for the World Day for Peace.

Starting with the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, the argumentation is more social-empirical (for example, in its analyses of social change), a simpler style is used, directed to all people; Social Doctrine takes on a more pastoral character; to encourage Christians towards transformative action in society.

Meanwhile, in Latin America, there is developing the whole pastoral and social movement that will culminate in Liberation Theology.

3.4. The urgent need to contextualize the principles, the criteria, and the directives of Social Doctrine

On the occasion of the 80th Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Paul VI published his apostolic letter, *Octogesimo Adveniens* within a turbulent climate of furious ideological debate. It is my opinion that this document provides a novel and bold change of direction for Social Doctrine, which perhaps had not always been perceived as radical or profound. Faced with the impossibility of finding solutions uniformly deduced and applied in order to respond to an enormous complexity of the depressing international situation, the Pope proposes substantially two criteria: the first, the responsible exercise of animation and accompaniment of pastors in intimate relationship with their communities; the second, a contextualization of Social
Doctrine's criteria, principles and directives along the lines of regions, countries, and local places. In this form, it is crystal clear that the Church's Social Doctrine is neither ideology nor "third way."

3.5. Reconsideration and applicability of social doctrine

Perhaps, having participated in the early days of his pontificate in Puebla (1978), i.e. in the General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops, is what made John Paul II personally take on the task of Social Doctrine with such passion and conviction. Besides his three great social encyclicals, Pope John Paul II made good use of his letters and apostolic exhortations not only to deepen Social Doctrine and hone its edge, but also to cry out that Social Doctrine must be taken seriously, that it be studied, that it be taught, and that it be lived.

Throughout this long period in Latin America he attended the two great assemblies of Bishops in Puebla and Santo Domingo, each deeply affected by matters having to do with Social Doctrine. Of particular importance, he took part in the debate concerning Liberation Theology that would produce conclusions not only of the validity of a legitimate Liberation Theology but also of the urgent necessity to apply pastorally the Church's Social Doctrine as the solution to the enormous problems that afflict Latin American peoples.

In the face of dehumanizing economic globalization, John Paul II energetically advocated a globalization of world-wide solidarity.

3.6. Moment for synthesis

I consider that the publication of *The Compendium Of Church Social Doctrine* (April 2, 2004) by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, constitutes a very important point in the development of Social Doctrine. Pope John Paul II as well as the Synod for the Americas had expressed the desire to have a document that would pull together all the pieces of Church Social Doctrine in a systematic and complete way. From that moment on — the materials having arrived and having been synthesized — the knowledge, the teaching and the practical application of the Church's Social Doctrine cease to be random, unsystematic, and non-compulsory.

3.7. Upon concluding this rapid review of the unique moments of the Church's Social Doctrine, I can now do an appraisal as to how they were perceived and received in the studies and in the teaching of Social Doctrine in our seminaries.
On this point I can neither be lax nor can I lack objectivity, even at the cost of appearing negative. I do not believe I am mistaken if I state that the dynamic sense, be it diachronic or synchronic, of the Church’s Social Doctrine passed practically unnoticed. Probably many had the idea that the “corpus” of Social Doctrine would be a finalized collection whose diverse contents were being explained in a systematic way along with the necessary authority of the Magisterium, without paying attention to internal development and to the timely response to demands presented by new situations. The deeply felt new responsibility with each pronouncement of the Magisterium concerning social welfare diminished, hidden by the same newness of yet one more document. One could say that due to this superficial appreciation, the dynamic and compelling aspect of each step in the development of Social Doctrine did not capture the attention of formators or of those in formation. But there is one much deeper cause which underlies all of this. In a few words I could express it this way: complete indifference to politics and sociology. It has always turned out easier to understand charity in terms of aid and of paternalism, and even in terms of development. The authentic social and political dimension of charity and of the entire gospel, is seen and lived out only with difficulty.

4. A Vincentian reading of the Church’s Social Doctrine

4.1. I think that, besides Gospel and moral responsibility, in as much as it pertains to every son and daughter of the Church to know, teach and put into practice Social Doctrine in ways that are creative and open to the many settings in which the Church is present in the world, that there is a certain binding relationship between this and the Vincentian charism. I believe that here is a spiritual, theological, and pastoral vein that has yet to be exploited. For now I dare to propose three criteria for a Vincentian reading of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

4.2. Sensitivity for the Poor

Paul VI states explicitly that our Church’s Social Doctrine “develops with sensitivity appropriate to the Church and designed for the disinterested willingness for service of and attention to the poor.”

