Spring 1998

Unfolding the Legacy—Key Figures in the Tradition

Betty Ann McNeil D.C.

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol19/iss1/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentian Heritage Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.
Sitting around a campfire exchanging stories on starlit nights evokes memories or significant experiences, arousing feelings that can motivate one into action. Sometimes listening to tales can make heroes or heroines seem like giants—people of mission and history. I would like to reflect on some of the giants in the Vincentian Family, individuals whose story:

A) Mirrors Providence’s gift of sacramental moments of ministry and prophecy

B) Celebrates Vincentian men and women who heard God’s call to mission

Retelling the story of the Vincentian family fans flames of love for the mission deep within our hearts. The enthusiasm of Saints Louise de Marillac (1591-1660) and Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) is contagious. They were so filled with the fiery spirit of our compassionate God that they recognized the face of Christ in the eyes of social outcasts. Their zeal moves us to imitation. Their model was Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor and source and model of all Charity. These giants were holy prophets of social and ecclesial reform on behalf of the downtrodden. Like them, each generation must address contemporary issues and make this same mission a living reality for its own time.

Each person transmits the mission by presence, service, and leadership. Organizations, agencies, and institutions dedicated to Vincentian ministry continue the mission. Everyone involved with the Vincentian family is called to stewardship of the corporate mission. Personal attitudes, value based choices, and expressions of social consciousness are ways that we mirror Vincentian ideals to others on the job and in the marketplace.

As Jesus taught his disciples to be attentive to signs in the rhythm of nature, we are called to be attentive to the cries of the poor and the signs of the times arising from the warp and woof of the social fabric around us.¹ Social changes call us to continually adapt the Vincentian mission to different circumstances of time and place. In the Vincentian

¹ Cf. Matthew 16: 2-3 and Guadium et Spes; 11, 912.
tradition, God speaks through social changes and events as signs which inspire us to act based on an interpretation of their meaning according to our beliefs.

The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Moved by that faith it tries to discern in the events, needs, and the longings which it shares with other people of our time, what may be genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God. For faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for humanity, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human.  

God inspired the Vincentian family to continue the mission of Jesus—to enable people to love one another and love God—to be instruments of the charity of Jesus Crucified. According to Saint Vincent: “God has raised up this Little Company . . . for his love and good pleasure . . . [and] we are bound to show it [love] by leading people to love God and their neighbor; to love the neighbor for the sake of God and God for the sake of the neighbor. We have been chosen by God as instruments of his boundless and fatherly love which desires to be established in and to replenish souls.” An appreciation of the role of Divine Providence helps one to understand how

---

2 Guadium et Spes; 11, 912.
the Vincentian family culls meaning from events when encountered by individuals in faith.

This article will contextualize the role of Divine Providence in the Vincentian tradition by:

1. Highlighting the mission of charity century by century.
2. Providing a survey of men and women who had key roles.
4. Reflecting on the role of zeal, collaboration, and servant leadership for ministry today.

Providence in the Company of Charity

What is the role of divine providence in the Company of Charity? Divine providence is at the heart of the Vincentian mission. In Vincent’s rural upbringing, he witnessed nature’s rhythm of life and seasonal growth. This made him realize how tenderly God cares for all the needs of creation. Humans only have to use the present moment for putting God’s work first according to the divine plan without worry or anxiety for tomorrow.4 “Saint Vincent’s experience of the providential action of God made docility to divine providence one of the characteristics of his spirituality.”5 This submission made Vincent act deliberately but slowly. In this way he annoyed some people although others esteemed him for being firm in his convictions once he had ascertained the will of God.

The word providence, from the Latin providentia, literally means “foresight.” It describes the way a loving Creator led the people of God through the Exodus and remained faithful to the covenant which Jesus fulfilled in the paschal mystery. The teachings of Jesus show us how to be in relation to the One who first loved us and how to build the city of God with our sisters and brothers. Gifted with human freedom, God has revealed love rather than power as the way to reach the heavenly Jerusalem. God’s love invites our active participation in serving the needs of the human family.

Vincent believed that “hidden treasures are found in divine providence and so those who honor our Lord so magnificently, follow

4 Cf. Matthew 6: 31-34.
Through the integration of prayer and service in this way, Vincentian men and women, mystics and missionaries, who become contemplatives in action and apostles of prayer who discover untold depths of spirituality along the way.

Inspiring the human heart with love and light, this caring presence of God in our midst we call divine providence. This expression of gracious kindness shapes our lives and directs the Vincentian mission through specific circumstances, people, and events—moment by moment, day by day, year by year, and decade by decade presenting encounters with God cloaked in routine reality, such as disappointments, interruptions, and other unforeseen situations. Perceiving God in our midst gives meaning to both orderliness and caring in the events of our lives. “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.”

We see the human face of divine caring all around us. The sight might move us to experience feelings of gentleness associated with the image of a nursing mother or a Good Shepherd tending the sheep. The prophet Hosea describes divine providence tenderly as the One who “led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love” lifting them like those who lift infants to the cheek and bending down to feed them.

For our part, relying on divine providence is like falling and being caught in the arms of a friend. Or it is like turning a corner onto an unknown street at twilight yet going forward in confidence. The wisdom to trust providence invites abandonment and implicit trust even in the midst of utter chaos and uncertainty. Toward the end of her life, Louise de Marillac wrote a reflection about the steps she felt moved to take in order to live this out:

I must practice great humility and mistrust of myself; abandon myself continuously to the Providence of God; imitate, insofar as I am able, the life Our Lord who came on earth to accomplish the holy will of God His Father; assist my neighbor to the best of my ability both corporally and spiritually for the love which God has for all of us equally; carry out my spiritual exercises carefully.

---

7 Cf. Romans 8: 28.
8 Cf. Hosea 11.
Divine providence often surprises us. Circumstances may invite us to use untapped talents and energy on behalf of the poor. Such situations stretch us beyond comfort into new possibilities. These moments of grace take us where God is leading us. It is the work of God, not our own.

Deep and divine meaning drew Vincent and Louise into an intuitive reliance on divine providence. Louise understood God as the One who provided and cared for her. She confidently entrusted her needs and sought to know and do God’s will. Surrendering her life to the divine plan, Louise discerned the ways God was inviting her response to follow Jesus Crucified. She believed that providence guided the Little Company. She, therefore, trusted that God would provide for the needs of individuals and the various ministries of the Company of Charity despite crosses of obstacles and suffering.10

For Vincent, providence contained hidden treasures of grace. He feared dashing ahead of “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God.”11 He believed in God’s eternal purpose for the best interests of the human family. Vincent’s slow discernment and human tendency to procrastinate sometimes tested his followers’ patience. Reluctant to not rush forward with merely human projects, Vincent frequently delayed decisions in order to determine God’s plan.12 Attending to the voice of God in confidence, for Vincent, any hint of intrigue ran counter to trust in providence.

Vincent often spoke of “following providence step by step” and not “rushing ahead of providence.”13 Louise frequently referred to the guidance of divine providence. She sent her daughters to certain places in order to discover the will of God regarding the service of the poor. For example, “Our Sisters Anne Hardemont and Marie Lullen are going to Montreuil in order to discover what divine providence wishes them to do there.”14 Elizabeth Seton consistently mentioned the sweetness of “heavenly providence over us” as a protector and

11 Cf. Ephesians 3.
12 Coste, CED, 7: 385-86.
13 “How marvelously our Lord is honored by those who follow it [divine providence] and do not rush ahead of it” Coste, CED, 1:68. “Wisdom consists in following providence step by step.” Ibid., 2: 472-73. “I have a particular devotion to following the adorabole providence of God step by step. My only consolation is that I think our Lord alone has carried on and is constantly carrying on the business of the Little Company.” Ibid., 2: 208.
source of blessings. She exclaims her happiness that “the providence of God keeps us wholly to himself.”

The Vincentian Family understands the mystery and role of divine providence in light of the founders’ teachings. Vincent firmly believed that the providence of God did not allow anything to happen to humankind without a reason. It was “God’s providence that brought you into being,” he reminded the Daughters of Charity in his conferences with them.

The founders connected wisdom with providence especially in time of uncertainty or difficulty. Timing is another critical factor in walking in synchronization with providence. Although Vincent believed in action, he acted deliberately and made haste slowly. His theology of events led him to perceive that “the works of God have their moment. His providence does them then, and not sooner or later.”

“The good that God wishes to be done comes about almost by itself, without our thinking about it,” Louise recounted, after visiting a mission where many problems had developed. Reflecting on the ways of God in establishing the Daughters of Charity mission at Nantes, she wrote:

I have great reason to say, in truth, that it has been Divine Providence alone at work. Going there, I had no knowledge of what there was to do. I can say that I saw what was being done only when it was completed. In encounters where I could have met with obstacles, the same Divine Providence provided, totally unexpectedly, persons who could help me.... It also seemed to me that I was doing what I was meant to do without knowing how. May God be forever blessed for it!

