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Models for Our Vincentian Vocation: Causes in Process

by Roberto D'Amico

Postulator General

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Introduction

A great 20th-century philosopher, Henry Bergson, has noted that “the greatest persons in history are not the conquerors but rather the saints.” In more recent times, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has rightly stated that “it is not the occasional majorities that are formed here and there within the Church who give direction to the Church and to our lives. The saints are the real, determined majority who give direction to our lives. We stick to them! They translate the divine into human form, the eternal into concrete time.”

In a changing world, not only do the saints not remain outside it historically or culturally but they are becoming ever more credible subjects of it. In an era where utopias have disappeared, in an epoch of distrust and of a lack of appetite for all that is theoretical and ideological, a new attention toward the saints is arising. These are remarkable figures in whom one meets not a theory or even simply a moral, but a story to tell with the word, to discover through study, to love with devotion, to carry out by imitation.

His Holiness John Paul II has understood the signs of the times and continually proposes to the Church the invitation to holiness and the saints as models to be imitated.

At the beginning of this new millennium, as a result of the most recent beatifications and canonizations, we, as Vincentians, have been reminded that we are a family of saints and that our community and pastoral plans will have no meaning unless they lead us to holiness, unless through the proclamation of the Gospel of charity, they also lead the poor to holiness.

1. Canonizations and Beatifications

During the past nine years (1995-2004), we have had the joy of celebrating:

– **Canonizations:**

- Saint John Gabriel Perboyre: on 2 June 1996
- Saint Francis Régis Clet: on 1 October 2000.

– **Beatifications:**

- Blessed Frederick Ozanam: on 22 August 1997
- Blessed Marcantonio Durando: on 20 October 2002
- Blessed Rosalie Rendu: on 9 November 2003.

2. Causes with a *Positio** and a miracle

2.1. *Servant of God Sr. Marta Maria Wiecka, D.C. (1874-1904). Province of Kraków*

She served the sick in the hospitals of Leopoli, Podhajce, Bochnia and Sniatyin. She was called “Benefactress” and “little Mama.” Her life, lived out in prayer and joyful service was crowned by the handing over of her life. Even today, Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox believers pray together at her tomb. The diocesan inquest was initiated on 26 June 1997 in the Cathedral of Leopoli (Ukraine) and concluded on 30 June 1998. The *Positio* was handed in on 20 February 2001. The Congress of Theologians recognized her heroic virtues on 11 May 2004. Now the Congregation of Saints is examining an “alleged” miracle that has been presented on her behalf.

* The *Positio* is an organized and scientific work that contains “the documented account (in chronological order) of the life and activity of the Servant of God, including evidence of the person’s holiness,” in which “the written sources and oral depositions are critically weighed in their socio-historical context...” (cf. *Regolamento della Congregazione per le cause dei santi*, 21 March 1983, Article 16 § 1). The *Positio* is then examined by a commission of nine theologians who vote on the cause. If the majority are favorable, then the cause is examined by the cardinals and bishops who are members of the Congregation of Saints (they meet twice each month). If their judgment is also favorable, the Prefect of the Congregation presents the results of the entire process to the Pope, who grants his approbation and authorizes the drawing up of a decree. With the proclamation of a decree of martyrdom (if the candidate had witnessed to the faith by his/her own life) or a decree of heroic virtue, the title *Venerable* is added to that of *Servant of God*.

2.2. *Servant of God Sr. Giuseppina Nicoli, D.C. (1863-1924). Province of Sardinia*

She lived the Vincentian charism by dedicating herself as a gentle and humble evangelizer and educator, serving the poor, especially abandoned and orphaned children. In the beginning of March 1998, the *Positio super virtutibus et fama* was presented. Two doctors of the Congregation of Saints have issued a favorable opinion regarding an “alleged” miracle. Very soon the *Positio* will be judged by the theologians.

2.3. *Servant of God Fr. Salvatore Micalizzi, C.M. (1856-1937). Province of Naples*

His zeal was limitless, especially when it came to doing all he could for the salvation of the poor and the sanctification of the clergy. Blest with supernatural gifts, he knew how to conceal everything under a veil of profound humility. A true man of God, he lived by prayer and died praying: he was found dead on his knees at the foot of his bed. The *Positio super virtutibus et fama sanctitatis* of this servant of God was presented to the Congregation of Saints on 27 June 1998. An “alleged” miracle, with the favorable judgment of two doctors of the Congregation of the Saints, has also been presented.

2.4. *Servant of God Mother Justa Domínguez de Vidaurreta, D.C. (1875-1958). Visitatrix of the Province of Madrid (San Vicente) from 24 July 1932 until her death*

She was a very spiritual woman and was the spiritual formator of a considerable number of Spanish Daughters of Charity. As Visitatrix she gave a strong spiritual orientation to the province and opened it to various missionary endeavors. The *Positio* was presented to the Congregation of Saints on 27 September 2001. This Congregation has also received the account of an alleged miracle that occurred in Puerto Rico in 1972. University doctors have given a favorable opinion on the inexplicableness of the event. Still we must wait several years before this case is examined by the theologians and cardinals.