*OA, 42.
If sensitivity for the poor is to guide the process of creation and development of social teachings, it is logical to infer that such a sensitivity should also be the criterion for the reading and interpretation of these teachings, since they were written in this spirit and should be read in the same way. John Paul II's discourses in Puebla and in Mexico offer — as magisterial teaching of the Church — precise criteria for an evangelical option for the poor, which should be the place from which the Church's social teaching is read and interpreted. With little effort one can see that the Vincentian charism is a place in the Church where the Church's social teachings can be found such as in one's home, and where one is able to do things in new and creative ways with the same gospel energy that resides in the poor, according to the fortunate expression in Puebla.

In addition to the content and the inspiration of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, there is a suggestive and always up to date proposal in Statute 9, which routes the Vincentian charism towards a substantive and normative acceptance of the Church's Social Doctrine. In the General Assembly of 1992, within the theme of New Evangelization, confreres were emphatically urged to keep in mind the Church's Social Doctrine in their work with the poor.

4.3. *The Mission of Evangelization*

Another criterion to understand and absorb the Church's Social Doctrine is the Mission. The Vincentian Mission has, in effect, the charge of helping personal conversion and the transformation of society, because of the poor. With regard to the poor the Mission is not an isolated action but rather embraces the person as center-point and moves from there to social change guided by the needs of the Kingdom of God — offered from the outset to the poor, humble, and simple. The mission dynamism, therefore, finds in the materials of Church Social Doctrine a prospective and hope-giving cause, one that channels efforts and provides Christian love with a tried and true tool to transform society according to the Gospel. As he was dying, St. Vincent de Paul realized openly that he and his mission of evangelization of the poor had practically changed the face of France and of the Church. It is not far from the truth to state that Vincent de Paul was clearly one of the modern fathers of the Church who shaped missionary action theoretically, spiritually and practically, with results which materialized as matured fruit of the Church's Social Doctrine.

Today it is important to have the necessary insight to state that the Vincentian Mission is truly a Church activity, and not a
movement nor a third way. Vincent was fully conscious of this, and how little it bothered him! In these times, no one is hidden from the many attractive offers from groups and movements of all different types in the Church, which include, sometimes, those that undermine the healthy missionary tradition of the Church. It is also for this reason that I consider that the Vincentian missionary identity is, in this crucial moment in the life of the Church, one of the best helps so that the Church’s social teachings be proposed “out of an integral and social humanism, capable of encouraging a new social, economic and political order, founded upon the dignity and upon the liberty of each human person, and for bringing about peace and justice in solidarity.”

4.4. Lay Action

For me this third millennium should be deeply distinguished in God’s Church for being about the laity and about lay activity. Thanks be to God, the Congregation of the Mission, after the Second Vatican Council, little by little has been taking on a consciousness of the importance of the layperson — it is worth adding, of the faithful layperson, thus recovering as well the genuine and primitive inspiration of our Founder. I consider that every impulse brought to bear to make visible and active the distinct links and branches of the Vincentian Family expresses, among other things, a clear desire for the presence and action of the layperson among us, for the Church and for the world.

It is obvious to note, from 

Octogesima Adveniens

onward, the insistence that lay faithful are both the agents and beneficiaries of the Church’s Social Doctrine. In the Post Synodal exhortation, Ecclesia In America, are the words: “With respect to this (the Church’s Social Doctrine) that [we] have to initiate the formation of lay faithful capable of working in the name of the faith in Christ, for the transformation of earthly realities” (No 54). It is the same John Paul II, who in his Apostolic Exhortation Novo Millenio Ineunte, highlights the importance of the lay faithful in the Church in this new millennium. Equally, in the same document, he makes very pressing the need to put into practice the Church’s Social Doctrine.

It is worth the trouble to point out that in the Compendium of the Church’s Social Doctrine, in the third part, the commitment of laypersons in relation to Social Doctrine is fully described and

*Compendium of the Church’s Social Doctrine, 19.*
pondered. Thus is placed in manifesto the enormous importance of the layperson in the field of Social Doctrine.

It sets up quite a rivalry, then, that those lay faithful now immersed in temporal things and institutions would be the first ones charged with contributing to the enrichment, the understanding, and the fulfillment of Social Doctrine. In this way the faithful layperson is not just a simple, passive subject or mere recipient of the gestating and working out of Social Doctrine. In this specifically ecclesial field we will have to think and work as co-responsible pastors and lay faithful.