---

15 “The heavenly providence over us has been truly our continued scene of mercy.” Elizabeth Seton to Julia Scott, 19 February 1819, Joseph B. Code, Letters of Mother Seton to Mrs. Julianna Scott (Baltimore: Chandler Printing Company, 1960), 277.
17 Cf. Coste, CED, 7: 385-86.
18 Coste, CED, 9: 74.
20 Coste, CED, 5: 396.
21 Coste, CED, 4: 122-23.
Experience has shown that God provides the necessary resources for the service of the poor. “Divine providence saw to it that alms were given for the sick and bashful poor in amounts for which no one had dared hope.”23 As Frédéric Ozanam testified: “I am now completely convinced that when one does a deed of charity one need not worry about where the money will come from: it will always come.”24

Divine providence may also be considered as the unique constellation of circumstances—people, needs, events, and places encountered in living out the Vincentian vocation. Providence used the urgent needs of countless men and women to involve the founders in accomplishing the divine plan. Poor persons served by the Vincentian family are also its best teachers and masters who instruct servants of the poor in authentic attitudes of Vincentian service. It is not only right and just that we “not only attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them.”25

Striving to “live in the spirit of the servants of the gospel,” we are not only taught, fed, and led by those who work by the sweat of their brow but our spirits can be nourished by their fortitude and simplicity.26 Their example is but one of the priceless gifts we receive from the poor themselves. Only God knows the names of the individuals who fed and led Vincent and Louise during their lifetime. “These poor vine dressers who labor for us expect us to pray for them while they themselves are working to feed us.... We are living on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of the poor. The poor feed us.”27

Call to ministry

What does this mean for our call to ministry? Continuing to be fed by and for the poor, today we call Vincent and Louise’s responses to the needs of their day, the Vincentian mission. God’s call to ministry lies at the core of Vincent and Louise’s legacy of charity and evange-

23 L 252, Louise de Marillac to Anne Hardemont, 23 July 1649. Sullivan, Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, 295.


lization. In the midst of a technological environment we must strive to humanize our techniques to make of them instruments of the tenderness of Christ based on Vincentian ideals and values—humble service, mutuality in ministry, and risk taking in faith.28

God’s call to mission emanates from a love of God and neighbor expressed by Christian service driven by gospel values.

God’s call to mission calls for collaborative ministries that ignite inventiveness to infinity in the best interests of persons who are poor and vulnerable.

God’s call to mission focuses on providing quality services steeped in advocacy that address poverty and injustice.

Ministry in the Vincentian tradition involves a sense of caring that evolves over time into an enduring concern expressed affectively and effectively in deeds. This posture along the path marked by providence requires ministers to care for themselves as whole persons and to relate holistically—head, heart, and spirit and move into action. Holistic relationships in Vincentian ministry are exemplified by key figures in the Vincentian tradition.

The understanding heart of Catherine Laboure enabled her to move beyond gratuitousness to genuine appreciation of the other person.

The humble attitude of Rosalie Rendu and Frédéric Ozanam enabled them to view all persons equally and move beyond polite encounters to profound, reciprocal respect.

Her appreciation for real presence moved Elizabeth Seton beyond transactions to the communication of core values in relationships grounded in mutuality.

Love of God and neighbor bond individuals together in the circle of the Vincentian Family, like in a weavers’ guild.29 There men and women gather around the loom guiding threaded shuttles bearing various hues and textures. Over time a Vincentian tapestry emerges—the product of collaboration and common vision—a combination of

---


contemplation with apostolic love. Through stories, one can examine its pattern and trace the most prominent themes related to its mission, vision, and values. To appreciate the thread of divine providence throughout the warp and woof of the Vincentian tapestry one must examine how key figures in the tradition followed providence step by step over the ages.

Providence leads step by step

How has divine providence led the Company of Charity step by step? A lawyer in Dax facilitated Vincent’s early education by bringing the bright young lad into his home as tutor. In 1617, Vincent experienced two events which helped him realize that “grace has its moments.”

January at Folleville sets the stage for popular missions and the eventual establishment of the Congregation of the Mission.

August at Chatillon-les-Dombes saw an encounter with a sick family which precipitated his initiatives for organized charity.

These two events prompted Vincent to address the material and spiritual miseries of the sick poor through the Confraternities of Charity and evangelization. Both the Daughters of Charity and the Ladies of Charity later arose as a result of Vincent’s collaboration with Louise de Marillac in the parish based confraternities of seventeenth-century France.

In both events, providence used the twenty-six-year-old Vincent and the laity as instruments of the divine plan to advocate for vulnerable persons in need. Turning the tapestry to the other side, we are able to trace the prophetic patterns in the formation of the Vincentian mission:

---

30 “In order to be faithful to the teaching of the [Second Vatican] Council must not the members of each community who are seeking God before all else combine contemplation with apostolic love? By the former they cling to God in mind and heart; by the latter they strive to associate themselves with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God” Cf. Evangelica Testificatio, §10: 685, quoted in Flores and Orcajo, Saint Vincent is Our Way, 330.

31 “That is why I have a particular devotion to following the adorable providence of God step-by-step.” Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 7 December 1641, Coste, CED 2: 208.

32 Coste, CED 2: 453.
A dying laborer in need of making peace with God.
A sick family in need of care and nourishment.
A powerful woman of wealth concerned about the spiritual welfare of the people on her lands.
A compassionate neighbor concerned about the welfare of a family in dire need.

For Vincentians, what does it mean that history recorded only the names of those who advocated for the poor but makes no mention of the identity of the dying laborer or the sick family? What message could we cull from the anonymity of the peasant whom Vincent visited at Folleville and the unidentified family at Chatillon in 1617? They are really unsung heroes and heroines in two events which caused radical conversion for Vincent and changed the direction of history forever. The situations of these unknown individuals providentially gave new form to evangelization and charity in the face of poverty, illness, ignorance. Although catalysts of change, their names are unknown, their story unsung. They remain anonymous among the cadre of persons whose lives make God present in our midst. Through them and others like them, God continues to speak words of compassion throughout the centuries.

Seventeenth Century

A simple country girl, Marguerite Naseau (1594-1633), taught herself and others to read, and was driven by a gospel vision of missionary zeal. She became the first servant of the poor in the Confraternities of Charity. When the people of the villages saw the respect, compassion and devotion to the sick poor, they named these good village girls who were serving the poor, the Daughters of Charity. Led by divine providence, the Vincentian tapestry during its first century of growth shows the threads of development and expansion in the Company of Charity. The founders heard the voice of providence through opportunities and unmet needs despite risk, controversy, opposition, and apparent failure.

33 History reports the names of those who advocated for the dying peasant as Madame de Gondi and for the family besieged with illness, Mme. de la Chassaigne.
34 Louise de Marillac missioned some of her daughters to Poland and Vincent de Paul sent his sons into Poland, Ireland, Scotland, (the Hebrides, and Madagascar.
Vincent first sent missionaries to Madagascar in 1648.
Vincent and Louise first sent their daughters to Poland in 1652.

Providence used a mission motif to guide the critical period of transition after the death of the founders who both died the same year, in 1660. Deriving strength from gospel vision, core values comprising threads of missionary zeal stabilized community leadership while God’s design on the Vincentian tapestry evolved through their successors. “Vincent consulted the aging and infirm Louise who recommended Marguerite Chêtif as her successor to lead the Daughters of Charity because of the practical wisdom and courage she showed.”

Rene Alméras, whom the elderly Vincent had recommended as a possible successor, was elected to succeed the founder in leading the Congregation of the Mission.

Eighteenth Century

Through the end of the seventeenth century until the dawn of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, the Company of Charity had developed into a significant presence in the Church in several European countries and elsewhere. The Congregation of the Mission grew from 27 houses in 1660 to 179 in 1789, and the Daughters of Charity expanded from 75 to 430 houses in the same period. Prior to storming the Bastille, revolutionary forces had sacked the head-

35 Louise’s recommendation was providential because Marguerite Chêtif then turned to Mathurine Guerin, Saint Louise’s former secretary, for assistance. It was she who suggested recalling the founders’ letters for transcription and compilation in order to preserve their teachings. Chêtif’s consultation with Mathurine served as a prelude to twenty-one years of leadership by Mathurine Guerin, who became the next superior general of the Daughters of Charity. Cardinal de Retz, archbishop of Paris, gave his approval on 18 January 1655. The statutes of this institute were confirmed in the name of Pope Clement IX by his legate, Cardinal Louis de Bourbon, duke de Vendôme, on 8 July 1668. Vincent de Paul modified these statutes at the insistence of Louise de Marillac so that the Daughters of Charity would be under the perpetual direction of Vincent and his successors as superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. “On the Election of Officers,” 27 August 1660, Conferences of Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity, trans., Joseph Leonard, C.M., (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1979), 1287.


