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Spiritual Life

FR GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Election of the Superior General

On 15th July 2004, during the course of their General Assembly, the 120 Priests of the Mission who had come from 52 Provinces and 70 countries, elected as Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission for 6 years;

Father Gregory Guy, from the United States,
twenty-third successor of Saint Vincent

who consequently becomes Superior General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

“May our missionary zeal grow ever stronger and may our spirit of prayer draw many young men to join our congregation” was the wish expressed by the new Superior General.

Born on 8th October 1953 at Baltimore, in Maryland (USA), Father Gregory Gay joined the Congregation of the Mission on 8th August 1973. He belonged to the Eastern Province of the United States. On 24th May 1980 he was ordained to the priesthood. From 1980 to 1984 he worked at the University of Niagara in that Province where he served as formator, professor and chaplain. From 1985 to 2000, he was sent on mission to Panama as formator (in philosophy and theology at the Internal Seminary), and he also served in two parishes. He was appointed Visitor of the Province of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama) in February 2000, and from 2003 onwards he was President of the Conference of Religious in Guatemala.

Father Gregory Gay will be helped in his mission by a new General Council:

**Vicar General*

Father **Jozef Kapusciak** of Poland

**Assistants General*

Father **José Antonio Ubillus**, of Peru (re-elected)

Father **José María Nieto**, of Spain, and present Secretary General

Father **Gerard Du Tran Cong**, of Vietnam.

We would like to assure Father Gregory Gay of our prayers and our deep gratitude to him for accepting this new responsibility. We also thank Father Robert P.

Maloney for his twelve years of devoted and fraternal service of the Daughters of Charity, his spiritual leadership and his untiring work for the development of the Vincentian Family.

**Message from Pope John Paul II to Father Gregory Gay, Superior General of the
Congregation of the Mission**

During the general audience held on 21st July 2004, Pope John Paul II invited the new Superior General, Father Gregory Gay, to explore new ways of spreading the Gospel:

“As you examine your apostolic works and your community living in the light of your Vincentian charism, I pray that you will experience a new outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that you may discern the path that God is calling you to follow...Your founder had a deep conviction of God’s love and he encouraged all his spiritual sons to see, love and serve Christ in the poor. I am sure that by remaining faithful to the vision of Saint Vincent, you will be more able still to form others, both lay people and clergy, in the task of preaching the Gospel today. Many religious followers of Saint Vincent de Paul...have nobly devoted their lives to the formation of the clergy in the past. I encourage you to continue this most important mission in the years to come...Launch out into the deep!...The Lord himself will be your guide.”

MOTHER ÉVELYNE FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

To all Daughters of Charity

Letter from Mother Évelyne Franc

Paris, 15th August 2004

My dear Sisters,

*Mary in the glory of heaven,
Mary clothed in the sun,
Mary, in the glory of God,
sing of His marvels to us!*

(Hymn for the feast of August 15th)

With Mary, let us sing the glory of God...A happy and holy feast day to each of you, to your local communities and to your Provinces!

Traditionally, in the Company, this feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, gives us the opportunity to share some news with one another. In these past few weeks, I have received many letters and messages. While all of them assure me of your prayers and support, they also tell of your life given to God, in community, for the service of the poor, together with its joys and difficulties. Forgive me for replying in a general way to these expressions of fidelity and affection. I thank you for them with all my heart and am most grateful for your sisterly support and your prayers. Your passion for those who are most deprived has truly touched me, and today it is my turn to share some news with you.

Recently we were united in prayer, and perhaps also via the internet, with the members of the General Assembly of our Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission. On 24th July I had the privilege and joy of going to Rome to greet our new Superior General, Father Gregory, in the name of all of you, to assure him of our respect and obedience, and also to thank Father Maloney for his attentive presence among us during the past twelve years.

I was also invited to speak to the members of the General Assembly about the expectations of the Daughters of Charity with regard to the Priests of the Mission. I approached this subject first from a historical point of view, going back to Saint Louise, who wanted the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity to have the same Superior General in the person of Saint Vincent. Next, I recalled certain periods in our history such as the time of the French Revolution and the General Assemblies that followed Vatican II. Lastly, I spoke about the changes brought about by the new

Constitutions and Statutes approved this year – **a topic on which we will be reflecting together after the revised texts have come into effect.**

What I really tried to stress, however, was how we can foster more dialogue and closer collaboration between Fathers and Sisters, in the Provincial Council, in ministry and in the works. This dialogue and collaboration are often very profitable but, using an expression taken from our Action Lines, I expressed the wish that together we might go *beyond the path already taken.*

My stay in Rome also allowed me to meet once again the representatives of the Vincentian Family and to discuss with all of them our common projects, especially the development of well-targeted sources of aid for poor people (e.g. credit unions) and the requirements of formation and accompaniment to be received and offered.

Since writing my February letter, I have had the opportunity to go to Vietnam, the Philippines, Austria, Spain, Madagascar, Blan (France-South and North Africa), and to la Chesnaye (France-North). Each of these visits was the source of many graces; witnessing the strong attachment of the Sisters to the whole Company, seeing Christ loved and served with cordiality and creativity in the person of the poor, praying and sharing with the Sisters, understanding their difficulties and becoming more aware of the realities of their particular cultures.

During each of these visits, I commented on the second Action Line: Relationships. I would like to refer to this once again and, beneath Mary's gaze, reread with you the first two paragraphs.

Let us give a new impetus to our spiritual life so that in our communities we may experience God and union among the Sisters, for the Mission.

It is good to make a connection between this sentence and a passage from the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, n° 28: *“Mary's faith...continues to become the faith of the pilgrim People of God: the faith of individuals and communities, of places and gatherings...It is a faith that is passed on simultaneously by way of the mind and of the heart. It is acquired or reacquired continually by prayer.”*

Our spiritual life is nourished by acts of faith and by prayer. It is a source of strength helping us to journey together as a community, to overcome mental blocks and to live authentically; it is courage to trust, to move forward, and to share “as Sisters whom Our Lord has united.”(cf. Saint Vincent, Conference of 19th July 1640, Coste IX, p.22).

“Let us develop greater attentiveness to the Spirit at work in people's lives and in events. In the light of this, let us discern individually and communally, the values and counter-values of today's culture.”

Today's Gospel shows us the Virgin Mary acting and praying under the

inspiration of the Spirit. Her visit to Elizabeth and her Magnificat hymn are the fruits of this. Our personal and community choices in the midst of a world in search of spiritual values, will be signs for others if they are made under the inspiration of the Spirit. The lives of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise have shown us this path, one along which they journeyed with patient humility and loving attention to Providence.

After the comings and goings of these past few weeks, almost all the members of the General Council were together again by 13th August. During September, in addition to our usual Wednesday meetings, we will have three days of intensive study and a special Council meeting, which we entrust to your prayers. Since the beginning of the year we have been working hard on the Constitutions, the Statutes of the Quasi-Province, and preparations for various meetings.

All the Councillors are planning days of reflection with their respective Provincial Councils in order to study the new texts of the Constitutions and Statutes which will come into effect on 29th November this year. The work of translating and printing them should allow you to have the new edition by that date.

The “Special Statutes for the Motherhouse in Paris and Casa Maria Immacolata in Rome” (the Quasi-Province) have been completely revised. Together with the Constitutions and Statutes, they were approved by Rome and then put into effect “ad experimentum” for three years by Father Maloney last June. They are being implemented in a flexible way and provide for the setting up of a Provincial Council of the Quasi-Province, between now the end of the year. This should give greater autonomy to the Sisters who live in the Motherhouse, and free the General Council from the need to deal with certain matters.

We also planned to organise in Paris, in 2005, an information and formation session for Sisters ministering to immigrants and displaced persons. In addition, there will be a meeting for new Visitatrices. Of course the regular meeting of Visitatrices that is usually held between two General Assemblies is also scheduled and will take place in Paris in 2006.

On this feast of the Assumption, I will end my letter with the Virgin Mary, recalling the words spoken by Pope John Paul II here in our Chapel of rue du Bac, in 1980:

*“Mary, you are blessed among all women.
You have been closely associated with all the work of our Redemption,
associated with the Cross of our Saviour...and now, in the glory of your Son,
You never cease to intercede for us.
You obtain for us from God all the graces symbolised by the rays of light
that radiate from your open hands,
provided only that we approach you with the trust and simplicity of a child.”*

Together let us pray that these graces will be granted to all the lowly and the weak

who are crushed by our society that is too often indifferent to their plight. Let us also ask for these graces for ourselves so that our communities may be places where we experience God and union for the Mission.

With my affectionate devotion,

Sister Évelyne Franc,
Daughter of Charity

**RENE VALETTE, ECONOMIST, MEMBER OF JUSTICE AND PEACE
COMMISSION**

Globalisation

In view of the tremendous changes in society that affect our XXIst century world, two issues of the Echoes will be dealing with the subject of globalisation, from the standpoint first of all of an economist, then of the Bible, and finally that of Saint Vincent and the Company. This issue presents an initial reflection which will be continued in the next Echoes.

Text drawn up from cassette recordings, checked by René Valette and published with his permission. The spoken style has been retained

Two ideas by way of introduction

1. Globalisation is a major phenomenon of our times

In the history of international relationships and the life of the two hundred countries that people our planet today, it is just as an important event as the one that took place in the early 1950s which saw the emergence of a third society that came to be known as the Third World. Globalisation is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that sweeps away many of the points of reference and the suppositions that we were familiar with and which orientated us. Today we are in an interim period which is all the more disconcerting since the old reference points we forged continue to exist even though they are less and less able to help us to understand the world, and the new points of reference are only slowly emerging. An old world is coming to an end but it still exists; a new world is beginning but it is still “stammering.” In any case, it constitutes the permanent horizon of our commitments, our actions, our lives. This phenomenon presents a permanent, ongoing challenge to Christians and to the Church.