Translation: Daniel Paul Borlik, C.M.
0. Introduction

Community Life, in its conception and as the expression of the relationships of obedience towards our superiors and charity with our brothers, is without a doubt one of the aspects of our life which has evolved the most since the Common Rules were handed out on May 17, 1658.

St. Vincent lived, reflected and wrote from his own human and theological formation. He was a child of his times, as we say. He was influenced by his environment. He learned from those whom he considered his teachers and was attentive to the manifestations of God's will in daily events and in the opinions of those who shared with him a unique concern for the building up of the Kingdom of God. Three and a half centuries of reflection by the Church, illuminated by the Spirit of the Lord, which culminated in the Theology of the Church in Vatican II and which has been continued in the post-conciliar theological reflection, gives us a very different perspective from which to consider the same realities and concepts that St. Vincent expounded in the Common Rules. If we illuminate these realities and concepts in the light of later reflection by the Church we can find values which St. Vincent and his contemporaries...
could not discover. We can almost dare to speak of a latent sense of the Common Rules which only comes to light in later reflections. This happens to us, I would say above all, with the reality of the Community. Although we can presume that clearly the missionaries lived in a community, the word community itself hardly appears in the entire text of the Common Rules. Reference is made to things placed in common (in communi deposita) for the service of each one as might be necessary. It says that Our Lord called together the Apostles and Disciples and gave them norms so that they could live well together (congregasset in unum, nonnulla recte inter se convivendi praecepta ipsis tradit) and we are assured that a community given to God (ut comunitas Deo dicata) cannot persevere without a rule of silence. Theses are the three closest references to the concept of community. In the new Constitutions and Statutes, on the other hand, the word community appears forty-four times, to which we can add seven more where the word appears in the plural.

These reflections wish to indicate the fact that in the Common Rules, although the concept of community is not found with precision and its development has been acquired from later Church reflection, some elements, which we consider today to be constitutive of it, are already suggested and other well developed. I do not mean that everything is already said in the Common Rules, but rather that something of what we talk about today on this topic we find already pointed to, in some cases with great clarity, in the text of the Common Rules. This is the continuity which we reclaim today from the Common Rules. Although they have no juridical value, they can still continue to give a strong impulse to the fidelity of the Congregation of the Mission and to each one of its members in a Community for Mission in the Church.

1. A Community of the Disciples of Christ

From the first number of the Constitutions it appears very clearly that the proper condition of a missionary is that of being a follower of Jesus Christ, the first missionary sent to the world to save the human race. Having pointed out this goal of the Incarnation, the end of the Congregation and of each of its members is concretized in continuing the mission of Jesus Christ: To do what he did and to do

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1 R.C. III, 6.
2 R.C. VIII, 1.
3 R.C. VIII, 4.
4 R.C. I, 1.
It as he did it. *This little Congregation wishes to imitate, as much as its meager resources allow, Christ, the Lord in his virtues and in works directed towards the salvation of the neighbor.*

**Imitation or Following**

A lot has been written about the differences that can exist between imitating and following. The supporters of the first word appeal to the traditional literature of the Church which has used the word imitate or imitators to designate the best followers of Jesus Christ. They never thought that by being imitators of Jesus Christ they were contemplating the master as a reality far away and different, like a bad copy of the original work of art which it reproduces. Rather they thought about Jesus Christ in terms of a close relationship, of participating in his spirit, in communion. What they sought to achieve was that Christ might live in them as St. Paul said. The supporters of using the word following say that it better signifies the closeness, the interiority of actions which are not limited to being copies of something external, but which are born from the conviction that they walk in the footsteps of Christ. If we remain with the surface of the image, both imitating and following will seem insufficient because neither the copy can be identified with the model nor what follows with what has preceded. What is meant is a continuity, a presence from knowledge and love which St. Paul expressed as *I live, not I; it is Christ who lives in me.*

St. Vincent, in keeping with the tone of the literature of his time, used in the Common Rules the word imitate, but he deepened its meaning with images of putting on the armor of Jesus Christ, or putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ, by which he was proposing that Christ continues to live and act in the life of the missionaries who have been chosen as instruments through which the Son of God continues to do what he did on earth.

Putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ, a task which has to be undertaken as the most urgent for a missionary, demands a

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5 R.C. I, 1.
7 Cf. R.C. II, 18.
8 Cf. R.C. I, 3.
9 SVP:ES XI, 387; SV XII, 80.
restructuring of thinking and feeling and acting so that, overcoming all natural tendencies or the invitations of the world, the missionary is converted into an expression of the thinking, feeling and acting of Jesus Christ. Remember, Monsieur, he wrote to Fr. Portail, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ; and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ; and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ; and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ. And, without leaving the text of the Common Rules, we find that for St. Vincent putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ consists in living faithfully the Rules because they describe for us the feeling, thinking and acting of Jesus Christ which should be reproduced by a missionary. The spirit of Jesus Christ which shines above all in the evangelical maxims, in his poverty, chastity and obedience; in his modesty; in the lifestyle which he taught his disciples; in the daily living; in the daily practices of piety; in the missions and other activities which he had with people. St. Vincent has enumerated each and every chapter of the Common Rules. For him to live them with authenticity is to live by putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ. That is why he could say Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission.

To do what he did and to do it as he did it is what the Common Rules ask of us. In them we contemplate Jesus Christ from the particular perspective of the unique participation in the spirit of Jesus Christ which St. Vincent de Paul received in the grace of his vocation. From this perspective a special Christian following is adapted by those who feel called to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, evangelizing the poor as Vincent de Paul did. In Chapter Two, On the Evangelical Maxims, this specialness is described like this: All of these evangelical maxims, which we have been talking about up to here, should be observed as well as we can, since they are holy and useful. But, some of them are even more important for us, in a special way those that refer to simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal. In the cultivation and practice of these virtues, the Congregation has to carefully dedicate itself, since these five virtues are like the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation and should inspire all of our actions.

11 SVP.ES I, 320; SV I, 295; SVP I, 276.
12 R.C. I, 3.
13 SVP.ES XI, 429; SV XII, 130.
14 R.C. II, 14.
Dynamic Following

The following of Jesus Christ acquires in the Common Rules a dynamic manifestation which St. Vincent managed to express in the seal and motto which he left us as an inheritance: Christ walking on the globe, crowned by the gospel text: Evangelizare pauperibus missit me. The path of the Congregation is a missionary road in following Jesus Christ who went from town to town, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and healing from every sickness and pain. This has to be, according to the Common Rules, the proper function of the missionary priests whom the brothers assist according to their own condition. The missionary needs to be moved by the dynamism of the spirit, since the five virtues by which the Congregation tries to express its spirit are like the five smooth stones of David, with which, wounding the infernal Goliath on the first throw, we will overcome in the name of the Lord of Hosts and submit the Philistines, which means, sinners, for the service of God. The following of Christ does not end here, since the Congregation of the Mission proposes to imitate Jesus Christ in everything he did and taught. That is why in every one of the dispositions which are given to the missionaries, Jesus Christ appears as the final example of what the missionary is trying to achieve. Since Jesus did such and such a thing, the missionary will also do it. And he will try to do it as Jesus did it, because the Congregation also proposes to imitate everything he did so well. Just a quick reading of the short text of the Common rules is enough to arrive at the conclusion that St. Vincent wanted that each of the missionaries commit himself to being a prolongation of Christ himself, in his mission, in his relation to God and in his dealings with others. That is why he highlights as the first end of the congregation to dedicate oneself to personal perfection, trying to practice to the best of his abilities, the virtues which this Divine Master wanted to teach us by word and example.

15 Lc 4:18.
16 Mt 9:35.
17 Cf. R.C. I, 2.
18 Cf. Cons. C.M., n. 7.
19 R.C. X, 12.
20 R.C. I, 1.
21 R.C. XII, 1.
22 R.C. I, 1.
To Achieve the Personal Perfection of a Missionary

For St. Vincent personal perfection cannot be conceived of on the margin of, or even less as against, our vocation. Remembering the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales, he repeats several times that the bishop cannot neglect his pastoral responsibilities to dedicate himself to contemplation like a Carthusian, nor the Carthusian abandon his solitude for wandering the roads preaching the Gospel. The missionary will achieve perfection fulfilling the duties of his vocation following Jesus Christ as the different chapters of the Common Rules indicate. This is following Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor, reproducing his attitudes and actions towards God and in the service of humanity, in reverential love of the Father, compassionate charity towards the poor and confidence in divine providence. And this conviction is so strong that he will cite for the Daughters of Charity the authority of Pope Clement VIII who proposes fidelity to the rule as sufficient for canonization without requiring another miracle.