3. Causes with the *Positio*

3.1. *Servant of God Msgr. Janez-Francisek Gnidovec, C.M. (1873-1939). Province of Slovenia*

Bishop of Skopje, in the former Yugoslavia, he was a man and bishop of great virtue who knew how to be the father of all believers, including those belonging to other religious denominations. He lived his life out in service of the Church. The *Positio* was presented in March 2000.

3.2. *Servant of God Msgr. Antonio Ferreira Vicoso, C.M. (1787-1875). Province of Portugal and Brazil*

Portuguese Bishop of Mariana in Brazil, he was a good and zealous pastor who spent his life in the formation of the clergy and, in a period when the civil authorities refused to recognize the autonomy of the Church, he defended the rights of the Church. The Diocese of Mariana, Brazil is *co-actor* of the cause together with the Provinces of Rio de Janeiro and Portugal. Since this is an historical cause, it was examined on 23 April 2002 by the Commission of historical theologians and resulted in a favorable outcome. At this time the cause is awaiting examination by the Congress of Theologians and the ordinary assembly of cardinals.

3.3. *Martyrs of the Spanish persecution (there are many causes on the waiting list)*

3.3.1. *Servants of God Srs. Josefa Martínez Pérez, D.C. and 12 companions Martyrs in Valencia (1936-1939). Province of Pamplona*

These 13 martyrs, Daughters of Charity, were killed during the Spanish persecution in Valencia in 1936. The process was begun in 1960 but halted in 1966 for "pastoral prudence." The process was reinitiated in 1995 and finalized on 22 May 1996. The *Positio* was presented on 5 October 1999.

3.3.2. *Servants of God Srs. Melchora Adoración Cortés Bueno, D.C., and 14 companions. Province of San Vicente, Madrid*

On the occasion of the Vincentian celebrations for the 300th anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac the cause was initiated in the Diocese of Madrid on 7 November 1960. Included in this initial process were 17 priests and 17 brothers of the Congregation of the Mission and 15 Daughters of Charity — a total of 49 martyrs.

Numerous difficulties of a local and general nature prevented the continuation of the process. However, the Diocesan inquest on behalf of the Daughters of Charity was reopened on 28 April 1998. On 30 March 2000, the *Positio* was given to the Congregation of Saints.

3.3.3. *Servants of God Frs. Fortunato Velasco Tobar, C.M. and 14 confreres. Spanish Provinces*

This is the cause on behalf of the martyrs of the Congregation of the Mission during the Spanish persecution. They belonged to various dioceses. After several events and 20 years after this cause was begun, the General Postulation presented the *Positio* to the Congregation of Saints on 14 July 2002.

3.4. *Virgin-martyr*

3.4.1. *Servant of God Sr. Lindalva Justo de Oliveira, D.C. (1953-1993). Province of Recife (Brazil)*

With great dedication she served the poor and on Good Friday 1993 merited the palm of martyrdom defending her virginity, thus uniting the sacrifice of her life to that of the first martyr, Christ the Lord. The cause has been entrusted by the Bishop of Salvador, Brazil to a Franciscan Postulator. The *Positio* was presented on 26 July 2002.

4. **Causes where the *Positio* is in preparation**

4.1. *Servant of God Sr. Marguerite Rutan, D.C. (1736-1794), Martyr of the French Revolution. Motherhouse, Paris*

This cause was abandoned in 1936. The Postulation requested that it be reopened following the insistence of the Vincentian Family in Toulouse. The *Positio* has not been completed. Meanwhile, the Bishop of Dax, Msgr. Philippe Breton, has entrusted to our care the cause of the Martyrs of Landes with Jean-Pierre Nautery, who was martyred together with Sr. Marguerite Rutan.

4.2. *Servant of God Msgr. Buenaventura Codina y Augerolas, C.M. (1785-1857). Diocese of the Canary Islands*

A man of God, poor and a lover of the poor, the sick and those suffering from cholera, he was willing to resign as bishop in order to be readmitted to the community. The Diocese of the Canary Islands is an *actor* in the cause of this Servant of God. The diocesan inquiry was opened on 19 January 1995. The results of this process arrived in

Rome and were presented in February 2001. A decree of validity of the process has been obtained and the work on the *Positio* is in progress.

4.3. *Servant of God Santiago Masarnau Fernández (1805-1882), Founder and first President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Spain*

Santiago Masarnau had his first contact with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Paris in 1839 being a member of the “conference” in the parish of St. Louis d’Antin, with the office of treasurer. On 11 November 1849, overcoming all kinds of problems, he founded the first Spanish conference in Madrid. The *actor* of this cause is the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Spain. Sr. María Teresa Candelas Antequera, D.C., is postulator of the cause. On 14 December 2000, the diocesan inquiry for the canonization was solemnly closed. At the present time, the work on the *Positio* is in process.