2. There are different opinions about globalisation and this depends on one’s social background.

We might even say, “*Tell me where you live, what your life is like, and I will tell you what you think of globalisation.*” If someone works in the aerospace industry, in the field of computers, etc., then their view of globalisation is more likely to be a positive one. If they work at the bottom end of the products range, their judgment will doubtless be negative.

1. DEFINITION AND CAUSES OF GLOBALISATION

Let us look, first of all, at one definition among many and at the causes of this globalisation. And, we can end by saying that globalisation is an irreversible happening which is inescapably going to develop but its nature is not predetermined. Globalisation will be what we make of it. We could go in another direction, I would even say that we could use the word in another sense. The word “sense” can be understood in two ways: not just as another sense or meaning, but also as another direction. That is why we have World Social Forums. At the third World Social Forum in Bombay, 100,000 people came together and they said, “*It is possible to have another world!*” This implies that a different form of globalisation is possible. But we need to add, “*if we want this.*” Because if we alter the meaning and the scope of globalisation we would still need to have a good understanding of the phenomenon in order to see the possible gear shifts and not act with only a minimal guarantee of effectiveness.

A) DEFINITION OF GLOBALISATION

The following definition is a personal one and it is only provisional. Globalisation is a recent event and as yet it is not sufficiently understood. We need to be careful when speaking about it. It is possible to find other definitions. In twenty years time we will be speaking of it in a different way. For me, globalisation is a **double process**. A process is something that is still in the making, it has begun but it has not been completed.

* First of all, a **process of intensified exchange of all kinds**: of people, goods, services in the economic sense of the term (transport, freight, insurance, formation, etc.), of capital, information, ideas, values (in the sociological sense), of fashions, of cultural products, but also of viruses, of pollution (the atomic plant at Chernobyl), of crimes or things connected with crime (arms, drugs, money laundering, prostitution networks....). In other words, if this is a process that intensifies all these elements, then it is far from being a strictly economic process even though it is mostly economists who speak about it. Globalisation affects every aspect of our lives and not just our economic activities as producer or consumer.

* At the same time it is a process that **extends these exchanges throughout the whole planet**, where these exchanges are being increasingly intensified. That is why this phenomenon has been called globalisation. Two years ago, three countries did not wish to take part in these global exchanges: Afghanistan, Bhutan and North Korea. Now, out of the 200 territories of this world, there is only one outsider, North Korea. Some countries do not communicate very much because they are “punished.” For example, Cuba does not participate as much as it would like because of the American embargo imposed by the United States and its allies in the earliest years of the country’s government by Fidel Castro. But this isn’t something the country has chosen to do, it is a sort of sanction. Countries such as Iran, Libya, Syria, and Iraq until the fall of Saddam Hussein, did not enter much into this exchange because of UNO sanctions against them for encouraging, or at least not combating international terrorism. So we can speak of a world-wide phenomenon and use the term globalisation.

The concept originated in Anglo-Saxon countries and was given the English name “*globalisation*”, a term which has been badly translated. The word “globalisation” was quickly accepted because it is not a fragmented phenomenon but something that effects all humankind. In this sense it is a new phenomenon.

- Some people say that the same sort of thing happened before in the 15th and 16th centuries when Europeans left the continent of Europe because they had the technology that enabled them to cross the oceans. They went not only to South America, which was not Latin but Mayan, Quechuan, and Aztec, and which they latinised, but they also followed the route of the silk traders in order to set up world-wide commerce. If people can see a little of this phenomenon in that situation, we have to say that it only concerned about 5% of the world’s inhabitants.
-
- When the industrial revolution brought about a first globalisation of exchanges, notably through the routes of colonisation, there also occurred a phenomenon of this kind

If we now use a different term, this is doubtless for the following three reasons:

- this phenomenon affects the whole planet; it can be said that every person in the world is affected by it even if they are not the protagonists but just caught up in the action.
- it affects every aspect of human activity, every aspect of our lives
- its rapid growth and intensity make it something new.

For this reason it was good idea to invent a new word. A new situation requires a new word, just as the term “Third World” was invented in 1952 to mark the emergence on the international scene of a third world which was not that of the rich countries of the West or of the East.

1. A big increase in the movement of people

* People move out of their own country first of all for reasons of tourism. In 1950, 25 million people crossed frontiers as tourists. In the year 2000, this figure rose to 697 million. It is forecast that for 2020, the number will be one billion, 570 million. In 1950 the 15 major tourist countries of the world received 97% of foreign tourists. In the year 2000, these 15 major countries only attracted 62% of tourists because these people now travelled to different places. Now they go to Tunisia, the island of Reunion, Guadeloupe, Slovakia, Poland, Russia, the Caribbean, Cuba etc. These days we find middle class people, and very ordinary people, travelling by air.

* There is also much more movement across frontiers for commercial and business reasons. We can see a change in the clientele of air travellers. In the past these were

upper class people but today they include middle class passengers, people engaged in commerce, and skilled technicians who are going to another country either to set up an assembly chain in a different country, to contact a supplier, or to look for new market outlets.

* There are also economic migrants who leave their country either because they are persecuted or because they cannot live the way they would like to. Moreover the boundary between economic migrants and political refugees is a very fluid one. And as travel is easier these days, the number of these displaced persons continues to increase.

2. A big increase in the level of exchanging goods

Let us note two particular categories:

* Products designed for global use

Today, products are designed for sale throughout the world even if they are meant for different types of customers. As people in the marketing business say, it is no longer a question of targeting the people of a particular region of their country, but everyone on the planet.

Everyone knows coca-cola, and marketing agents have succeeded in making this product appeal to people all over the world, to people of very different cultures. And in the Andes or in African villages, it is easier to find coca-cola than it is to find drinking water. So this product is destined for the whole world. It is the same with jeans and trainers. The Nike enterprise aims at reaching a worldwide market for products that may have different features and which are not manufactured in the same place, but which are destined to reach all parts of the world. Nike footwear is considered the fashionable thing for young people all over the world to wear. The tennis shoes at the lowest end of the product range come from South-East Asia. Any faulty goods are disposed of or else sold at bargain price sales; if there is difficulty in maintaining supplies, the goods can be held in stock since they are cheap. The important factor here is the price at which they are sold and too bad if the goods are faulty or if there are delays in delivering them. On the other hand, top of the range tennis shoes come from Western or Central Europe because these have to be perfect and delivery within 48 hours has to be guaranteed. So they cannot come from distant countries. In this case, it is interesting to note the proximity factor. The same phenomenon occurs with small, end of range, transistors. If you buy a transistor for 10 euros and it breaks down, you throw it away. Even if you buy a more expensive transistor you do not have it repaired because agreeing on an estimate is more costly than the repair. In a country that is economically poor, if a transistor breaks down then a handyman will take it to pieces even if he is not a qualified electrician; he finds what is causing the breakdown and repairs the machine. That makes for an interesting market. So some products destined for worldwide distribution, can be 2nd or 3rd models in some countries and top model in others.

* On the other hand, there are also some very complex products which, when they are

manufactured, contain components that come from all over the world. The classic example of this is the motor car.

For example, more than 25 countries contribute to the production of a French middle-range Peugeot (206). Toyota cars of Japanese origin but manufactured in France, contain components from all over the world: the designer might be Italian, the robots are probably Japanese, the metal sheeting might perhaps come from Brazil or South Africa, the electrical equipment will doubtless come from the Philippines, etc. We find nearly the whole world represented in this French version of the Toyota.

* Between these two extreme cases; the simple products that are destined for worldwide distribution, and the complex products that incorporate components coming from every source, there are all the intermediary categories. So, in the production of a Thomson French television set, very few parts are manufactured in France. The same can be said about a Dutch Philips television set or a Japanese Sony.

3. A big increase in the exchange of services (transport, freight, insurance, training...)

Today motor insurance companies in different countries offer very attractive contracts and they are in competition with insurance companies in the respective countries.

Similarly, if you observe the type of staff employed by a cruise liner, an oil tanker, or any other ship, you will notice the wide variety of nationalities among these people. Take, for example, a ship that is going to take people on a pilgrimage-cruise to Palestine. The ship which is owned by a Dutch shipping magnate is hired for three years by Nouvelles Frontières, an enterprise set up after the marriage of a former French NGO and a German traveller. The ship's captain and the head chef are French. The technical machinery staff come from central Europe and are mainly Polish and Ukrainian. The people employed to serve at table are young Romanian women: most of these are former teachers who earned 6000F a month, which is very little in comparison with French collective agreements but it is ten times more than they earned as teachers in Romania. The cabin crew are Filipino women with a few from Cambodia, the bar staff are from Latin America (Brazilians, Argentines, Cubans, etc.).

4. A big increase in the exchange of capital

Capital of more than 1500 billion euros moves from one country to another everyday. (That is the equivalent of ten thousand billion francs!). Only 2% of this amount is transferred from one country to another in payment of bills. The other 98% of the exchanges are not connected with merchandise; they range from normal market economy procedures to immoral speculation that can provoke financial crises. Among these movements of capital there are some very important transactions: the placing of foreign pensions funds. In the United States, as in Switzerland or in Canada, retirement pensions are not paid by allocation as in France (where active workers pay for the pensions of non-active workers) but by capitalisation, that is to say, every month the

worker puts aside money for his retirement and the business enterprise adds to this amount. The longer a person has worked, the more dollars he accumulates month after month. These dollars do not lie idle. They are entrusted to management enterprises and are known as pension funds. These funds are always managed by making a judgment between investments that are safe but which do not bring in much by the way of profit, and speculative investments which can yield greater profit but which are more vulnerable. So those who are responsible for investing pension funds do not always put this money in the same place, and so these funds are spread all over the world. Today, 40% of France's most important business enterprises have American pension funds as their primary shareholder. This may only amount to 8 or 9% of the capital but it is enough to make these funds the principal shareholder and if this 9% were to be suddenly withdrawn there would be a financial crisis.