2. Called Together for the Mission of the Community

Looking back over the beginnings of the Congregation of the Mission, from the foundational experience which St. Vincent places at his stay in Gannes-Folleville, passing through the contract of association of the first missionaries or the bull Salvatoris Nostri which approved the Congregation, one is convinced that St. Vincent always thought about a community for mission.

The Common Rules point out as the second and third end of the Congregation evangelizing the poor, especially those of the country, and helping clerics acquire the knowledge and virtue necessary for their state in life. St. Vincent conceived of the mission like this, following Jesus Christ, responding to the needs which his experience had led him to discover in the people and the Church. In reality this meant continuing, in the concrete circumstances of time and place, the following of Christ, sent by the Father to save the human race. In the same direction of openness to the salvific will of God and concrete reality, the Congregation could reformulate its end in the new Constitutions, attentive to the will of God which is manifested in

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23 Cf. SVP.ES IX, 527.934-935; SV X, 356-357.585; SVP. IX, 446.
25 Cf. R.C. I, 1.
a special way in the needs of the poor of present day society as it was manifested in the past to St. Vincent.  

The reformulation of the end in the Constitutions and Statutes in the time after the Council is not the goal of this study, but rather to concentrate on some community elements which are taken from the present Constitutions and in a special way are already pointed out in the Common Rules with their strengths and weaknesses.

Submission to the Superior

One of the important chapters in a community for mission has to be the activities and ministries which the community has undertaken. Chapter XI of the Common Rules discusses the missions and the other ministries of the Congregation on behalf of the neighbor. And, perhaps here more than in any other place, is the disjunction between the text and present thinking about relations among the members of the community. It turns out that in a community for mission the activity is centered in the superior or in authority in general, which seems to indicate that the individual can do nothing for himself. It seems that neither his opinion, his initiative, his concerns and questions, or his personal values are taken into account. Many things have to be done, some very important, but it seems that one can do nothing if the superior has not thought about it, or not thought it right or prefers something else. For the individual nothing remains other than the disposition of a tool in the hands of the craftsman, an instrument which can rust in the craftsman's toolbox for lack of use.

If we pass from this to the description of the relationships of obedience expounded in Chapter V of the Common Rules things get worse. The superior appears to be the Lord and Ruler of all things and, we might say, all persons. It is necessary to give him a submission of judgment and will with a type of blind obedience. He always orders for the best and it is necessary to attend not only to his expressed will, but also his intention.

We cannot expect to find expounded the principles of responsibility, participation or subsidiarity which only found adequate formulation in the theology of religious life after the Council and which frequently in practice still seem more like ideals.

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26 Const. C.M., Introduction.
27 Cf. R.C. V, 2.
28 Cf. R.C. V, 2.
yet to be achieved than already fulfilled. There is not even mentioned St. Vincent’s way of working which was so frequent we might say it was his usual way of acting.

### St. Vincent’s Practice

The elaboration of the text of the Common Rules, as Fr Koch maintains, was a long task, open to a wide consultation which took into account personal corrections by some confreres, passing to modifications by groups and finally to the General Assembly. Taking into account that we only have preserved about a third of the letters which it has been calculated that St. Vincent wrote, we can suppose that the consultation on this matter was even wider.

In his advice to the young missionary, Fr. A. Durand, named superior of the seminary at Agde at age 27, there is outlined a way of exercising this office which is far from the one that appears in the Common Rules. The superior has to be united to God because it is necessary that Jesus Christ work in us or we in him; that he labor in us or we in him; that we speak like him and with his spirit, and because there is the storeroom from which you can withdraw the instructions that are needed to fulfill worthily the obligations which you will have; praying to God for the needs of the others, confident that you will obtain more fruit from this means than from any other; without the passionate feeling of being superior or of being the master, but rather by behaving towards them as one of the others; disposed to referring to God all of the good which may be done by us; on the contrary, to attribute to ourselves all of the evil which might occur in the community; remembering that all of the disorders come principally from the superior who, by negligence or his bad example, introduces the disorder, just as all the parts of the body get sick when the head is not well.