4.4. *Servant of God Sr. Gabriella Borgarino, D.C. (1880-1949). Province of Turin*

On 3 February 2002, in the Chapel of the Casa Immacolata of the Daughters of Charity of Luserna-San Giovanni (Cuneo), the diocesan inquiry into the cause of Sr. Gabriella Borgarino, D.C., was opened. Sr. Borgarino gave witness, by faith and charity, to an extraordinary holiness, lived out in the apparent simplicity of an ordinary life. Blessed with the gift of a special intimacy with the Eucharistic Jesus and some extraordinary revelations, she was charged with diffusing the ejaculatory prayer: “Divine Providence of the Heart of Jesus, look after us.” Those who have recited this with faith have already received graces of conversion, healing and peace. The results of the inquiry were presented to Rome on 12 January 2004.

5. Causes that have come to Rome but are blocked

5.1. *Servant of God Fr. Gianbattista Manzella, C.M. (1855-1937). Province of Turin*

Even though his holiness is well known in Sardinia, there are difficulties and for this reason we are waiting for better times. In May 2004, a joint commission was formed composed of two members from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and two members from the Congregation of Saints.

5.2. *Servant of God Sr. Clemencia Oliveira, D.C. (1896-1966). Province of Fortaleza, Brazil*

Totally committed to the service of the poor, she possessed charismatic gifts of healing. The diocesan inquiry was begun in Baturité (Brazil) on 6 September 1995. The results of the process arrived in Rome in June 2001. Further investigation is necessary since the material from the diocesan process was not sufficient.

6. Diocesan inquiries in progress

6.1. *Catania: Servant of God Sr. Anna Cantalupo, D.C. (1888-1983). Province of Naples*

The *fama sanctitatis* is alive, especially in Catania, where this Daughter of Charity has become a reference point for all charitable activities and for catechetical work. The diocesan inquiry was begun on 27 October 1997. It seems that some problems in the area of organization are blocking the progress of this cause.

6.2. *Valencia and Lima: Servant of God Msgr. Emilio Francisco Trinidad Lissón Chavez, C.M. (1872-1961), Archbishop of Lima. Province of Peru*

The 27th Archbishop of Lima, Peru, gave his life in service of the poor and in the greatest obedience to the Holy See, even when, for political motives, he was obliged to resign from the See of Lima. When he arrived in Rome, he was forbidden to return to his country. From 1940 to 1961 he exercised his pastoral ministry in Valencia, Spain, invited by the bishop of that diocese. In 1961, at the age of 90, he died in Valencia, renowned for holiness.

On 24 July 1991, his remains were moved from Spain to the Cathedral in Lima. The diocesan inquiry, which will be very complex because of the many situations to study and clarify, was begun on 20 September 2003 in the Cathedral of Valencia.

6.3. *Valencia: Servant of God Vicente Queralt, C.M., and 21 companions (priests, Daughters of Charity and Members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal). Provinces of Spain*

On 4 March 2004, the diocesan inquiry was begun on behalf of these 22 martyrs who were assassinated in Valencia, Murcia, Barcelona, and Girona because of their faith during the religious persecution of 1936.

6.4. *Madrid: Servants of God Frs. José María Fernández Sánchez, C.M., and 38 companions (17 priests, 16 brothers, and six Knights of the Miraculous Medal). Province of Madrid*

These are martyr confreres of Madrid together with some lay persons for whom the cause was begun last 30 June.

7. Silent causes

These causes have not moved forward for an extended period of time and most probably will not be taken up again:

- because of disinterest or, therefore, lack of *fama sanctitatis*;
- because the documentation is inadequate and, with the passing of time, we perhaps will not have the possibility of sufficient information;
- Servant of God Felix De Andreis, C.M. (1778-1820), Founder of the Mission in North America;
- Servant of God Kin-To Sié (1790-1858), lay catechist;
- Servants of God Claude Chevrier, C.M. (1831-1870), Vincent Ou, C.M. (1821-1870) and Marie Thérèse Marquet, D.C., and companions, martyrs in China (1870);
- Servant of God Luigia Borgiotti, (1802-1873), Co-foundress of the Nazarene Sisters;
- Servants of God Jules Garrigues, C.M., and Jules André Brun of the Marist Brothers Institute and companions, martyrs in China (1900).

8. Probable future diocesan inquiries

- Fr. Giovanni Battista Tornatore, C.M. (1820-1895), Co-founder of the Daughters of St. Ann;
- Msgr. Peter Schumacher, C.M. (1839-1902), Bishop of Portoviejo, Ecuador;
- Polish confreres, martyrs of the Nazi regime;
- Msgr. Giuseppe (Joseph) Rosati, C.M., Bishop of St. Louis, Missouri, USA;
- Fr. William Slattery, former Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and others.

Conclusion

I end this presentation and my time as Postulator General by thanking the Superior General, Fr. Robert Maloney, for the confidence he placed in me during these nine years of service. I also wish to thank the confreres and the Daughters of Charity who have worked and continue to work for the various causes.

Finally, I wish to remind all of you, fathers and brother, that we are all called to be saints, though not all to canonization. At the same time I wish to encourage you so that the memory of confreres, sisters and lay Vincentians, who died renowned for holiness, is not lost. Keep in mind that canonizations are the culmination of a lived holiness, which is appreciated and exalted in the places where it was lived, and that each canonization gives glory to God from whom all holiness comes. It is an incentive to the whole Community and to the universal Church to follow in the footsteps left by so many of our brothers and sisters.