During a recent debate it was stated that only 10% of American pension funds were invested in the United States. If this 10% were invested in France that would cover the total market value of the Paris investment and could redeem everything that could be sold in Paris by way of liabilities and shares. In the 1000 billion dollars, these movements of capital, which are in no way unusual, are very important. All banks manage money deposits on a world scale. So directly or indirectly, we participate in this exchange of capital because the banks where we place our money and the insurance we take out, all operate on a global level.

There are also some investments that are highly speculative: to make as much money as possible, selling them could involve risks. The same capital could move between 8 to 10 countries in the space of a week. That is why the association Attac has asked for these capital sums to be taxed, even at a figure after the decimal point, so that this money could be used to finance development in countries which do not have much in the way of savings. Besides, even if the tax were fixed at only 0.5%, and if the capital moved to different countries 10 times a week, that could bring in an enormous sum. It could discourage and avoid these movements of capital which can bring about financial crises like the one in Thailand a few years ago, or those in Argentina not so long ago.

These movements of capital are extremely important and they are widely scattered and not subject to much control so they have the potential to cause trouble.

5. A big increase in the exchange of information, ideas, values and fashions

The immigrant population density in a particular district can be gauged by the number of parabolic aerials that allow people to receive information almost instantaneously from all parts of the world. This information is a global link between peoples.

With the internet, groups of researchers can work on the same subject and can exchange information from all over the world. These exchanges cost less than the price of a packet of cigarettes every two or three days.

We may also note another phenomenon, the spread of sects throughout the world. The sects found in Africa are not the Church of Scientology in the United States or in Europe, neither are they the Afro-Asiatic sects of Brazil. The upheavals caused by globalisation create a sense of unease and this unease creates the need for a religion that provides meaning. If so many sects have sprung up it is because there are people who are without hope and who look to religion for perhaps the “religious opium” that will give some purpose to their lives. This form of religious revival is a global phenomenon.

It might be added, too, that the criteria of beauty have become standardised and universal. A young Senegalese woman, Peule, who is a “top model”, said that when she goes back to visit her family in Senegal, her old mother says to her, *“My dear, these people are crazy if they think you are beautiful, you have no thighs and no bust! You’re not beautiful.”* Indeed, in days gone by, beauty was linked to fertility. But her little sisters and all the young girls of her age find her beautiful and they want to be like her. Beauty is no longer linked to a particular culture because culture has been standardised and this has led to uniformity of some of the values spread by that culture. This explains why in many countries the whiter one’s skin is, the more beautiful you are thought to be! That is why young Asian women can have their eyes widened or young African women can have their hair straightened. There is now a global criterion for beauty.

6. A big increase in the exchange of cultural products

We can speak of the globalisation of culture. In our times, artistic productions are meant to capture a worldwide audience. For example, when the American television series “Emergencies” was being made, the commercial producer told the film makers that according to the costings file, he had to make a film that could be sold to at least 140 countries in the world. The criterion for this product was that it should please more than 140 countries in the world. That is why the product must not be too closely linked with a particular culture. So the sound effects, actions and basic gestures are developed to the detriment of the dialogue. Dialogues should not last longer than 12 seconds because it is the visual image that can be understood by everyone. A delegate producer is there, not to censure anything, but to note what might possibly hinder the sale of the product to a country that has expressed interest: in such a case this or that scene might be added, not in response to any moral criteria, but to commercial criteria, so that the product could be acceptable to this or that country. With globalisation there is the risk that great works will not be produced because an outstanding work is tied to a particular culture.

We observe the same phenomenon of standardisation with regard to some ideas about medicine, about the relationship between the carer and the cared for, and ideas about illness.

7. A big increase in the movement of criminal products

The drugs and the arms markets have seen a marked development and the same can be said of prostitution. New networks are set up every 6 months.

8. A big increase in the spread of viruses and pollution

The increased movement of people and goods means that we now have to treat diseases previously unknown to us. In our times, if we are to wipe out an epidemic we have to treat it on a global scale. Just as smallpox and poliomyelitis were eradicated thanks to the worldwide use of vaccination, we must think, today, that when a vaccine has been found to counteract AIDS we will need to finance this vaccination throughout the whole world.

B) THE CAUSES OF GLOBALISATION

1. The tremendous progress that has taken place in communication technology

The effect of these advances in communication technology has been to completely overturn the relationship between time and space. The relationship with space has been turned completely upside down because the time needed to breach this space has altered radically.

Distances are not what they used to be, the world has become a village. Communication becomes more and more speedy: communication by air, by land (when Europe is criss-crossed with high speed trains, it will be as common to spend a weekend in Oslo or in Prague as it used to be to spend a weekend in the mountains or by the sea). Distances are measured on a different scale when the time to travel them is reduced. These forms of transport are becoming more and more rapid and at the same time they are costing less and less.

On a cultural level, these changes are becoming more and more acceptable. Provided of course that people have access to the internet. Culture is less and less a real obstacle. When technology reduces distances, when financial and cultural obstacles are not so great, we can say that globalisation is on the increase. There will be more and more exchanges.

One of the drawbacks is that the changing relationship with time brings us into the realms of what is transitory. Everything happens quickly, we change, we move on.

2. Political obstacles have disappeared: the world is no longer divided into hostile blocs.

At Yalta in February 1948, the great powers divided up the world. There was the East and the West and between East and West there was no exchange. The world was compartmentalised. To travel to the East you had to have a visa, you had to pass through controls when you entered and when you left, and during the day you were subject to surveillance. Similarly, people from the East did not visit the West. Countries in the South had exchanges with those of the East: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea, but not with countries from the West. On the other hand,

the countries of Latin America had exchanges with Western countries but not those of the East. Today, with the end of the communist regime (fall of the Berlin wall) this separation is over, there are no more geopolitical obstacles to exchanges.

Today, one of the main places of “pilgrimage” in the world is no longer Mecca, Lourdes or Rome, but Peking. It is here that we find more than 1300 million potential customers and the cheapest source of manpower in the whole world.

3. There are no longer any ideological barriers

At the present time, throughout the whole world (with the exception of one or two countries), there is an economic system in place that advocates and recommends the most free exchange of trade possible. The liberal credo: Adam Smith said that the freer the market, the greater will be the development of commerce, and the more that commerce develops, the more will economies be stimulated. Today the liberal economy is dominant throughout the world, either in the form of a totally free market, or one that is regulated. The other alternatives have disappeared: the true socialism of the Eastern countries, communism, which was based on other ideas, has disappeared; Yugoslavia's attempts at self-management have disappeared, the socialism rooted in the African community traditions has disappeared, the Sandinista attempts in Nicaragua have disappeared. Today, the Chinese have invented a concept of “socialist market economy”. This has to be understood in terms of “rampant capitalism directed by a Leninist totalitarian state.” This does not mean it isn't a market. And today, Vietnam is also following this line of socialist market economy, that is to say, it is a capitalist country but one that is controlled by one single omnipresent authoritarian party. For the time being there is no alternative.

So if the prevailing ideology accepts such markets and encourages them, if there are no longer any political obstacles to these exchanges and if there is the required technology in place, something that is increasing all the time, then globalisation just has to develop: so we need to really understand it in order to see if we can change the content.

To sum up, we can say that globalisation is a major phenomenon of our times, that people's opinions on it are very varied and that this diversity is very much affected by the place where people live. It is a global phenomenon and it affects every aspect of life, it is very intensive and takes place rapidly. Globalisation is a dual process: there is the tremendous growth of all forms of exchange and, at the same time, there is the spreading of these changes throughout almost every part of the world.

II. A BALANCE SHEET ON GLOBALISATION

In this second part we are going to see who are the winners and the losers in this globalisation, and its positive and negative effects.

A) Positive effects of globalisation. Who are the winners?

1. We all enjoy much easier and cheaper access to goods and services that were for a long time restricted to a small, privileged group of people.

Globalisation means that manufactured goods can be produced more cheaply. This increases competition and encourages price reductions. As consumers, we benefit from this increased production and commerce. We benefit from cheap goods produced by businesses which strive to minimise costs by trying to find the best correlation between quality and price at every stage of production. Here are a few examples.

* Access to audio visual goods: television, video recorders, hi-fi equipment, etc. Today a television set costs 45% less than it did ten years ago. Why? This television set has been made in countries where labour costs are lower and also because there has been a considerable reduction in transport costs to the purchaser abroad. It is obvious that if the product is sold cheaply in this new place then somewhere the workers have been badly paid. This does not prevent us all from profiting from a reduction in prices of goods which today can come from any part of the world. When a large store can sell small calculators for 2 or 3 euros and this type of goods is subject to 19.6% VAT tax, when the firm can manage to pay its staff and still make a profit, this means that production costs must be very low in Asia and other places.

* Less expensive clothes, cheap shoes from Poland (before the fall of the Berlin wall we never had shoes from Poland), stocks of cheap shirts from China, etc.