37 The Congregation of the Mission had established missions throughout France and in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Lithuania, The Palatinate, Algiers, Mauritius, Bourbon, Constantinople, and China. The Daughters of Charity were serving in France, Verviers, Barcelona, and Poland.
quarters of the Congregation of the Mission at Saint Lazare. This destruction and ensuing violence threatened everyone involved in weaving the tapestry of Vincentian charity. Finally the government dispersed the communities of Charity and officially suppressed the Company until providence launched it again.

In the interim many other Daughters of Charity and Vincentians continued their ministries clandestinely, or migrated elsewhere to embody the Vincentian tradition in new institutes and lay groups. There they continued the mission by serving persons oppressed by poverty, ignorance and illness. Younger members were sent back to their families and native regions. For example, Joan Antide Thouret (1765-1826, canonized 1934), a young Daughter of Charity who had not yet pronounced vows for the first time but who had memorized the Common Rules of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise while in the Company, gave the same rule to the community she founded at Besançon in 1799. The Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antide continued the Vincentian mission in her spirit by teaching poor children and helping to nurse and feed the poor.38

Approximately twenty-five Vincentian missionaries and ten Daughters of Charity died as a result of governmental persecution during the French Revolution. The Vatican has recognized approximately nine of these heroes and heroines as martyrs for the faith whose cause for sainthood is in process.39

Nineteenth Century

Missionary urgency defined the horizon of the nineteenth century in the Company of Charity. Providentially Antoinette Deleau, D.C., (1728-1804, superior general, 1790-1804), who had returned to Paris to care for the sick poor after the Reign of Terror, realized that Napoleon Bonaparte’s government had a great need for nurses to care for the sick and injured. Deleau proposed that the Daughters of Charity could help meet this need if housing and financial support would be

39 These include: Blessed Odile Baumgartener and Marie Anne Vaillot, martyred at Angers (1 February 1794); Blessed Marie Madeleine Fontaine, Marie Françoise Lanel, Therese Madeleine Fantou, Jeanne Gerard, martyred at Arras (26 June 1794); Blessed Louis Joseph François, John Henry Gruyer, martyred in the massacred at Saint Firmin (3 September 1792), and Blessed Peter René Rogue, martyred at Vannes (3 March 1796). See *Echoes of the Company* (1994): 31-35, 67-72.
provided. The Chaptal Decree of 12 December 1800 made the Daughters of Charity the first institute to be granted legal recognition after the Revolution. Steady growth in vocations and membership followed. Four years later the Congregation of the Mission was legally recognized, also. Despite the pains of rebirth, the Company stabilized in the second half of the nineteenth century under Very Reverend Jean Baptiste Étienne, C.M., (1801-1874, superior general 1843-1874), whom some consider the second founder as a result of his twenty-one years of leadership during the critical era of reconstruction.

Twentieth Century

The Vincentian mission has continued to respond during the twentieth century to new needs among marginalized persons in society despite two world wars, economic crises, communism, nazism, and fascism which required bold Vincentian initiatives to address the atrocities of injustice and criminal assaults on human dignity. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) at least fifty-seven Vincentian priests and brothers and thirty Daughters of Charity were martyred. The cause for sainthood of thirteen of them is being studied by the Vatican. Sister Helene Studler, D.C. (1891-1944), became known as a guardian angel of the poor and prisoners because she helped more than 2,000 soldiers escape the Gestapo at Metz by crossing the French-German border during World War II.

In addition to responding to flood relief efforts and national disasters of the twentieth century, interprovincial efforts among the Daughters of Charity during the decades of 1970 and 1980 in the United States have sought out displaced Vietnamese, Thai, and Cambodian

refugees. The most recent outreach has been to Guatemalan refugees in Mexico to accompany them back to their native land during the 1990’s. It is also worth noting that the five provinces established the Daughters of Charity National Health System which has become a major player in the United States since its inception in 1986. Around the globe Daughters of Charity continue to initiate and direct health care programs in Sierra Leone and Angola and are engaged in missionary work in Bolivia, Ethiopia, Japan, Madagascar Taiwan, Zaire, and elsewhere.

I call you friends

Within the Vincentian Family there are many no longer called servants, but friends by God and are relevant models for ministry today. The scourges of the French Revolution yielded to years of blessing and promise during which new Vincentian heroes and heroines emerged around the globe. They highlight different aspects of corporal and spiritual service in the Vincentian tradition. These agents of transformation, all of whom lived at the same time, include examples of humble service, mutuality in ministry, taking risks in faith, and servant leadership for the mission.

Saint Catherine Labouré  
Sister Rosalie Rendu and Blessed Frédéric Ozanam  
Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Humble service—Catherine Labouré

Living in the nineteenth century was Catherine Labouré (1806-1876), the ninth of seventeen children. Her mother died when Catherine, called Zoé in the family, was still a child. Circumstances necessitated that she assume management responsibilities for the farm household at a premature age. This prevented her from having any formal education and learning to write until adulthood.

At age nineteen, she dreamt that she was praying in the parish church at Fain-les-Moutiers while an old priest was celebrating Mass at the altar. When he faced the congregation at its conclusion, the

---

celebrant turned and beckoned her. Catherine was afraid and ran away but soon found herself at the bedside of a sick person. The old priest was there also saying: “My child, it is good to care for the sick. You run away from me now but one day you will be glad to come to me. God has his designs on you! Do not forget it!”

In a few years Catherine wanted to enter the Daughters of Charity but her father forbade it and sent her to Paris in an unsuccessful effort to dissuade her. She was dissatisfied living with siblings in the capital and working there. After awhile she learned that the Daughters of Charity had a house in Châtillon-sur-Seine where her sister was principal of a school. When Catherine went to visit the community house she saw a portrait in the sisters’ parlor of the same old priest she had seen in her dream earlier at Fain-les-Moutiers. The sisters explained that he was Vincent de Paul, their founder. Eventually, her sister interceded with their father for his permission for Catherine to enter the community. This she did in 1830 with her father’s blessing.

In the Daughters of Charity, Catherine was gentle, affable, and considerate of her companions. One sister recalled that Catherine “always welcomed us [as visitors to Enghien] with such kindness and affability.” She had a gift for calmly communicating peace and being an instrument of reconciliation. Her antidote for stress was spirituality rooted in God through prayer. She advised a young sister who was in turmoil to “Go to the foot of the tabernacle and say what you have to say to the Good Lord. He will not repeat it, and you will have the grace to put up with it.”

Singularly given to devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, Catherine was favored with several visions and supernatural experiences. In 1830 she received the Medal of the Immaculate Conception (soon called the Miraculous Medal). Central to the Marian message was the invitation to “come to the foot of this altar. There graces will be poured on all those, small, or great, who ask for them with confidence and fervor. Graces will be poured out especially on those who ask for them....” She understood that in addition to extraordinary graces her mission included suffering and contradiction. Among her physical sufferings from her youth was arthritis which became so bad that hospitalization was necessary when she was thirty-five years old.

---

43 Laurentin, Life of Catherine Laboure, 296.
44 Ibid., 290.
46 Ibid., 75.
In 1831 she was sent to Enghein Hospice for old veterans and infirm soldiers at Reuilly, where she cared devotedly for them with deep respect and devotion for forty-five years. Catherine was a realistic and efficient woman given to contemplation in the midst of the bustle of routine activity. She organized what needed to be done, focused on it and carried out her service of the poor with tender compassion. Her childhood rural experience was a great help to her because Catherine at one time also tended the poultry yard and purchased cows at the hospice in order to have fresh milk and eggs for her patients. Having an innate sense of fairness and management, the elderly respected her sense of equity. She also had charge of the linen room and finally, as an elderly sister, served as portress of the hospice. Of all her duties at the hospice, she was remembered as being “especially good with the poor.”

Catherine’s ministry revolved around humble daily service inspired by charity—serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. She held herself strictly accountable for the time and money which was available to her. Likewise, she gracefully assumed care of the most difficult residents and the most unpleasant tasks as an indefatigable servant of the poor.

She took on herself the heaviest burdens—floor-polishing, washing, ironing—or the most repulsive ones—commode-cleaning, looking after the personal hygiene of the old people. She was both available and benevolent... and above all she was not a scandalmonger.

A straightforward woman of integrity, simplicity in word and deed characterized all her relationships. Everything came straight from her heart, “gazing into God, seeing everything in God.”