When Fr. E. Blatiron, superior in Genoa, complained that it appeared that his missionaries were less submissive than people outside the community, St. Vincent excused them by reminding him that novelty is always attractive and that once in a while they have to put up with this; and he makes this wise and understanding recommendation: If your men grow weary of the work or balk at obedience, you must bear with them. Get what you can gently from

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30 SVP.ES XI, 235-242; SV XI, 342-351.
them. True, it is good to be firm in attaining your goal, but use appropriate, attractive and agreeable means. The missionary, even in the office of superior, or perhaps even more in that role, has to be a man full of mercy.

If this is the difference between the practice of St. Vincent and the text, what endures today from the Common Rules on the community? Here is where we need to inject the light of present reflection by the Church and the Congregation. The Mission and each one of the activities which are undertaken is the Mission of the Congregation which participates in the Mission of the Church. No individual can set up the mission on his own or try to impose his own vision of things or his own way of doing things or his own initiatives. The superior is the tie that binds together different opinions and initiatives, which are sometimes in opposition. The relationship with him can be seen as an exercise of discernment so that each one can submit to the lordship of the one Jesus Christ in whose name the community has come together. If it is true that all of the members of the community have to participate in the discernment, many times the only practical way of advancing to decisions is to restrict them to smaller groups or even to the authority of the superior.

All of these ideas are not expressed in the Common Rules. From them, however, the text of the Common Rules acquires a new value beyond the letters on the page.

3. Participating in the Mission of the Church

We cannot expect from the text of the Common Rules an exposition of the theology of the local Church as an event and fulfillment of the universal Church, nor of the community as the living cell of the Church which participates in its life and work. This appears, more or less fortunately, in the text of the present Constitutions. Our particular participation in its life and mission appears in the Constitutions approved by the Church. The individual inserts himself in the church in and through his insertion in the community and he does it by fidelity to his charism. Our insertion in the life of the Church is neither more intense nor more clear from a weakened common denominator which makes us equal, in works and obligations, to all of the faithful. The Church approves for us a life and a mission as an expression of its own life and mission. Being

31 SVP.ES IV, 75; SV IV, 74-75; SVP. IV, 79-80.
32 SVP.ES XI, 234; SV XI, 341.
faithful to the Church is being faithful to this way of life and this mission which has been confided to us.

None of this appears in the Common Rules either. But in them are sufficiently accentuated our belonging to the Church and our submission to its authority. We owe obedience to the pope and to the bishops in whose dioceses the Congregation is established, even though in this case is added according to our institute, because it does not fall under the bishop’s competence to change what has been approved in our Constitutions. Moreover we do not undertake anything in the parishes without the consent of the pastors. Those who go on missions will bring with them a certification from the bishop and will also let him know what has been done.

This is the way the Common Rules describe our insertion in the Church. It might not be theologically profound, but it is sufficient for our connection with the hierarchical activity of the Church.

4. In Fraternal Relations with the Members

Another chapter in which, in some way, the community elements are pointed out is chapter VIII, titled: On the Mutual Relationships Among Us. Although there abound in it norms for the way and times to speak, it includes many more things by which the Latin term, conversatio, is expanded to mean any dealings between us.

The first thing that stands out in this chapter is the figure of Jesus Christ who brings together the disciples and gives them norms for the correct community living among them. By way of example it cites: they will love each other mutually; they will wash each other’s feet; when they have some disagreement, they will seek reconciliation; they will go out two by two; and, finally, the one who wishes to be the greatest among them will make himself the least of all; and other similar things.

This figure of Jesus with the apostles has a particular relevance today. We had to wait for the renewal of the Code of Canon Law in 1983 for our style of life to be satisfactorily designated in the legislation of the Church. From a Congregation without Vows (without religious vows), which was the title which corresponded to us in the code of 1917, we passed to being a Community of Apostolic Life. The term, Apostolic Life, refers directly to this way of living by

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33 R.C. V, 1.
34 Cf. R.C. V, 1.
35 Cf. R.C. XI, 5.
36 R.C. VIII, 1.
Jesus and the apostles and disciples from whom he chose the twelve who were with him and whom he sent to preach.  

The norms of Jesus, which St. Vincent cites for this first Community of Apostolic Life, includes norms for the twelve and common norms for all Christians, which when applied to our community form the beautiful manual of community living. They are norms of mutual love, of service, of forgiveness and reconciliation, of collaboration, of humility without which a Christian community cannot exist.