* The telephone is no longer regarded as a luxury. Fifty years ago, people only used the telephone for serious reasons. The telephone was a luxury and it was used only by people who needed it for their work or by people in comfortable circumstances. Today the telephone is an everyday piece of equipment: authorities do everything they can to make sure that people in debt do not have their telephone line cut off because this action is now regarded as a serious affront. The telephone is something for general use and is now considered such an ordinary thing that when people buy some other products they are presented with a free cordless phone as well. The telephone has become the form of communication used for selling things. Besides, it costs less to make an evening transatlantic call than to buy a stamp. This is due both to technological developments and to the fact that telecommunications are a worldwide enterprise. As consumers, we have cheap goods and we find prices that are based on the fact that production costs, transport and commercial costs, have come down because of globalisation.

2. Globalisation can help us to move from seeing differences as a form of aggression, to accepting differences because these have become commonplace.

We need to be very circumspect in discussing this second positive aspect of globalisation. The more we come into contact with diversity, the less it is seen as different. The more contact we have with foreigners, the less foreign they become.

The transport systems in our towns, just like our schools, are where we meet

people of many different nationalities. Our markets are frequented by black Africans and people from North Africa. Religious services are attended by young West Indians, Tamils, Africans, Portuguese... And the more we are accustomed to difference, the less it is seen as difference. Difference can be disturbing. Our first reaction when we come across difference is to reject it. This rejection can take the form of scorn, mockery, sarcasm, violence.... We can also reject people by not acknowledging that they are different. We act as though the other person is like us and we do not recognise his right to be different. The more the other person is like us, the more acceptable we find him. When we meet people who are physically or mentally handicapped, we often feel insecure. We find the difference between us disturbing. But when we meet them on a regular basis, at work or in other situations, these meetings make us see that they are not so different from us. Becoming accustomed to difference means that we end up not noticing it. Globalisation brings us more and more into contact with diversity and this can perhaps help us to move on from seeing differences as psychologically threatening, to accepting them because they are commonplace.

The second stage of this process means that globalisation can help us to move on from accepting diversity as commonplace, to seeing it as a positive benefit. The other person enriches me because he is different. The other person shows me a part of humanity that I do not possess. And for us believers, the other person reveals to me an image of God that I was unaware of. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created man. Male and female he created them. God created them in his own image. Every human person is an icon of God, a bearer of the divine. Each human being reveals to me an image of God. That is why globalisation can help us to discover the unity of humankind within its diversity and the quality of "otherness" which is necessary for knowing God, who is the Other, the Completely Other. That leads us to think of a mosaic. Each tiny mosaic stone is not of much consequence, but it is the mosaic as a whole that makes it a work of art. Humankind is a mosaic of men and women and if one part of humanity is missing then part of the work of art is missing, too.

Of course this is a Utopia that has to be built up. Three conditions are necessary if diversity is to be seen as a positive benefit:

* The first condition is that *we be educated with regard to difference*. This is something that concerns us all. Today, educating people with regard to difference is a vital component of the work of education: it means teaching people to look on diversity and every form of difference, as a positive benefit. We have to include in all our educational services, training people to welcome diversity. For us Christians, this goes without saying. Pentecost means that the Good News is proclaimed to all people. Now the apostles were not intellectuals but what they preached was the Good News for everyone. If the Good News is for everyone, this presupposes that everyone can understand it. And we cannot understand this if we are not willing to meet others. We cannot be disciples of Jesus if we are not open to differences. The other person has something to contribute, he is part of what constitutes human dignity: so there needs to be an educational system that makes people open to differences.

* The second condition is that we must take care to *show that there is goodness, greatness and nobility in the person who is different from us*, even if he or she is among the lowliest people in society. All reporting and articles that show all the sufferings, all the hurts and all the injustices of the Fourth World, or of immigrants in our own countries, are very necessary. But we must not stop there, because otherwise there would be the danger of presenting a negative and wretched picture of poor persons and this would stop people seeing their innate good qualities. We need to say that greatness is to be found in all those who are different. One day there were very strong tensions in a particular college and the atmosphere there deteriorated with more and more identity clashes and rejection of people who were seen as different. A teacher suggested that each ethnic group (there were more than forty of them) should be given the opportunity to express the good things about their native country. The educational authorities agreed and normal lessons were suspended for a week and the time devoted to showing all the good things in the countries that the pupils came from, with music, dance, films, clothes, etc. The final day was called “nations day”. Each family was asked to come along in their best regional costumes and to bring a speciality dish from their own country. From that day onward the atmosphere in that college changed because the students were able to see something good in people different from themselves. They saw with different eyes. When we like people we find them attractive. And when we look on other people and think that there is something good about them, our vision alters. We need to take care to help other people discover their attractiveness and the things that make up the richness and the wisdom of their culture, etc.

* The third condition affects us collectively: *we must not add to the factors that could make encounters difficult*. This includes, among other things, the need for a social policy with regard to housing, work...with as few clashes as possible. Here is an example from my own experience. My neighbour is a Muslim from Cameroon and he observes Ramadan. In the evening, when he breaks his fast, there is a lot of noise. But the conditions in which we live and meet one another make it possible for me to say with respect, “My neighbour is celebrating Ramadan.” In other words, the disturbance he makes is not so great that I cannot respect his different religious beliefs. At the end of Ramadan, he invites us to celebrate that festival with him, just as he comes to our house on Holy Thursday and Easter Sunday. That is no problem. The conditions under which we meet are such that any threatening differences are eradicated by other and more important values. On the other hand, if I lived in a block of flats in a ghetto area where a lot of people break their fast at the same time, that would create far too much noise; and if I had to get up early next morning to go to work, I would be very annoyed. And if, to add to all this, the stairway is dirty, the lift has broken down and the letter boxes vandalised, I would be very vexed. If the children at school are held back because of the low standard of education I would react in a different way to my neighbours who were breaking their fast during Ramadan. In other words, if there are more and more ghettos, blocks of flats that are essentially ghettos, schools and works that are ghettos, there is an increased risk of seeing differences as a threat and not as a benefit. That is why, if one is trying to promote the positive side of diversity, it is necessary to promote a social mix...We would need to ensure social housing in every district, otherwise people would be concentrated in certain areas, ghettos would be created and it would be impossible to

see diversity in a positive light.

Yes, it is a Utopia, and a Utopia that needs to be created in the knowledge that one can only recognise the richness of various cultures to the extent that we feel at home with them.

To come to terms with different types of people, we need to feel happy with their culture. So there are three possible attitudes:

- we are so happy with the situation that other people can only feel happy about it, too
- we are so unsure of our identity that we cannot reach out to the other person and we will protect ourselves in order to survive.
- we feel quite happy about the way things are but we also recognise what is lacking. We can only be what we are. We know, too, that each of our values has its negative side.

Each culture has its good points and its limitations. We are enriched by our contact with others insofar as we are able to accept them. And we are accepting insofar as we are sufficiently confident about ourselves to be able to reach out to others.

To sum up, three possible currents of thought with regard to globalisation

*1st category: those who see globalisation above all as an opportunity to be grasped. They are particularly aware of all the possibilities that globalisation has to offer economically, culturally, etc. They do not deny that there are problems but before all else, they realise all its positive features.

*2nd category: those who think that globalisation is intrinsically evil, that is to say, it can only be destructive for the most vulnerable. It is by its very nature, dangerous. Since it has this capacity to destroy, it is lawful to curb it, to denounce it or to thwart it by every possible means, even by resorting to violence. These people are the “anti-globalisationists.”

*3rd category: those who think that since globalisation is an irreversible process, it is useless to oppose it, but they think that it is unacceptable in its present form. So there has to be another version of globalisation. These people are the “alternative-globalisationists.” However, it is a very complex reality that has all sorts of tendencies. The “alternative-globalisationists” are very united in their denunciation of some of the bad points about globalisation but they do not speak with one voice in proposing alternatives. In spite of everything, the “alternative-globalisationists” would like to see another form of globalisation, even if the one they are suggesting is not perfect either...

B) Negative aspects of globalisation. Who are the losers?

Globalisation is not acceptable for ethical reasons and it is not a realistic policy.

1. For ethical reasons

It is generally established that globalisation accentuates the gaps between the winning nations and the losing nations (countries that were already the poorest on the world scene). Even within the winning nations, it accentuates the divide between the economic sectors, regions and people who are winners, and the sections of the economy, the regions, and the people, who are losers; the losers are the most vulnerable people.

Over the past ten years it could be objectively said that globalisation has created more than a million extra jobs in France. But we can also say that this million represents a balance. Three million jobs have been created and two million jobs lost. The jobs lost have been in the most vulnerable sectors and regions, and affected the most vulnerable people. China is the biggest winner in the globalisation stakes, with an annual growth in its economy of between 8 and 9% ! But if the middle classes in China are prospering, a whole section of the population is under privileged, and these are the most vulnerable people.

Now we know that society shows greatest humanity, is most humane, when it cares for its weakest members. Society makes progress when it cares for its weakest members and when it makes up for inequalities of birth or of nature. In a family, the parents pay greater attention to the weakest child and it is this care that is the basis for the weakest person's quality of life. This happens in a family and in any society that is truly humane. So if progress ends by accentuating inequalities, society becomes less humane. When a boat is sinking and people observe the old dictum, "*women and children first*", people show an extraordinary degree of humanity. If finding a place in the life boat depended on physical strength, then the strongest people would get into the boat and the weakest people would be left to die.