Catherine, only 5’3” tall, lived during times of violent civil unrest but believed in the power of prayer, and faced each day with confident trust in divine providence. A woman naturally lighthearted, her ready smile captivated hearts and her energetic and lively disposition made others feel they could turn to her for support. Once, she, along with thirty other sisters, protected the local superior when attacked by

---

47 Ibid., 295.
48 Ibid., 287.
49 Ibid., 285.
Paris militiamen during the commune (March-May 1871). Another
time, she assisted the escape of two wounded policemen and distrib­
uted medals to rebels who accepted them. Catherine had learned the
delicate art of responsibility in humility. She was able to meet people
all kinds on an equal footing, including hostile vigilantes, rather than
view others as superior or inferior.

Her characteristic mode of serving the residents was very self­
effacing—she was not one to call attention to herself or to stand out in
a crowd. Her sense of humility led her to prudence and discretion in
her relationships with everyone. “Passionately concerned about things,
Catherine avoided becoming polarized on those [issues] that were
dear to her heart.” In times of conflict when she was in charge of the
hospice, Catherine had to mediate the tensions between the houses at
Reuilly and Enghien (separated by only a garden) and respond with
diplomacy and tact to the satisfaction of the elderly residents, the
administrator and the d’Orleans family.

She intuited the needs of others and had a kindly, understanding
heart that led her to genuinely appreciate those she served despite
their sometimes disagreeable behavior. In her quiet but prayerful
way, Catherine described the dynamic of her spiritual life:

I go to the Chapel and I talk to God. He answers me. He
knows that I am there [. . . ] I wait for whatever I have to
wait for, whatever he wants to give me: and, whatever it
is, it always makes me happy. Listen to God, talk to him,
sort yourself out. It’s all there—that is prayer.

Catherine embraced death as a gift, with her typical attitude of
gratitude for all the graces God had bestowed on her long life. Con­
sidered by many to be just a regular sister, Catherine lived her life in
ordinary roles of service but in an extraordinary manner. She died
with great serenity and calmness at age seventy without ever publicly
revealing the forty-six year old secret of her identity as the one ex­
traordinarily favored to be the seer of the Virgin Mary.

Mutuality in ministry—Rosalie Rendu and Frédéric Ozanam

50 Ibid., 174.
51 Ibid., 275.
52 Ibid., 282.
53 Ibid., 296.
Collaboration is in the genes of a Vincentian whose service of the poor addresses needs and issues, not in isolation, but in the context of relationships involving church, community, and the family. Rosalie Rendu (1786-1856), a Daughter of Charity engaged in social work in the Mouftard district of Paris for forty-six years, attracted the most destitute as if she were a magnet. She lost her father as a young girl and grew up in the darkness of the Revolution accustomed to unfamiliar guests in her home only to learn her mother was providing sanctuary to clergy fleeing the guillotine. One of these visitors presided at her first communion in the darkness of a cave for fear of persecution. She became acquainted with the Daughters of Charity through a friend with whom she worked at the hospital in Gex and soon joined the community herself at age sixteen.

Rosalie’s dynamic charity arose from her own family orientation which made her sensitive to the needs of others, especially anyone suffering from poverty and injustice. It was she who taught energetic but idealistic students of the Sorbonne how to serve the poor with an attitude of respect and genuine helpfulness. To be Vincentian is to be family-oriented and comfortable with the family of poor persons bonded by friendship rather than servitude. She often reminded new volunteers that poor people have “many more things to do than to study etiquette and good manners! You should not mind rough words nor should you shrink from uncouth looks. These people are far better than they appear.”

Once Sister Rosalie wished to avoid embarrassing someone who was one of her clients, so she asked the person in front of others: “Will you please do me the favor of bringing this package to some one who lives near you? I cannot go there today and I want the person to get this as soon as possible. You will render me great service by doing this.” This sensitivity to the bashful poor revealed the profound respect she had for others and her humble stance in dealing with persons in need so that she might learn about their strengths from them. Sister Rosalie often repeated that “You should always have one

---

55 Lhote and Dupeyrat, White Wings and Barricades, 72.
56 Ibid., 75.
hand open to give, in order to receive much in the other.”57 In gratitude the people of Paris still continue to place fresh flowers daily on her grave in Montparnasse Cemetery.

Among those she oriented in her school of charity was Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853) whom she trained along with other student volunteers.58 Monsieur Emmanuel Bailly, professor of philosophy and editor of The Catholic Tribune, referred Ozanam and his friend, Auguste le Taillandier to Rosalie.59 Bailly requested that she be their mentor in reaching out to needy families to address their needs for social services.60 In this way Bailly hoped to channel their youthful idealism and impetuosity but tempered with Rosalie’s practical charity and wisdom. Bailly had seen the students’ deeds but also believed in their potential for greater good. Wisely, he sent them to Sister Rosalie as to a school of charity. She taught them how to foster partnerships that enhance the quality of service when they were establishing the fledgling Conference of Charity in 1833 which became the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.61 In her school they learned the value of pooling resources and personnel skills, strengthening church presence and providing mutual support as a means to be effective voices for the voiceless—to be advocates for poor persons. Exerting such a significant influence in shaping the mission of the newly formed Society, Sister Rosalie Rendu could be considered its cofoundress.62

The world Rosalie and Frédéric knew was not too different from the end of the twentieth century. There was a decline in religious

57 Ibid., 105.
59 At the time of his death, the father of Emmanuel Bailly possessed a large collection of manuscripts belonging to Saint Vincent de Paul, who was considered the Bailly family’s special saint. A brother of Emmanuel, Ferdinand, entered the Congregation of the Mission. Madam Bailly was a regular volunteer in the social services rendered among the poor of the Mouffetard district of Paris by Sister Rosalie Rendu, D.C. A daughter of Emmanuel Bailly entered the Sisters of Saint Clotilde and took the name Mother Saint Vincent de Paul. See Baunard, Ozanam in His Correspondence, 67. McNeil, The Vincentian Family Tree, 26, n. 27.
60 See Baunard, Ozanam in His Correspondence, 71.
61 The first seven members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul were: Frédéric Ozanam, Paul Lamache, Jules Devaux, François Lallier, Auguste Le Taillandier, Felix Clavé, and Monsieur Emmanuel Bailly. See Baunard, Ozanam in His Correspondence, 426.
practices and living by gospel values, a dominance of secularism and new age philosophies among students, the prominence of political ploys and civil unrest. Despite these social currents, humility grounded Rosalie and Frédéric in ways that allowed them to see the truth and potential in others and situations. This sensitivity to equity drew them into service of the poor with respect and daring in the face of injustice—a bold response to a peer’s taunting challenge: “What are you doing for humanity, for the poor today?”

Following a famine (1847) and during the Revolution of 1848, Denis Auguste Affre (1793-1848), archbishop of Paris (1840-1848), at the initiative of Frédéric Ozanam and his friends, mounted the highest point of the barricade in Faubourg Saint-Antoine on 25 June 1848 to beg for peace. The archbishop was shot and killed. Learning the news, Sister Rosalie made her way through the crowd and stood on top of the barricade begging the mob: “Stop this shooting! Haven’t I enough widows and orphans to care for now?” The fighting ceased in that quarter of the city.

The governmental disregard for the poor served to reinforce the class distinction between the haves and have-nots. Frédéric identified the basic issue: “The problem that divides men [and women] in our day is no longer a problem of political structure; it is a social problem; it has to do with what is preferred, the spirit of self-interest or the spirit of sacrifice, whether society will be only a great exploitation to the profit of the strongest or a consecration of each individual for the good of all and especially the protection of the weak.”

Frédéric expresses an important aspect of Vincentian ministry by emphasizing collaboration and partnership in mission in a reflection he wrote about the Good Samaritan.

Society today seems to me to be not unlike the wayfarer described in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For while journeying along the road mapped out for it by Christ, it has been set upon by thieves of evil human thought. Bad men have despoiled the wayfarer of all his goods, of the treasures of faith and love.... The priests and the Levites have passed him by. But this time, being real priests and true Levites, they have approached the suffering, wretched

---

63 Baunard, Ozanam in His Correspondence, 64.
64 Lhotte and Dupeyrat, White Wings and Barricades, 133.
creature and attempted to cure him. But in his delirium he has not recognized them and has driven them away. Then we weak Samaritans, outsiders as we are, have dared to approach this great sick patient. Perhaps he will be less affrighted by us? Let us try to measure the extent of his wounds in order to pour oil into them. Let us make words of peace and consolation ringing in his ears. Then, when his eyes are opened, we will hand him over to the tender care of those whom God has chosen to be the guardians and doctors of souls.