**Fraternal Love**

Fraternal love is the foundation of every Christian community. The love of God which has been poured out in our hearts by the Spirit which has been given to us and which allows us to love Jesus. The as I have loved you said right at the end of Jesus' human life, permits us to understand all that he did for us and which we have to do for our brothers. The washing of the feet, when rightly understood, is nothing more than a gesture which captures a constant attitude of service for which one is disposed to give oneself, to give up one's life, to die for one's brother.

St. Vincent had already mentioned in chapter II of the Common Rules the acts of love which always have to be present in the community. This is a list taken from St. Paul which St. Vincent borrowed saying:

All of this should always be undertaken unless there is something against God's commandments, the teachings of the Church or the Constitutions of our Congregation. In the Last Supper, it is not necessary to point out, the master's example stands out: Do you understand what I have done? Then go and do likewise.

**In the Manner of Good Friends**

Community living among the confrères as proposed by St. Vincent comes with a fortunate phrase: in the manner of good friends. Nevertheless, the phrase needs a few annotations. The goal which St. Vincent proposes for the community is not friendship, but rather the great respect with which we have to treat each other so that

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38 Rom 5:5.  
40 R.C. II, 12.  
41 Jn 13:12-27.
fraternal charity and a holy union will remain alive among us.\textsuperscript{32} The friends to whom St. Vincent refers love each other and live together. The reason for this friendship is the shared life to which the conviction of one call to share the same mission has brought us. Therefore friendship in the community has to be open, extended to all who share this life and respond to the same call, without excluding anyone. Love, the motor which has started the response to the call, acquires then in fraternal relationships the colorful warmth of friendship. The one, same response to the God who calls is open to zeal for the mission and friendship among brothers.

The lasting and always growing experience of fraternal charity and holy union which St. Vincent proposes as the foundation of our upright community living demands a great deal of mutual respect. Respect is born from the value we give to each other, not only as a different person but as the presence of the Lord who accompanies us when we gather in his name. As an initial response, respect means overcoming any mere uneducated spontaneity, by which one behaves as he likes, but with attention to the other. Respect includes a positive acceptance of difference which permits us not only to tolerate it because there is no other option, but to accept it as a gift with which God enriches the community. From this positive acceptance of the other as different there follows the need to help the other grow in his own situation for the good of the community, including even a personal sacrifice. Here is the foundation of condescension, not as the tolerance of one who is forced to put up with someone, but as the generosity of communion and the joy in another’s growth. Lastly, respect will make one not live the demands of community life as a loss of personal liberty but as a gift of friendship, and even as an act of devotion to the presence of the Lord who is there with those gathered in his name.

5. With Special Attention to the Weak

It is undeniable that the missionary is fulfilled in fidelity to the ideal of the first missionary sent to save the human race. The Vincentian vision is centered on Jesus Christ sent to evangelize the poor. \textit{This is what he did and wishes to continue doing through us.}\textsuperscript{41} Among the poor, the sick, especially when they were poor, merited Christ’s attention. St. Vincent also proposed to the missionaries a special attention to the sick.

\textsuperscript{32} R.C. VIII, 2.
\textsuperscript{41} SVP.ES XI, 386; SV XII, 79; SVP XII.
It does not cease to surprise that in such a small book, dedicated to organizing the life of the Congregation, a whole chapter is dedicated to the sick. Fr. Vicente de Dios commented on this theme recently in *Vincentiana*.

In this chapter VI of the Common Rules four points with a reference to the community need to be highlighted. 1) We should be solicitous in visiting the sick and helping them because it is one of the *things Christ did and recommended frequently* and we want to do what he did. 2) They *represent for us Jesus Christ* and the encounter with them becomes an encounter with Him who holds this as being done to him. 3) Commitment to the mission has to fill our lives completely, even in moments of weakness and sickness, which place us in a *new pulpit to preach Christian virtues, above all patience and conformity to God's will*. 4) This special participation in the mission, which is sickness, has to be undertaken from belonging to the community and has to be submitted to obedience, not only to health practices, but also to the superior of the house. From the relationship of obedience, we convert our sickness into an act of service for the good of the community.

Translation: JOHN PATRICK PRAGER, C.M.

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**Vicente de Dios, Matters Concerning the Sick, VINCENTIANA, Year 52, n. 3, May-Jun 2008, pp. 204-212.**

R.C. VI, 1.

R.C. VI, 1.

R.C. VI, 2.

R.C. VI, 3.

Cf. R.C. VI, 2.4.
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