We should be able to see this concern for the weakest people reflected in the budget of a family, a town or the State. For us Christians, such concern is a sign of our religious identity. Chapter 7 v.18-28 of St. Luke's gospel tells us about John the Baptist being in prison and saying to his disciples, "*Ask Jesus is he the Messiah we are waiting for?*" And Jesus gives this answer, "*Go and tell him what you have seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them.*" This is what Pope John XXIII called "the signs of the times", that is to say, the signs that God is at work in the world, it means that people of no account and those who are marginalised find their place in society. The sign that God is among us is when the lowly are reintegrated. And chapter 25 of Saint Matthew's gospel is the most subversive text ever! Our God not only identifies with the poor, the hungry and the stranger ...but **He is** poor, hungry and a stranger...If this is how God is, how can we say that we love God if we do not love the poor, the hungry and the stranger....

Even in the Old Testament we can read passages that clearly speak about justice and right. So in chapter 25 of Leviticus we find: "*slaves will be set free, debts cancelled*

and lands returned.” This was a reminder that things could not go well when people lived in sub-human conditions and that certain laws that led to injustice had to be called into question. Amos declared, *“Let me have no more of your chanting, no more of your strumming on harps, but let there be justice and integrity.”* And Isaiah said, *“the fast that pleases me is justice and integrity....”*

And we have all Jesus’ teaching and his example which tell us that if we see that globalisation increases the divide between peoples to the extent that some persons live in sub-human conditions, then we cannot agree to it in its present form.

How is globalisation expressed on a world scale?

Which countries have economic involvement?

1. These are countries that have **strategic raw materials** (oil, certain metal alloys that can be used for the most up to date weaponry and high technology). It is quite normal for the whole world to be interested in oil because we cannot do without oil as a source of energy and as a basic product: petrochemicals are the basis of many manufactured goods). But being interested in a product does not give countries the right to do what they like. Everyone has an interest in certain metal alloys necessary for the manufacture of sophisticated weaponry, for Ariane style rockets, for high speed aeroplanes...When a country does not possess these strategic raw materials it is not considered so important.

2. These are countries that have a **useful source of manpower**, that is to say workers who are:

- in plentiful supply
- flexible and able to adapt to new tasks (including repetitive tasks),
- compliant - either by nature (some societies have a deep respect for authority) - or through pressure (because the government obliges them to be compliant)
- cheap to employ (long working hours, fewer days absence because of strikes or sickness, and low wages earned) Some countries are more attractive in these ways than others. It is not by chance that China has 42% of western investment in 2003, while sub-Sahara Africa has less than 2%

The work force in China is plentiful, docile and disciplined both by temperament and by necessity (no right to strike...). It costs 25 times less to employ these workers than it does to use workers in Germany who are the highest paid work force.

So an industry that needs a large, unskilled work force, will be drawn to China. And also, if the country offering an attractive work force is also a place that has marketing outlets available, then businesses rush there to enjoy these advantages. China meets these criteria because it has a population of one billion three hundred million and 30% of the inhabitants are increasingly becoming a consumer society (400 million, a total that is 15 times that of European consumers!). So markets in China are becoming more and more an attractive proposition. Some people go there to earn a higher salary, others

go to seek out new clients, and some people go there for both these reasons.

On the other hand, places such as Burkina-Faso, Mali, and Central Africa...which do not have raw materials or a large and flexible work force, are of no interest to anyone except for beer and tobacco producers.

This is the first time in economic history that the rich, even if they need cheap labour (the poor), no longer need poor people to make them rich, because now they need people who have enough money to buy their products. India is an interesting case because it has first rate scientists and technologists, as well as skills...about 20% of India's people (200 million) are increasingly able to join a consumer society. At the same time, 40% of the population has become impoverished over the last ten years.

Liberals say that globalisation is a good thing because it opens up markets. But markets are only set up if they have things to sell, things that the customers want to buy. Opening up new markets through globalisation only makes sense if there are goods to sell and customers to buy them. So what does "opening up new markets" mean for a country that produces goods that are of interest to only a few, if any, foreign markets? Here are some extreme examples. Madagascar exports hemp, vanilla, pyrethrum, and ylang-ylang for synthetic perfumes. It is the same with places like the Ivory Coast that exports cocoa. These days people in the richer countries do not eat simple cocoa products but they add ingredients to the cocoa: they eat another form of cocoa, milk chocolate, nut chocolate, mint chocolate...they eat less of the raw product but instead use raw materials to which have been added ingredients which are not necessarily basic products of poor countries. The peasants know that people do not drink as much plain milk, but milk that has other things added to it, as with yoghurts: yoghurts with vitamins, energising yoghurts, magnesium enriched milk ...

In France, businesses face competition from manufacturers who use cheap labour. The directors of these enterprises say that they have less to pay in social charges and taxes if they relocate and of course they know that there is a social price to pay for all these measures. When a firm has to lower its reselling prices, it wants to cut costs. And one of these costs is manpower, but if we are talking about an enterprise that needs a large work force without much technological training, that is a very different scenario from an enterprise that only needs to bring in innovations and this demands a very highly qualified staff. In the past, businesses that needed a lot of unskilled labour sought it locally: originally it was close at hand and then eventually people were employed from places further away. Today, with globalisation, when a business is expanding, it isn't the work force that is displaced, but the business itself moves to where cheap labour is available.

On the other hand, when labour costs are high, these can be reduced. How? By replacing workers who are costly and less adaptable, with young workers who are more flexible and who cost less to hire. For decades in France there has been a manpower shortage. So the stability of the labour force was an asset to the enterprise and bonuses were awarded to people who had worked there for a long time. Also, in times when there was little change in technology, long service was proof of competence. Today there are

rapid changes in technology, long service is no longer a proof of competence but can be seen to be more of a handicap and as senior staff have to be paid more, firms prefer to employ young people who may be better qualified but are still paid less. This led to the decision to tell people in the 53-57 age group to give up work. And when these tried to find other employment they were offered a much lower salary because it was felt that they might not be able to adapt to new working patterns. This meant that such persons were marginalised and they suddenly became more vulnerable. So it was a matter of cutting costs because of increased competition resulting from globalisation.

The enterprise will also outsource a certain number of functions. Today business enterprises use the following strategy: no stock held after the goods are produced, no stock of raw materials before an order is placed. But if the firm unexpectedly receives an important order, it either uses subcontractors or temporary staff. This means that the firm employs two categories of staff: workers whose rights are guaranteed by collective agreements with the unions, and staff who do not qualify for these rights and who are in a more vulnerable position. The unions are finding it very difficult to look after the interests of both types of workers.

When a business has found markets, the products have to be delivered. The number of lorries and drivers used by the firm is calculated on normal delivery rates. But when there have to be supplementary deliveries the work is given to subcontractors, small enterprises whose staff can work 50, 60 or 70 hours, often without much job security.

Globalisation increases competition so businesses are forced to cut their costs. This cost cutting is achieved to the detriment of the people, particularly the most vulnerable people, and it means that everyone engaged in social action needs to rethink their mission of solidarity. The old guidelines still exist but at the same time there are new situations emerging and these, too, have to be taken into account.

Since the economy is affected on a global scale, the counterbalances must also be felt worldwide. The Trades Union Movement can no longer think purely in terms of national enterprises but in global terms. For all these reasons, globalisation as it is flourishing at present, is unacceptable in its present form, even though it has some positive aspects.

2. For reasons of political realism

Globalisation is not acceptable for ethical reasons or as a matter of political realism. Indeed, if globalisation continues to accentuate the gaps between those who are well provided for and those who are at risk, then it is only to be expected that terrorism will increase. When people and nations feel that they are suffering humiliations, injustices and have no prospects at all for the future, they come to the conclusion that they have nothing to lose. That is why although it is necessary to combat terrorism by preventive military measures and by force, we must also work at lessening inequalities, at organising the world in a different way, at being more concerned about the poorest countries; this is not just a way of acting dictated by morality, it is also an important act

of political realism. If we wish to avoid an increase in the flow of migration, we must ensure that there are not too many people living without hope. That is why we have to think in different terms about development, its financing and trading relations. Similarly, the high rate of unemployment among young people is suicidal for a society.

For the first time, external danger cannot be identified as coming from any particular country. Between 1945 and 1990, danger was seen to come from Bolshevism or from American Imperialism. For centuries, the French thought that the threat came from England or from Germany. Today there is no longer this identification of any one country as the source of danger. So, among the twenty or so persons accused of being at the root of the attack on New York, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the suspects came from countries that were the closest allies of the United States. In the Middle East the chief ally is Israel and then Saudi Arabia and Jordan. At the present time, young French people of North African immigrant families go to Chechnya as volunteer fighters to defend the people of Chechnya who are being massacred by the Russians, while the international community maintains a deafening silence, and the Chechen resistance fighters, opposed by the Russians, by orthodox Christians or atheist Marxists, use Islam as a catalyst for their resistance. Just as the Poles did with Catholicism under the Communists and Irish Catholics do with regard to English Protestant occupiers. So Islam provides a “catalysation” for resistance. That is why, if we want the world to live in peace, we have to reject globalisation in its present form. We have to lessen people’s feelings of humiliation and injustice, and to do this we must give priority to the most vulnerable.

C) Historical account of the Anti-globalisationists and the Alternative-globalisationists.

The first expression of opposition to globalisation came during the **1st Social Forum at Porto Alegre, in 2001**. This gathering was directed by some founding figures such as Chico Whitaker, Secretary General of the Justice and Peace Commission in Brazil. It was no coincidence that this meeting took place at the same time as the one in Davos, Switzerland, where the “Super Powers” meet every year to discuss world problems and try to find solutions to them with all the means available. Now, people like Chico Whitaker, Bernard Cassel from the diplomatic world, and others, said that we shouldn’t let the “Super Powers” be the only ones to talk about world affairs. Even if these people are men of good will, they speak from their own standpoint, which is one of winners and not one of losers. So at Porto Alegre, others wanted to speak about world problems. So the first Social Forum was an anti-globalisation or an “anti-Davos” Forum. If this Social Forum had not been held there would not have been an alternative-globalisation movement. The starting point for this Forum was an answer to and a protest against Davos.