Frédéric is a model for all ages and seasons. Inner conflict about religious beliefs, vocation, and career caused him great pain at important points of transition in his life because of his highly sensitive nature and complex personality. With apostolic zeal driven by a quest for truth and justice, Ozanam was a scholar who taught and defended the faith. As a Christian lawyer he advocated for persons who are poor and promoted compassionate service for them. He became a spouse and parent but remained a counter-cultural man of prayer, passion, and zeal whom the world describes as historian, lawyer, educator, journalist and advocate. Ozanam lived by his faith, opted for the path of good works, and thirsted for the blessings of the poor in the spirit of Vincent de Paul. Both Vincent and Frédéric had been fed and gifted by the poor themselves. Frédéric was a truth-sayer whose mere forty years of life mobilized the laity to carry on the legacy of charity begun by Vincent de Paul. At his death, a photograph of Rosalie Rendu was among his most cherished possessions.

Taking risks in faith—Elizabeth Ann Seton

Born an Episcopalian in New York, Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton (1774-1821), married (1794) William Magee Seton (1768-1803). Blessed with three daughters (Anna Maria, Rebecca, and Catherine Josephine)
and two sons (William and Richard), health and happiness were theirs. They enjoyed the comforts of social status and prosperity but soon encountered bankruptcy, illness, and William's death from tuberculosis. His wife Elizabeth and their eldest daughter Anna Maria had accompanied William on a desperate sea voyage for his health. At Leghorn, authorities feared his disease and quarantined the family. William's death on 27 December 1803 left Elizabeth a widow at age twenty-nine and thrust her into circumstances that changed her life and history.

The Filicchi family of Leghorn, business associates of William, befriended Elizabeth and extended gracious hospitality to the Setons during their stay in Italy. From them the Americans learned about Roman Catholicism. After returning to the United States, Elizabeth converted to Roman Catholicism (1805), and struggled unsuccessfully to support her family in New York. There she met the first Sulpician priest—an instrument of divine providence through whom she discovered her life's mission.

In the midst of anti-clericalism and violence during the French Revolution, providence had guided many clergy and religious to safety across the ocean. Among those fleeing to North America were priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice, a congregation founded 1641 at Paris by Reverend Jean Jacques Olier (1608-1657) to engage in priestly education and formation. Olier was a close friend of Vincent de Paul and often told his confrères: "Monsieur Vincent is our father."\(^\text{70}\)

Many of the French clergy who emigrated to the United States valued their historical relationship with the Vincentian family. Moreover, some of those who settled in Maryland had been either trained in Vincentian seminaries or had worked closely as priests with Daughters of Charity in their ministry. Among these, for example, Reverend Louis William Valentine Dubourg (1766-1835), John Dubois (1764-

\(^\text{70}\) Saint Vincent and Olier were associates both in the Company of the Blessed Sacrament and the Tuesday Conferences. Vincent collaborated with Olier and lent him Reverend Antoine Portail, (1590-1660), and Reverend Antoine Lucas, C.M. (1600-1656), to assist with early missions of the Sulpicians. Olier had given several ordination retreats at Saint-Lazare, headquarters for the Vincentians. Saint Vincent was his spiritual director for four years. McNeil, The Vincentian Family Tree, 71.
Dubois had been chaplain in Paris at Les Petits-Maisons of the Daughters of Charity on rue de Sèvres in Paris for a number of years until the Reign of Terror.

Trained by the Sulpicians, Dubourg, former president of a boys’ seminary in Issy in France, had escaped Paris disguised as a fiddler. After his arrival in the United States in 1794, Dubourg joined the Sulpicians the next year. John Carroll (1735-1815), first bishop in the United States, named Dubourg president of Georgetown College (where Reverend Benedict Flaget was the vice president), a post he held for only a brief period. After resigning from Georgetown in 1799, Dubourg then traveled to Cuba with Flaget to assist Reverend Pierre Babade, S.S. (1763-1846) in establishing a college in Havana but returned unsuccessfully. The Spanish government suspected the three Sulpicians because they were French and forbade them to carry on their educational work. A dozen Cuban boys returned with the priests and Dubourg hoped to open an academy for them but Carroll did not favor the plan. He feared it would compete with Georgetown.

Upon his return, Dubourg founded Saint Mary’s College, Baltimore (1805-1830), as a means of generating candidates for the priesthood although it never became a genuine minor seminary because of too few candidates. In the beginning its establishment was questioned by Carroll and Emery who opposed its policy of admitting non-

71 Charles C. Hebermann, The Sulpicians in the United States (New York, 1916), 127. John Dubois arrived in Virginia in 1791 with letters of introduction from Lafayette to Patrick Henry, James Monroe, the Lees, Randolphs and Beverleys. Dubois made his headquarters at James Monroe’s home. Patrick Henry taught him the English language. President Andrew Jackson declared the then elderly Dubois (age 27) to be the “most refined gentleman he had ever met.” Dubois joined the Sulpicians in the USA and was a member from 1808-1826 but retained his Sulpician spirit until death. In 1795 he was the pastor in Frederick, Maryland, and engaged in extensive missionary journeys throughout western Maryland which is how he came to know the cluster of Catholic families at Mount Saint Mary’s near Emmitsburg. Simon Bruté de Remur, a physician turned priest and theology professor at the seminary in Rennes, came to the United States in 1810 with Reverend Benedict Flaget (1763-1851), first bishop of Bardstown, Kentucky. Bruté, whose maternal aunt had been a Daughter of Charity, translated the French manuscript of the rule of the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity which Elizabeth Seton and John Dubois adapted to meet the needs of the Church in America. (See Melville, Elizabeth Bayley Seton, 210-13; 218-19). Bruté arrived in Emmitsburg in 1812 to assist Dubois but was recalled to Baltimore in 1815 to head Saint Mary’s College, where he remained only one year until his return to Mount Saint Mary’s. In 1818 Bruté returned to Emmitsburg where he served as spiritual director to the Sisters of Charity. As a trusted confident and advisor for family and community affairs, Bruté ministered to Elizabeth Seton on her deathbed. He became the first bishop of Vincennes in 1834.
Catholics. The Sulpicians, however, felt that this was necessary for survival in the American milieu as one way to inculturate or plant the Catholic faith in the newly developing country. Reverend Francis Charles Nagot, (1734-1816), superior of the Sulpicians in America, and Dubourg believed that they had no other recourse or they should have to abandon education all together. Their plan succeeded because in three years the few dozen students became one hundred. Dubourg then wished to have a school for girls as a companion institution to Saint Mary’s College for boys.

Dubourg first met Elizabeth Seton while visiting Reverend Louis Sibourd in New York, a curate at Saint Peter’s Catholic Church in New York. In her writings Elizabeth refers to a chance meeting with Dubourg in a letter to Carroll. In it she describes a plan to go to Montreal where Antonio Filicchi was willing to pay for the education of her two sons, William and Richard, at a Catholic school in Montreal. She hoped to secure employment as a teacher if her daughters could also be enrolled as students in the Catholic school there. The seeds of Dubourg’s invitation for Elizabeth to come to Baltimore to start a school for girls may be traced to providential meetings in November 1806 and the spring of 1808. According to Charles Hebermann, author of *The Sulpicians in the United States*, Dubourg thought that his idea “might lead to the foundation of a Congregation of nuns to further Catholic education. The idea was entirely in accord with the feelings of Mrs. Seton, but no practical steps were taken to realize the scheme.”

This was especially important for transmitting the Catholic faith in the United States because in 1798 the Reverend Jacques-André Emery, S.S. (1732-1810), superior general, had disapproved of Dubourg’s proposal to bring the Ursulines, renowned as educators, to the United States for teaching.

In 1808 Dubourg again came to New York for the burial of a mutual friend, James Barry. At that time Mrs. Seton half playfully alluded to his scheme of starting a school for girls in Baltimore. Dubourg warmly urged her to come to that city, telling her that

---

74 Hebermann, *The Sulpicians*, 220.
instead of waiting to erect a building on the seminary grounds it would be more advantageous to rent a house on Paca Street.76 The Setons left New York for Baltimore on 9 June 1808 and were welcomed to Paca Street by Dubourg’s sister, Victoire Fournier. During the Baltimore spring of 1809, upon seeing the four women who had joined Mrs. Seton’s school as teachers (Cecilia O’Conway, Maria Murphy, Mary Ann Butler and Susan Clossy), Dubourg thought it time to take steps in order to realize his dream of having a religious community for the education of girls.

_Sulpicians inculturate the Vincentian charism_

_The American Sisters of Charity._ The Régestre minutes for the Sulpician Assembly for 14 March 1809 read: “It is a matter of buying a plantation near Emmitsburg to found there a community of daughters, _à peu près sur le même plan que les filles de la Charité, de Saint Vincent de Paul_ (like that of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul); who join to the care of the sick, the instruction of young girls in all branches of Christian education.”77

Through the generosity of Samuel Cooper (1769-1843), a wealthy seminarian from Philadelphia who later joined the Sulpicians, Elizabeth moved to rural Emmitsburg in the summer of 1809 on 269 acres of land purchased and donated by Cooper. There Elizabeth Seton began the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s, the first native community for religious women founded in the United States. In 1812 Mother Seton and her Sisters of Charity adopted a modified version of the _Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity_ originally developed by Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in France.