At the **2nd Social Forum, in Porto Alegre in 2002**, there was a split between those who wanted simply to denounce globalisation (the anti-globalisationists) and those who wanted this denunciation to be followed by a time for drawing up something new. So people were already thinking about an alternative. However, in 2002, almost all the Press coverage continued to speak of anti-globalisation.

In **2003, the 3rd Social Forum in Porto Alegre** was clearly the forum of the alternative-globalisationists. The line taken by this Forum was very obviously one of seeking alternatives to globalisation and this happened to such an extent that a certain number of anti-globalisationists refused to attend. Instead, they set up a parallel Forum to take place at the same time. It proved to be a failure. For the alternative-globalisationists, denunciation is just a starting point and it has to be immediately followed by studying an alternative globalisation project, starting with people putting in common all ideas that could lead to an alternative solution. After this 3rd Social Forum, the Press began to give wide coverage to this meeting of alternative-globalisationists.

In **2004, the 4th Social Forum in Bombay** produced a shock. This Forum marked both continuity with previous Forums and a split from them. As well as dealing with alternative-globalisation themes discussed at previous Forums, though these were not given priority, subjects such as the role of the IMF, the World Bank, what is meant by world governance, the monitoring of the movement of capital, etc., there were three new and very interesting features:

- *The presence of Asian countries.*

At Porto Alegre, 156 countries were represented, the vast majority of these were from Western Europe and Latin America, with only a few delegates from the Asian countries. (The next Forum in 2005 will be held in Porto Alegre, and in two years time, in Africa, at Dakar or Johannesburg, and this will encourage greater representation from Africa). At Bombay, on the other hand, Asia's active presence was very noticeable.

- *The voice of the voiceless.*

At Porto Alegre, those taking part were mostly intellectuals and people from a middle class background. At Bombay, the Forum heard not just the people of that country but also the "untouchables", the oppressed, the street children, exploited women and ethnic minorities. And the voiceless expressed themselves as voiceless people. The Forum had anticipated the need to translate the proceedings into English, French, Spanish and Portuguese but had not foreseen the need for translation into the ethnic languages. Since no translation was available, participants had to rely on what they saw. The minority groups expressed themselves clearly and impressively through mime, dance, painting.... When people arrived with their musical instruments to accompany the dancing, the conference came to a halt, and then when the dancing ended, the musicians and dancers left the auditorium. This was the voice of the voiceless, using the language of the voiceless. This made people reflect on the measures they needed to take in order to hear what the voiceless were saying.

- *They dealt with subjects not generally considered to be important* before now because they related to regions that were not regarded as important and problems of men and women not considered important: the problem of religious intolerance, religious fundamentalism, the status of women, of minorities and of castes. So new elements were introduced and we will have to see how these can be incorporated into the 5th Forum at Porto Alegre in 2005. And if, in two years time, the 6th Forum takes place in Africa,

other features will have to be added.

The World Social Forum and the continental Social Forums like those at Genoa, Paris, Dakar, Nairobi and others, are the sign and manifestation of this alternative-globalisation that is emerging.

There are two stages in this alternative-globalisation movement. The first is that of a wake-up call and a denunciation. Here the language is, of necessity, simplified because the aim is to convince and to mobilise people, so it is a language that appeals very much to people's feelings, to moral values and to conscience. Even though this first stage is necessary, people have to move on to the second stage. Now the call to action has to be couched in language that allows for rigorous analysis, and actions and projects that can be applied to modern situations, and it should make people taking part in the movement reflect on its weaknesses, its ambiguities, its risks and its contradictions. The alternative-globalisation movement is still at a delicate stage; everything will become easier in the years to come.

III. IN VIEW OF THIS GLOBALISATION SITUATION WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HUMANISE THE PROCESS?

A commitment to working in solidarity to humanise globalisation is something that is binding on every human being and on the Christian conscience. We can distinguish 4 levels of commitment which range from the most personal to the most general, but no one of them is more important than the others.. The commitment made by each individual will depend on his or her history, experience, living conditions, age, social status, etc. But even though commitment may take different forms it is not something that is optional.

1st level: commitment to or interpersonal solidarity with those who are nearest to us

This is a commitment to caring for one's neighbour in a block of flats, a lonely old person, a couple whose marriage is at risk of breaking down parents who no longer understand their children or who have children who take drugs.... Globalisation has created new forms of vulnerability and new poverties. For example, there is the family that becomes a single-parent family because the father is obliged to work 100 or 200 km away from where he lives. There is the degradation felt by young adults who cannot find work except on a temporary basis or on solidarity contracts. It is impossible to pay for a house bought on credit when someone loses his job or has his salary reduced, and this causes tensions within the family that might even lead to divorce. It is not globalisation, strictly speaking, that brings this about, but globalisation does make people more vulnerable. Let us look around us and see if there are suffering people who are not the usual unfortunate people we come across, because globalisation creates new forms of poverty.

2nd level: associative commitment to those in closest proximity to us

Ten years ago society could still be represented in the form of a pyramid. Everyone was guaranteed entry into society. Work gave people the means of participating in social life and was a form of social acceptance. Opportunities for advancement were available to nearly everyone. It seemed possible to better oneself, or if one didn't manage to do this oneself, there was always the hope that one's children would.

Today, the pyramid model can no longer be applied to society, which is now represented as two parallelepipeds: one of these represents the people who are part of society and the other represents those who are outsiders. Access to society is no longer guaranteed for everyone. For the outsider, the possibilities for joining society are not at all the same as in the time of the pyramid model. For someone who leaves school without any qualifications, who lives in a dubious area, who has no useful contacts, the chances of getting onto even the lowest rungs of the social ladder have become difficult. Even when a person is on the inside of society, he is not sure that the future will be better, the risks of being rejected by society are greater and this threat can come at any moment. These days, even a business enterprise that is making profit can dismiss staff either to increase its profits margin or to prepare for the future. So an enterprise that is in a bad state is always risky and even one that is in good shape cannot give guarantees. Moreover, when someone is excluded from society, opportunities for re-entry are now more difficult to find. And if, in addition to this, someone is in circumstances that are rather marginal (handicap, drugs, prison, alcohol...), the chances of reinsertion are even more slim.

Today is the first time since the Second World War that fathers are not sure that their sons will have a better standard of living. At present it is the grandparents and retired people who care for young people, whereas previously the opposite was true. This marks a radical change in society. No longer can people think in the same way about collective advancement, the future or solidarity, and this has led to the emergence of a new type of social movement which is often radical in its demands, such as the right to housing, an association against unemployment etc. For those who have been outside mainstream society from the outset, it is difficult to join or to rejoin society if there are no support structures in place like associations committed to local action. These local structures do not function in order to change the content of globalisation but to repair the damage caused by globalisation or to take into account the new deals caused by globalisation. For example, there are the local state controlled organisations that are in closest contact with handicapped people, intermediary agencies and social housing organisations that support people who move from transit centres to an apartment in the centre of town where there is a social mix and they live with people of the middle class, social centres that provide remedial classes and educational help to avoid the risk of people being "failures". All these initiatives are necessary because society has changed and without these support structures some people would definitely be left on the sidelines. Of course these things have their limitations because they are simply a form of aid.

3rd level: collective commitment at national level and taking up the causes

This involves national, not local, structures. These include national associations or NGOs that work to bring in national laws against precarious situations, that work for universal medical insurance or launch campaigns to urge that public money continue to be used for development, or to cancel international debt, to suggest that money be invested for social purposes, or that there should be fairer trade, etc.

“Shared investments” propose that savers should only receive interest at the rate of inflation and that the rest should go to financing projects of organisations that have no savings and no access to credit. These funds are largely helped by religious Congregations; it is one way of living the vow of poverty. If the savings can promise certain guarantees then it is a good idea to take care that the money is used for social purposes; this is a way of putting into practice a preferential option for the poor.

4th level: world commitment

This is the commitment shown by the major organisations or the NGOs that have networks all over the world and which have dealings with the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), UNO (United Nations Organisation), etc. Several NGOs have come together to lobby the World Bank. Interest-free loans from the World Bank with 30 years for making repayment, have gone to the people’s organisations in shanty towns, rural associations, etc. The NGO “Handicap” began its work by demanding money to provide appliances for people who had lost a limb after stepping on a landmine. At a later stage, it denounced the existence of these cruel armaments as unacceptable since they affect the civilian population. The 3rd stage of their work was to vote in a law for the whole world, by which 140 countries committed themselves to producing no more anti-personnel mines and to destroying all those they had in stock. Some countries finance the work of destroying mines and open training centres for those who will do this work. However, China still has a stock of 110 million anti-personnel mines, Russia has 60 million and the United States has 11 million. This shows us that world pressure needs to be increased.

Conclusion

These 4 levels are not in opposition to one another; they are complementary. Every person, by reason of their life history, charism and talents, is involved at some level or another, knowing that they have to carry other people in their thoughts, their reading, their educational work and in their prayers. Man needs God and God needs man. If the end of History marks the coming of the Kingdom where love is stronger than hatred, where the Good News is proclaimed to all people, then this can only come about if we build the foundations by our human actions. This is our vocation, lived out in the diversity of our charisms.

René Valette
*Geographer, economist,
Member of the Justice and Peace Commission in France,*

*Former Vice-Rector of the Catholic faculty of Lyons,
Former President of the CCFD
(Catholic Committee working against hunger and for development).*

Globalisation from a biblical standpoint

Notes taken from a cassette recording (conversational style)

Introduction

As we reflect on globalisation it is difficult to relate this phenomenon to others that have arisen in our day. We realise that globalisation is a new reality, both in its causes and in its consequences, and yet we can also say that it is also a very old reality, if the subject is expressed in a different way.

It is true that the word “globalisation” does not appear in the Bible. So we must look there for something that we see happening in today’s world and which can shed some light on what we are experiencing. I think that the passage about Babel has something to tell us about how we should live together. When we read the text we might think that man’s plan for living together is a good idea. However, it ends with people being dispersed, not united.

The building of the tower of Babel (Gn 11:1-9)

When we think about this passage on Babel we have in mind first of all the building of the city and the tower. However, there are other themes here: the question of language and the question of people being separated. These three themes are intertwined and they come together to illustrate a project that is never completed, which remains just a rough sketch, a “*stuttering*” that lead to the “scattering”, the verb used in verse 9.

History of the tower

In these plains bordering the river Euphrates, huge towers sprang up like mushrooms and they were called ziggurats. Unlike the pyramids of Egypt, these towers are “temples” because, by climbing monumental staircases to the top of the tower, one can reach the place where God dwells: so they are temples.

A pyramid is a tomb but the tower or the ziggurat of Babylon is a “temple” tower, so it is the house of God. This helps us to understand what these men were aiming to do: they wanted to build a tower that would reach up to heaven and so to God himself. This account is something that is both mythological and rooted in the imagination of the

ancient East with its towers and the great city of Babylon. The sacred writer uses these experiences to reveal to us a message from God.

Outline of the biblical account

We can see that the text is constructed as follows:

- *The initial circumstances:* at that time everyone used the same language and the same vocabulary.
- *The action: man's plan:* in verses 2 to 4, we see that man plans to build a tower and to invent a name so that people would not be scattered over the earth.
- *God's design:* verses 5 to 8 reveal God's contrary plan. He allows their project to be completely wiped out by scattering them all over the face of the earth. For Him, this project is just a "stuttering" and a mix-up: we shall see why. God's action is described by the verb form "*Let us go down.*" God comes down! He *swoops down* (as in Westerns) to clear things up!
- *The final situation:* in verse 9 we have the people scattered. Is this dispersion a catastrophe or a stroke of good luck? We might think that it is a calamity. Indeed just before the passage about Babel, we are told that the people were already scattered all over the face of the earth. The Bible calls this dispersion "the Table of Peoples." And man's plan is to come together in one place, speaking one language, having one dwelling....without God. God rejects this plan and seems to be saying that it is normal for men to be scattered all over the earth.

Some ways of interpreting this text

The initial situation: "*throughout the earth all spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary.*"

We have the impression that the situation at the beginning is emphasising the early unity of the human race. But this is only an apparent unity where people speak in the same way, using the same language, the same vocabulary. We might say today that men had the same ideas, shared the same thought processes and the same ideology. This apparent unity is expressed in man's plan to build a city-tower, a construction they would have in common. It is easy to see that this edifice is the projection of one single ideology based on people thinking in the same way and using the same language.

Man's project (v.2-4) "*To be together in order to be in charge*"

Let us look in detail at man's project: people who had come from the East settle down and want to lead a sedentary life. From our knowledge of mankind's history, we find that moving from a nomadic to a fixed way of life is a sign of progress. A stable way of life goes hand in hand with agriculture and the building of cities. The text follows this line of thought. Men want to settle down and lead a stable life so they build a city-tower. And in doing this, they hope to become famous: "*Let us make a name for ourselves.*" There does not seem to be anything in this plan that would cause Yahweh to

intervene: however, this project is too much according to the mind of man, not of God. Why?

Building a city for themselves is both possible and desirable; everyone speaks the same language and all are engaged in the same project, so cohesion and collective effort can be taken for granted. But there is a danger in doing this: they risk creating their own world, a world that exists just for them, a world that is closed in on itself, one that is self-sufficient, autarkic, and without reference to others or to the Other, to God. This world then would be a caricature of God's original creation. This impression is given added weight by the building of a tower whose summit reaches the heavens. We can see in this an attempt to put something in the place of God, to grasp at being God.

This is a similar temptation to that of Adam and Eve in the first account of creation. With this city-tower, men still want to become God, to be like the gods and reach the heavens with their tower. It is interesting to note, too, that the lofty modern buildings of our times are called skyscrapers.

Their plan to become famous and to make a name for themselves by building a city and a tower, is a way of asserting themselves. The tower will be visible from afar, it will be a landmark, it will be seen by others and it will be a lasting monument. It will become the symbol of power, of power regained.

Making a name for oneself, becoming famous, takes us back to that first account of creation. We may recall that man was given the task of naming the animals but not of giving himself a name. In other words, by giving himself a name, man claimed to be the only point of reference, no reference was made to the Creator.

With this plan to build a tower that will reach to heaven, men are aiming to build a world that is closed, cut off from others, self-sufficient and independent of God whom they are replacing, a world devoid of difference, built upon the same ideas, the same ideology, the same world outlook, a world that is a melting pot where people want to amalgamate and remain enclosed.

Here again there is a reference to Chapter 2 of Genesis: when Adam was the only created human, part of him was separated, and this gave rise to diversity with no possibility of returning to his former state: *“male and female he created them...for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and the two will become one flesh.”*

And with the construction of the tower, it would seem that men were going back to a former state of being: an amalgamated and imaginary world like a new Eden. However, the creation of this Eden was decided by men themselves and not by God; that is why God intervened.

The reaction of God (v. 5-8): *“Unity does not mean uniformity, the whole must not absorb the different parts. Living together means respecting differences.”*

In verses 5 to 8 we see God reacting in a non-violent but an effective way, countering what seems like a bad plan, an evil which might be called “uniformity”, uniformity being the idea behind a closed world where no diversity is allowed. Note the humour of the writer: although the tower reaches to heaven, God still has to come down! This means that man’s project has not succeeded in bringing them up to God because God has to come down to them. Indeed, in the writer’s eyes, God is fundamentally different from men and if he intervenes it is not to justify this difference but to give men the opportunity of living together, not in uniformity but in diversity.

This description of God coming down has some echoes of God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening with the intention of extricating Adam and Eve from the rut into which they had fallen. God’s Word came to lift them out of it and to give them a new chance of living differently.

God’s descent to this city-tower is something similar: it is to give men a new chance to live together as human beings and to have something else in mind than simply shutting themselves up in a tower and only thinking of a plan centred on themselves.

And what will God do? He is going to confuse their speech and scatter them over the face of the earth: *“Let us confuse their language.”* At first sight, God’s reaction might seem a negative one: for once let men understand one another! However, the biblical text shows this to be a new opportunity for humankind because uniformity is not people’s normal way of living. So uniformity is destroyed together with the melting pot mentality and the exclusive mentality (*“let us make a name for ourselves”*). Men can once again live according to the designs of God, that is to say, in diversity, as they are scattered over the face of the earth.

Verse 9 tells us the final result of this incident. God scatters the people and this is contrary to the settled way of life (referred to in verse 2) and all the consequences of this. Even if it seemed at first to be a calamity, this dispersal is a fortunate occurrence because it leaves room for diversity in human life, it reveals differences not just between men themselves, but between God and man. Through this dispersal God re-establishes man’s proper place in this otherness: man’s relationship with God, with his fellow men, and with creation.

So how can men begin again to live with one another? How can this stuttering project become a plan that is worthy of man?

The end result: “the call to leave everything and enter into the Covenant”

In chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis, the call of Abraham comes to counterbalance the Babel plan and it marks a new departure for humankind.

Let us see some features of Abraham’s call compared with the account of Babel (Gn 12:1-3).

- In the Babel account, men talked among themselves but Abraham was called by Another who told him, “*Leave your country.*”
- In the Babel account, the people lived in anonymity and wanted to give themselves a name but this came to nothing: Abram, on the other hand, receives the name: Abraham.
- In the Babel account, the people wanted to settle down: Abraham is told to move, to leave everything.
- Men wanted to make a name for themselves: Yahweh made Abraham’s name illustrious.
- In the Babel account, Yahweh intervenes in quite a compelling way, “*let us go down*”, and he scatters the people: it is the opposite with Abraham, because in him God assembles and raises up a new people.
- The dispersal is counterbalanced by a blessing: “*in you many peoples and nations will be blessed.*” The people being scattered over the face of the earth is followed by the nations being gathered together “in you.” “*In you they will be blessed.*”

This is the movement that began with Abraham. In other words, the call of Abraham or the choice of Abraham, seems to us to be the opposite of Babel and at the same time a prolongation of it. From a biblical point of view, it is normal for people to be scattered. But in the midst of this dispersal, God raises up a man who will give a name to, or rather he will be the founder, of a people, Israel, so that a new way of living will come into being through a partnership that will be called the Covenant. This partnership makes men engage with one another but also with the Other, who is God. This is the model for the new way of living that has to be created. Truth is always a balance to be found in partnership, a promise to live in the practice of diversity.

Conclusion

“*In you, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*” This blessing is not based on people settling down and finding security behind walls, no matter how high these may be, or however persistent men may be in building such walls, even in our own day. The blessing is not conditional on conformity: same ideas, same thoughts, same words. The blessing is linked to separation, to coming out of a closed world and moving towards autonomy, which makes people mobile and ready to set off on a journey: “*leave your country.*” This invitation echoes the call for Adam to find diversity in life, not amalgamation with others (the garden or the tower). So it is an invitation for people to come out of themselves, to live their sexual differentiation, to be male and female. It is differentiation and not confusion or merging, that is the normal pattern of human life. At any rate, this is what the Bible considers to be normal, providing that there is a covenant and that the promise begins to be fulfilled.