Driven from France by the evils and violence of civil war, the Society of Saint Sulpice in the United States became the instruments of providence who transplanted the Vincentian mission, vision, and values into North America and nurtured its growth.

The Sulpicians ignited the fire which transmitted the teachings of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac to Elizabeth Seton and her American Sisters of Charity.

---

76 Hebermann, _The Sulpicians_, 220. Also see Elizabeth Seton to Antonio Filicchi, 8 July 1808, Kelly and Melville, _Selected Writings Elizabeth Seton_, 236.
77 Melville, _Louis William Dubourg_, 177.
The Sulpicians envisioned the possibility of linking the Emmitsburg community with the Paris based Daughters of Charity founded in 1633, and initiated the earliest ties with the Vincentians in the United States and the American Sisters of Charity.

The Sulpicians responded to a mandate from their General Assembly of 1829 requiring that the Society of Saint Sulpice in America free itself from all apostolic commitments other than priestly formation and education and, therefore, later passed the baton of ecclesial responsibility for the Sisters of Charity to the Congregation of the Mission. The Sulpicians, led by Reverend Louis Regis Deluol, S.S. (1787-1858), the fourth and last superior of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, facilitated and forged the union with France which the majority of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's confirmed by vow on 25 March 1850.

Canonized in 1975, Elizabeth Ann Seton became the first native born United States citizen declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. Her sanctity grew not because she converted to Catholicism but because she lived her faith, drew nourishment from spirituality, and embraced God’s will at every stage of her life—as daughter, wife, mother, widow, and foundress. The roots of her sanctity were nourished as an Episcopalian. Her compassion for the poor and her commitment to social justice shows itself as early as 1797. Elizabeth and other parishioners of Trinity Episcopal Church were concerned about the plight of destitute women in New York City and established the Society to Aid Poor Widows with Young Children. This association was the first charitable organization managed by women in the United States.

Later Elizabeth championed the cause of justice and charity, especially through non-discriminatory education of all classes, beginning with the illustrious Saint Joseph’s Academy which she founded and directed at Emmitsburg.78 Tuition income from the Academy made it financially possible for the sisters to undertake additional works of charity on behalf of poor and needy families. In addition to honoring Jesus as the source and model of all charity through corporal and spiritual service to the sick poor, the Seton rule addressed the signs of

---

the times within the cultural context of the early nineteenth century Church in America. The rule of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s recommended that they: “honor the Sacred Infancy of Jesus in the young persons of their sex whose heart they are called upon to form to the love of God, the practice of every virtue, and the knowledge of religion, whilst they sow in their midst the seeds of useful knowledge.”

Like Louise de Marillac the caring embrace of providence molded Elizabeth in layers of wisdom and gave her a mission which endures. Formators of the charism of charity for apostolic women, both foundresses searched for and found God first as lay women. Providence prepared them for mission as wives, mothers, and widows before they began their communities and bound themselves to the evangelical counsels by vows. Although removed by almost two centuries, there are striking similarities in their lives, their philosophy, and spirituality. Elizabeth Seton herself was the first to render an English translation of the life of Louise de Marillac, originally written in French by Nicolas Gobillon (1676).

The Great Reconciler led both women into a process of inner, holistic conversion despite personal scars from the school of life. Both Louise and Elizabeth had experienced early maternal loss, had half-siblings, knew rejection by stepmothers, relied on a favorite uncle as a paternal figure, soon nursed terminally ill husbands, coped with single parenting as widows, cared for children of relatives, sought strength from God’s Word and sacrament, and were blessed with soul searing spiritual experiences that formed them for mission.

Her quest of faith led Elizabeth to know Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor, as present in word, deed, and sacrament. The Real Presence in the Eucharist, in sacred scripture, and in charity to the neighbor invited her to deepen her spiral of biblical, sacramental, and apostolic spirituality. The Eucharist became the font of grace which strengthened Elizabeth’s drive for authenticity and real presence in the midst of painful human relationships. To her community and students alike she communicated the core values of the spirit. Reflecting on the many ways God speaks through creation led Elizabeth to an intuitive awareness of the Real Presence among the poor persons she visited and

---

nursed, the girls in her boarding school, the children of color she taught at the Mountain, and the orphans for whom her sisters cared. Like Louise before her, the first apostolic work she accepted for her community beyond Emmitsburg was the care of unwanted and neglected children. In 1814 Elizabeth sent Sister Rose White (nee Rosetta Landry) and two companions to manage Saint Joseph’s Orphan Asylum in Philadelphia.80

American Vincentians.

Dubourg left Baltimore in 1815 to become apostolic administrator and then bishop of Louisiana (1815-1826). He soon went to Europe seeking recruits for the American missions. While staying with the Vincentians at Monte Citorio in Rome, Dubourg was very favorably impressed by Reverend Felix de Andreis, C.M. (1778-1820), a young priest, whom Dubourg heard giving a spiritual conference to a group of clerics. Dubourg invited the Vincentians at Rome to come and minister in his vast diocese in the United States. The Congregation of the Mission accepted that invitation. De Andreis, Reverend Joseph Rosati, C.M. (1789-1843), (first bishop of Saint Louis, Missouri 1827-1843), and eleven other companions established the first Vincentian mission in North America (1816) at Perryville, Missouri.81

Late after his final return trip to France where he continued his ministry, Dubourg became the archbishop of Besançon (1833), providence again involved him with the Vincentian family. He ordained the future saint, John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., to the priesthood in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity at rue du Bac in Paris.

Mission and Ministries.

Meanwhile in the United States, driven by the fire of zeal and in response to a request from then Bishop Rosati, the Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg opened Mullanphy Hospital, the first Catholic hospital in the United States, and the first hospital west of the Mississippi, in 1828 in a two-room log cabin close to the center of Saint Louis, Missouri. Five years later in 1832, the Sisters of Charity nursed poor victims of the Asiatic cholera in almshouses at Philadelphia, Balti-

81 Ellin Kelly, Numerous Choirs, 1: 192.
more, New York, Saint Louis, Washington, D.C., and Boston. The Sisters of Charity began the first Catholic hospital for the mentally ill in the United States at Baltimore in 1840 and in 1855 were nursing victims of the yellow fever in Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and New Orleans.

In 1861 the Daughters of Charity began service during the national crisis of the Civil War. A total of two-hundred-twenty sisters served in thirty camps and hospitals. On 5 July 1863 the Daughters of Charity went onto the battlefield of Gettysburg to assess the needs and care for the injured of both the Union and the Confederate troops without any political or partisan discrimination. Again in 1898 the services of Daughters of Charity were offered to the United States government during the Spanish American War during which they served in twenty-seven hospitals or camps. Several sisters contracted typhoid or yellow fever during this duty and died.

Living out the Vincentian mission in the United States involved managing growth, overcoming communication problems, resolving control issues, a judiciously prudent exercise of authority, and dealing wisely with diverse opinions among the hierarchy about the role and function of religious women in the Church. During the middle of the nineteenth century, providence used the resulting pain of such conflicts for the birth of new communities from the Emmitsburg based Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s: the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York (1846) and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati (1852). Today the American Sisters of Charity (and others formed according to the rule of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac) are united in a federation rooted in the Vincentian and Setonian tradition and collaborate hand in hand with divine providence for the Charity mission.

Hand in hand with Providence

We are called to walk hand in hand with providence. Since its foundation, the Vincentian Family has always focused on its world-
wide mission by preaching the gospel in foreign lands or by combating the erosion of gospel values. There was a heavy concentration in China during the first half of the twentieth century.

Missionary Zeal

Vincentian missionaries first went to China in 1692 during the generalship of Very Reverend Edme Jolly, C.M. (1622-1697, superior general 1673-1697). Saint John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. (1802-1840), the first saint of China who was canonized in 1997, was betrayed and martyred for the faith in 1840. Twenty years earlier Blessed Francis Regis Clet, C.M. (1748-1820) had also given his life as a martyr at Wuchangliu rather than renounce his religious beliefs.83

Today a courageous faith and Vincentian spirit exists in new foundations because members of the Vincentian family had established native communities on foreign missions throughout the world as did another missionary, Vincent Lebbe, who was a maverick Belgian Vincentian in China, and also José Vilaseca in Mexico.84 These are among the 268 religious institutes which lay claim to some aspect of the Vincentian tradition, such as those founded by Leopoldine Brandis in Austria.85

Reverend Vincent Lebbe, C.M. (1877-1940), for example, a Belgian missionary, persistently advocated innovative methods for inculturation of Jesus’ message and the Vincentian charism by Euro-

---

84 Other such institutes are the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy (1961, Nigeria), the Missionary Sisters of the Poor in Christ (1978, Philippines), and the Missionary Sisters of the Presentation (1987, El Salvador) plus others who are now serving in the Church of silence. See McNeil, The Vincentian Family Tree, 184-85, 196-206. Leopoldine Brandis, D.C., who was first a Sister of Charity of Graz, Austria (which united with the French Daughters of Charity in 1850 shortly after the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s, founded by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton did the same) founded the Marienschwestern community in 1800 as a foundation of the Lay Association of Visiting Nurses. She had previously established the latter to supplement the health ministry of the Daughters of Charity. Ibid., 105-06, 109, 117, 127, 128, 171.
pean missionaries in China. The Gospel values, gospel imperatives have no boundaries—the love of Christ urged many Vincentian men and women to bring good news to the poor even in the face of uncertainty and possible death. At least twelve Vincentians and Daughters of Charity were killed at Tien-Tsin on the 21 June 1870. Despite hardship and persecution, the mission in China thrived until the Communists expelled foreign missionaries in the middle of the twentieth century.

Missionary efforts contributed significantly to the worldwide expansion of the extended Vincentian family during the nineteenth century, causing a dramatic increase in membership on all continents. In Africa, Saint Justin de Jacobis, C.M. (1800-1860), endured persecution while serving in Ethiopia and died in exile there. One of the native Ethiopians, and a convert to Catholicism who became a priest as a result of Justin’s efforts, was Blessed Ghebre Michael, C.M. (1791-1855). He also became a martyr for the faith.

In 1909, Reverend Thomas Augustine Judge, C.M. (1868-1933), a North American Vincentian, launched the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate in New York as a lay ministry in order to provide a missionary presence of faith to the poor and abandoned. This was the original entity from which the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (1912) and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (1929) developed. The Trinitarians are committed to the abandoned poor and aim to preserve the faith among Catholic peoples through an incorporation of a missionary spirit among the faithful.


87 Henry Mazeau, The Heroine of Pe-Tang Hélène de Jaurius, Sister of Charity (1824-1900) (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1928), 121. The sisters were accused of bewitching children and tearing their eyes out. After the massacre what was thought to be eyes in a jar were small onions soaking in vinegar.

88 McNeil, The Vincentian Family Tree, 103-4, 170.
In addition, some members of the company were chosen by divine providence to receive extraordinary graces. Apolline Andriveau (1810-1895) received the Red Scapular (the Scapular of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Heart of the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary) to spread devotion to the Passion of Jesus in 1846. A few years earlier in 1840, Justine Bisqueyburu (1817-1903) became an instrument to spread devotion to Mary, Mother of God, through the Green Scapular (the Scapular of the Immaculate Heart of Mary). An extraordinary event connected with wearing the Miraculous Medal was the instantaneous conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne (1814-1884), a prominent man of the Jewish faith, through a vision of Our Lady of Grace at the Church of Saint Andrea delle Fratte at Rome in 1842.

Contemporary servant leadership

What about contemporary servant leadership? Pope John XXIII convened the twenty-first ecumenical council which has shaped the vision of the Catholic Church at the dawn of the Third Millennium. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) aimed to update Catholicism in the modern world by:
- Promoting the development of the Catholic faith.
- Renewing the Christian life of the faithful.
- Adapting ecclesiastical discipline to the needs and methods of modern times.
- Dozens of members of the Vincentian family participated in Vatican II as bishops, theological experts, and auditors.

Suzanne Guillemin

Suzanne Guillemin, D.C. (1906-1968, superioress general 1962-1968), participated in the last two of the four sessions of the Council. After the Second Session, Pope Paul VI invited lay auditors to the Council and in 1964 announced that religious women would also be invited. “We believe that the time has come for the religious life of women to be given more honor and to be made more efficacious.” (Paul VI, 8 September 1964) See Mother Suzanne Guillemin (Paris: Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, 1970).
mission in the modern world. Mother Guillemin became actively involved in diffusing the message of the Council among religious women of active life throughout Europe.90

Long recognized as a capable person with unusual talents throughout her apostolic life, all her endeavors were characterized by efforts to initiate, organize, modernize, improve and even build when necessary. She had the intuition and ability to envision alternatives, set goals and collaborate with others successfully. Her assignments progressively expanded her horizon from local to regional to national to international for the Company of the Daughters of Charity, then the universal Church. As superioress general of the Daughters of Charity she set out to become acquainted with the international community and visited missions worldwide.91

Many major events marked her tenure in office including: an agreement for international uniformity of the habit (1963), modification of the traditional habit (1964), erection of eight provinces in Spain (1963), the union of two communities with the Daughters of Charity, the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Madagascar (1963), and the Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal, Austria (1964), and also the erection of several new provinces or vice-provinces.92 The last official act of her administration approved the division of the two provinces in the United States into five.

In spite of all the difficulties we may fear, it is with perfect confidence that I see the time of the Assembly arriving. The very importance of the work with its serious consequences is for me a subject of peace and absolute confidence; such a work goes so far beyond all human possi-

90 She did this through presentations and participation in collaborative networks such as the National Union of Congregations of Hospitals and Social Action, the Mothers General of France, and the International Union of Major Superioresses. For example, she was also invited to the Near East and asked to speak at Louvain's *Pro Mundi Vita* dialogue, a world-wide gathering of delegates considering religious life and the universal apostolate, by a renewal of spirit and structures.

91 Italy, Algeria, Japan, Vietnam, Belgium, Madagascar, Portugal, the United States, then Lebanon, Brazil and the Near East. In Vietnam she had the happiness of being present to witness the safe return of some Daughters of Charity and Vincentians who had been captured by communists.

92 These were located in Australia, Bolivian, the Congo, Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Mozambique, Santa Domingo, and Venezuela. In addition Mother Guillemin regrouped the community houses in France, reorganized and modernized the Mother House, including the Seminary and Infirmary.
bilities that we must believe that God Who has ordered it, reserves for Himself its accomplishment by assisting us continually with His grace. Herein is all our Faith and all our Hope.  

A woman of wisdom and prayer, Mother Guillemin’s great stature and natural talents, reflected a certain dignity and grandeur but she was also very natural and able to make others feel comfortable. She harmonized contrasts by balancing grandeur and simplicity, openness and fidelity, a strong personality and an understanding of others. An engaging personality coupled with a deep respect for the human dignity of each person enabled her to relate to everyone with both a freedom of unconditional interest and sincere concern.

Her spirit of faith was not ostentatious but profound. She struggled with the inevitability of failure and disapproval and ultimately found peace in the knowledge that all was God’s, not her own. She viewed tepidity among collaborators and persons dedicated to a consecrated life as the prime enemy of mission. She, therefore, never ceased urging the Vincentian Family to an ever greater generosity in fidelity to apostolic spirituality—a spirituality for mission.

The genius of Suzanne Guillemin was her ability to focus clearly on core values. Her writings illustrate this in relation to a spirituality for mission which blends both action and contemplation. For example, she wrote:

Work and prayer, this is our unique spirituality, the spirituality of a full life. It is to answer present needs that we were created, let us not forget that. We are marked by a vocation of what is timely, and we shall live as long as we are faithful to it. Our place is beside the poor, the sick, the abandoned, those who have gone astray.

Vincentian servants of the gospel

Christine Chiron, D.C. Matters of mission and renewal became the focus of this French missionary who was serving in Ecuador at the time of her election as superioress general of the Daughters of Charity. Mother Chiron (b. 1909, superioress general 1968-1974) launched new

93 Life of Mother Suzanne Guillemin, 205.
94 Ibid., 146.
missionary initiatives for the Company, especially in Africa. Some of these, like the mission begun there in Nigeria, have now become autonomous provinces. She presided at the two sessions of the first legislative general assembly in the history of the company and completed the physical renovation of the Mother House in Paris begun by Mother Guillemin.

**Lucie Rogé, D.C.** The spiritual and community formation of the sisters according to the founders became the *leitmotif* of Mother Rogé (1919-1991, superioress general 1974-1985) who emphasized a simple lifestyle and contemporary ways to live as a servant of the poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity. One strategic initiative toward this goal was the inauguration of the international Vincentian Sessions which sensitized sisters worldwide to the universality of the company and the richness of the Vincentian heritage. Mother Rogé not only completed the renovation of the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal at rue du Bae (despite many obstacles) but rejoiced in its blessing by Pope John Paul II on his visit to Paris in 1980. In response to the Vatican II’s call for renewal of religious life, the new *Constitutions and Statutes of the Daughters of Charity* received final approval by the Church. During her administration, the general councillors also became more actively involved with the provinces of their language group.

**Anne Duzan, D.C.** Mother Duzan (b. 1921, superioress general 1985-1991) led the company into the modern era by overseeing the installation of modern technology to facilitate communication worldwide, including fax machines in every province and computerization of the secretariat. A transition figure, much of her contribution to the company dealt with improving and updating internal infrastructures of the company as an organization and negotiations to overcome the inertia of status quo at different levels. Mother Duzan made innumerable visits to missions worldwide and oversaw the launching of new apostolic and missionary initiatives, for example in Sierra Leone.

**Juana Elizondo, D.C.** The first non-French woman to be elected superioress general in the history of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Juana Elizondo (b. 1926, superioress general 1991-present) has facilitated the development of missionary regions in vice-provinces with representation at the General Assembly now held in Paris. Her council has been expanded to include representatives from Asia and Africa in response to the ebbing of Eurocentric concentration of the Company of Charity.
William M. Slattery, C.M. The first native-born citizen of the United States to be elected superior general, Reverend William M. Slattery, C.M., (1895-1982, superior general 1947-1968) guided the company during the tragic years of World War II. In response to the 1917 revision of Canon Law, he supervised the development of the first Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity which the Church approved in 1954. During his generalship he also participated in the historic sessions of Vatican II and became the first superior general to resign from office after twenty-one years of service in that office.

James W. Richardson, C.M. A canon lawyer, Reverend James Walsh Richardson, C.M. (1909-1996, superior general 1968-1980), guided the Vincentian Family through the intricacies of the post-Vatican II general assemblies and updating of the constitutions and statutes. With great exactitude, Father Richardson sought to preserve the special nature of the vows of the Daughters of Charity and their unique relationship with the Congregation of the Mission according to the mind of the founders.95

Richard McCullen, C.M. As spiritual animator, Reverend Richard McCullen, C.M. (b. 1926, superior general 1980-1992), stimulated a spiritual rebirth in the Vincentian family. A selection of his writings has been compiled in an inspirational volume, Deep Down Things.96

Robert P. Maloney, C.M. The current superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, Reverend Robert P. Maloney, C.M., (b. 1939, superior general 1992-present), has published extensively in the public domain about Vincentian spirituality. He has stimulated collaboration within the Vincentian Family for the sake of the mission and is fostering an upsurge in foreign missionary activity worldwide.

Incarnating the charism collaboratively

What place does collaboration have in how we are called to incarnate the charism today? Each generation must incarnate the Vincentian mission in new ways for its own time, must make it a reality in its own generation, must make the legacy live with clarity and audacity. Only this is fidelity to the ageless vision of Vincent de Paul. In our own day, there have been varied ways that the Vincentian

95 Miguel Peréz-Flores, “Father Richardson and the Daughters of Charity,” Vincentian Heritage 17, no 2(1996), 95.
Family has reached out to marginalized persons—to those ignored by mainstream society who languish at the edge of the superhighways of cyberspace technology.

**Collaboration**

The eve of the new millennium has witnessed an upsurge in collaboration within the Vincentian family to further the mission. Too frequently we have been accustomed to doing projects of charity for people rather than with them. “This preposition, WITH written on our hearts, is a burning question.” It means, in collaboration with people, not relating to them from a position of power or acting toward them in an authoritative manner, but helping each one to develop more and more their fullest human potential. It means asking people about their needs rather than imposing our projects on them based solely on our perceptions of their needs.

Much of the thinking about collaboration and the gifts of the poor has been inspired by the post-Vatican II renaissance in heritage studies and the increasing availability of the writings of the founders in English. This delving into the charism has led to new discoveries and appreciation of Vincentian roots. The Vincentian family recognizes the need to combine charity and zeal so that the love of Christ truly becomes life-giving energy for a mission of service to the poorest of the poor. Today we realize more than ever that we are the Vincentian family seeking a common vision of mission—opening our eyes and ears to listen to one another’s story and extending our hands in partnership with the poor.

Mission driven collaboration and inculturation face the new challenge of applying the core Vincentian values, in ministries focused on the poor, but linked to innovative resources as a result of cyberspace technology. Like Vincent, Louise, and the Vincentian men and women who preceded us, our generation also searches for ways to be open to creativity and interdependence—to be authentic expressions of the tradition, filled with the fullness of God. In the words of Louise de Marillac:

---

95 Guillemin, “Service of the Poor,” *Circular Letters*, 118.
96 See *The Way of Vincent*, 118.
97 Cf. Ephesians 3.
We must hope that God, in His goodness, will bless your efforts and bestow upon you all the graces you need to accomplish His most holy will because you were chosen for this work by the guidance of Divine Providence.\textsuperscript{100}

This trust provokes reflection about our stewardship of the mission we have received:

- How open am I to collaborating with others?
- How supportive am I of the initiatives of others?
- How well do I objectively evaluate proposed projects versus my own prejudices about the planners?
- Am I driven more by a spirit of cooperation and collaboration than competition and control?
- Am I as willing to invest in bringing the initiatives of others to fruition as I am for my own projects?

In unfolding the legacy we have recalled the importance of Divine Providence for Vincent and Louise and their vision of the Company of Charity. Reflecting on God’s call to ministry, clearly providence has led the Vincentian family step by step over the centuries and will continue to do so into the next millennium. We also are called to an ever deeper friendship and discipleship with the ever gracious God who journeys with us. In so doing we seek to inculturate the Vincentian charism in our particular milieu, like the American Sisters of Charity have done in North America. We are called to imitate key figures in the Vincentian tradition and become authentic ministers of transformation for poor persons of our day: The humble service of Catherine Labouré; The collaborative ministry of Rosalie Rendu and Frédéric Ozanam; The willingness to risk in faith of Elizabeth Seton.

Impelled by the love of Christ to go forward hand in hand with providence, Vincentian men and women are marked by vitality and enthusiasm for the mission. This missionary zeal has been lived out by numerous servants of the poor who placed their gift of self at the disposal of the Company of Charity and became flames of love, servant leaders for the sake of the gospel. We stand on their shoulders

\textsuperscript{100} L 539, Louise de Marillac to Barbe Angiboust, 22 August 1657, Sullivan, \textit{Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac}, 563.
and move into the future along paths they began even as we blaze new
trails. We are sent to the poor. For their tomorrow, we give our today.

We are weaving the Vincentian tapestry for the third millennium
using the traditional threads of providence, prayer, and service of the
poor, but creating new patterns. The new designs we make will be
woven with prayers of praise and petition for the essential elements
in the Vincentian family’s story—people, relationships, values, and
service. Its theme will reflect how we, as agents of transformation,
respond to providence’s invitation to be rooted and grounded in love
through zealous ministry, yet humbly acknowledging, like Frédéric
Ozanam, that we are “the useless instruments of providence.”101 The
durable thread of divine providence is embedded in the warp and
woof of the story of the ever ancient ever new vision of Vincent de
Paul—a mission for persons oppressed by poverty and injustice. The
Vincentian family faces the future with an attitude of gratitude for
God’s providential guidance. By heeding new voices of the spirit in
events around us we, too, become prophets of tomorrow, continuing
and shaping the mission—planting it in the reality of the present,
nurturing it for the future.

Like Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, how do I find
balance between investing energy in my goals and abandoning trust
to Divine Providence?102

Like Catherine Labouré, when do I pause to reflect on serving
Jesus Christ in the person of the poor?103

Like Rosalie Rendu, what steps do I take each day to see God in
the faces of the poor?104

Like Frédéric Ozanam, what helps me to find Jesus Christ in the
faces of the poor persons I serve?

101 Frédéric Ozanam to his brother Charles, 20 May 1853, San-Jacopo, quoted in
Baunard, Ozanam in His Correspondence, 424.
102 “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” Conference of 21 February 1659 to the Con­
gregation of the Mission, Coste, CED, 12:142.
103 “To serve the poor is to serve Jesus Christ. Yes, you serve Jesus Christ in the
person of the poor. A Sister may go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a
day she will find God in the sick. As Saint Augustine says, what we see with our eyes is not
always the truth because our senses deceive us, but God’s truth can never deceive us.”
“On the love of your vocation and on the love of the poor,” Conferences to the
Daughters of Charity, 13 February 1646, Coste, CED, 9:252.
104 “When you leave your prayers of the Eucharistic celebration to serve the poor,
you lose nothing since to serve the poor is to go to God. You must see God in the faces
of the poor.” “On the Rule,” Conferences to the Daughters of Charity, 31 July 1634,
Coste, CED, 9:5.
Like Elizabeth Seton, how often do I pause to pose the critical question: What is the will of God for me?

Like Joan Antide Thouret, Thomas Augustine Judge, and Vincentian men and women everywhere, how does my service of the poor bring me closer to God and become a source of prayer for me?

What are the central themes of the gospel your life proclaims by your ministry? By the story of your life? How will future storytellers tell the story our lives are writing today? Which of you will be the heroes or heroines who seem like giants to generations yet in the stars?