It has often been said that Babel was a bad project and that it was superseded by Pentecost. Yes and no. I think that the real answer to Babel is to be found first of all in the call of Abraham. Among the nations of the earth, God raises up a people: this people is always living according to the promise, it is always being called, always developing. The circumstances in which a people reach fulfilment can obviously be read in the rest of

the Bible, and in particular, the account of Pentecost. The real answer to Babel is the building up of a people from all the peoples scattered over the face of the earth.

Father Michael Garat
Director of the Major Seminary of Bayonne

N.B.

This first part of the article on globalisation as seen from a biblical standpoint, will be followed by a second reflection on the place of intercultural and interfaith experience in the Bible. This will appear in the next Echo.

News from the Provinces

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Christa Bauer, General Councillor

Visit to the German Province

On **25th November 2003**, Sister Christa Bauer, General Councillor, visited the Province of Cologne and began by meeting the elderly and sick Sisters in Tavel, then the Sisters of Buochs who have a pastoral ministry in a very de-christianised zone, the Sisters of the Provincial House, and finally, the Sisters of Thuringe (former region of East Germany). After calling to mind the difficulties experienced during the Communist regime, the Sisters reflected on the challenges they are called to take up today. In view of a changing society and a diminution of resources, they are trying to see how they can adapt to new situations but still, in spite of everything, be bearers of hope and joy as witnesses to the Gospel and to Vincentian virtues. In this fragile and precarious world, since we no longer have the numbers we had in the past, we have to improve the quality of our gospel presence and our sisterly life and make a constant effort to deepen and interiorise our spiritual life.

Next, it was time to meet the Sisters of Dusseldorf who are in charge of a large hospital and a retirement home. The Sisters were able to share the joys and the sorrows they experienced in this mission. Then, all the Sister Servants assembled here to reflect on their role of animating the community with regard to community living and prayer in common, and they did this in the light of some words of Rosalie Rendu, *“Always do whatever you can, the Good Lord has given us the task of clearing the ground, of sowing and of cultivating, but it is He himself who waters the crop and makes it fruitful”, “a single grain of self-love can affect the merit of a good action. How stupid we would be to attribute to our own efforts the success of any of our works when we owe this to some poor person’s prayers for us or to the intervention of some unknown good person...If we are not to fail we need to lean on two crutches: trust in God and mistrust of ourselves.”*

On 8th January, the second part of the Visitation began: the evaluation of the work done at the retirement home in Bad Godesberg, a house that takes in lay people and elderly Sisters, and the work of Rosalie House in Cologne, for women in distress, homeless or unemployed...this work is carried out in collaboration with other institutions. In general terms, this evaluation put a great deal of emphasis on our need for faith, the dynamic force behind everything that can be done in the service of the poor, so that we may recognise the presence of Christ in the hearts and the lives of the poor and allow ourselves to be evangelised by them.

Then Sister Christa told us about what is happening in the four corners of the Company. That strengthened our desire, and our strong wish to be united with the whole Company, to be more aware of the poor in every country, and to remember all the communities of Daughters of Charity who serve them. The international aspect of the Company has special resonance for our Province and we feel that what happens “here at home” has repercussions on the life of the whole Company.

By promoting sharing of ideas and experiences, this visitation has been a very special time for us and an opportunity to refocus on our mission with confidence. Thank you, Sister Christa, for your encouragement.

The Sisters of the Province

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General

Visitation of the British Province

Every Visitation is a special moment in the life of a Province, but in this Visitation we had the privilege of welcoming to our Province Sister Margaret Barrett, not only as the Assistant General but as our own former Provincial, and more importantly, as someone who continues to be our sister and our friend, when she visited Britain from 28th February to 19th March 2004.

Her first engagement was to have a meeting with the Provincial Council who gave her an overview of the Province, its achievements over the past six years, and the challenges facing us in the future. Then she had the joy of visiting our retired and sick Sisters in the two communities near the Provincial House and they gave her a very special welcome.

Sister Margaret went to see several community projects in Central London; these included services to the homeless, a project for parents and young children, and a hostel for young women who come to London in search of work and opportunities for further education.

During these three weeks, special gatherings of about 100 Sisters were organised in different regions of the country and in this way Sister Margaret managed to meet nearly all the Sisters of the Province. At these meetings we listened to Sister Margaret's words which both challenged and encouraged us to deepen our following of Jesus Christ of the Gospels, and to continue to revise our works in order to reach out to new forms of poverty not yet addressed by others.

During the second week of the visitation, Sister Margaret visited Wales and the West of England. The Sisters spoke about their ministry to deaf people and to children in need, as well as their Parish work.

Moving north, Sister Margaret was able to see at first hand the work done by Sisters in poor parishes that are without a priest. In Scotland, she met the staff and residents of Saint Joseph's, near Edinburgh: this house is for people with profound learning difficulties; two Sisters coordinate a special religious education programme for these handicapped people. At the Louise Centre in Glasgow, she met the Sisters and volunteers who offer support to women victims of prostitution.

On her return to London, Sister Margaret talked to the Sisters of the Provincial House, sharing with them the highlights of her visit to the Province, and then attended her final meeting with the Provincial Council. At this meeting she encouraged us to prepare well for the promulgation of the new Constitutions, to energetically promote the Action Lines and to courageously continue the huge task of relocating our Provincial House and the two houses for our retired and sick Sisters.

In our closing liturgy we expressed our deep gratitude to Sister Margaret for the warm and compassionate way she had shared in the life of our Province and for her supportive and inspiring words that encouraged us to move forward to a future full of hope. Just as Mary was changed by her encounter with her cousin, Elizabeth, at the Visitation, so too, we were changed in some way, and we know that we have now to live something new. Thank you, Sister Margaret.

Sister Teresa Mathews,

TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of Cuba

50 years presence in the diocese of Pinar del Rio

“Remembering our history strengthens us spiritually. Remembering and commemorating history brings it into the here and now, brings it to life, now and for the future. If we do not keep this memory alive in our hearts the next 50 years will be very difficult. May this commemoration give us the strength to forge ahead on our journey.”

In the diocese of Pinar del Rio, at the western tip of the Province of Cuba, the Daughters of Charity are celebrating 50 years of being part of the local Church. For half a century they have been embodying the Company’s motto: *“The charity of Christ urges us”* while trying to radiate the merciful face of God. On 16th and 17th March 2004, the Christian community joined Saint Louise de Marillac’s daughters in their joyful celebrations at the diocesan house of Our Lady of Loretto, in Pinar.

During the evening of March 16th, ten or so people, helped by a layman, Dagobert Valdes, presented the broad outlines of the works accomplished. In March 1954, four Spanish Sisters arrived. Jose Siro Bacallao (bishop of Pinar del Rio) had just been ordained to the priesthood and was beginning his ministry with the help of the Daughters of Charity. An intensive pastoral programme was put into action: visiting people in their homes, visiting the sick in hospital, catechetics in various districts, rural missions, distributing food to the poor, every type of liturgical service in the churches and chapels. After the revolution of 1959, the Sisters lived in very difficult conditions because they lacked resources and were put under continual pressure. Fortunately, they were supported by some lay people who were very committed to the Church and in spite of their meagre resources, they continued to serve Christ in the poor. They also opened the doors of their house to groups of young people and adults for various courses and for retreats arranged by the diocesan pastoral team. This collaboration led to better evangelisation for everyone. Together with the Pastoral Councils, they organised general pastoral work: this very vibrant parish is very attentive to the calls made by the Church in Cuba and its recommendations which are the guiding force in the life of this community: commitment, participation and a sense of being Church. *“We are fortunate in being daughters of the Church in two ways, and if this is so, do we not have the double duty of living and conducting ourselves as daughters of such a mother?”* said Saint Vincent.

In recent years, the Sisters have developed works to promote the overall care of children, single mothers, old people, and have equipped canteens as well as providing

meals for elderly people (during the day), VIVA workshops (formation in virtue and values) for children and young people: they have been engaged in animating rural communities and people in deprived areas, have collaborated in pastoral work with prisoners....

On 17th March 2004, after paying a visit to the valley of Vinales, a tourist centre in the Province of Pinar, the Sisters from the different houses came together for a Mass presided over by Bishop Jose Siro Bacallao, who concelebrated with Father Gilbert Walker, Provincial Director, and some diocesan priests. Bishop Siro said, *“History cannot be reduced to just a few moments in time, it is a long and difficult journey. It is now half a century since those tireless workers in the Church’s social action plan have been here...Without their presence, without the gift of being able to welcome them here, the history of this diocese would have been a very different one.... For 50 years, the Daughters of Charity “have used the language of men and of angels” in order to transform mountains of poverty, confusion and despair. They shared their material goods but above all else, they shared their love, they witnessed to being people of deep faith, they gave endless support to others, endless love...Blessed are you who are poor in heart because you have shown love for the sick heart of poverty. Your names will be written in the heavens, that is to say, in the heart of God.”*

Sister Carmen Divas, a missionary Sister from Colombia, spoke on behalf of the community, and thanked people for showing them such warm affection, for the presence of so many friends and for that wonderful floral panel bearing the inscription, **“Thank you, Lord, for everything.”**

Sister Maria Lazara Fernandez,
Echoes correspondent

TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of Peru

“Multiple are the forms of poverty, multiple the forms of service.” C.1.8

Pomata, a town in one of the poorest regions of Peru, is situated among the high plateaus of Puno, near the Bolivian border, and at an altitude of 3,763 metres; it is near Lake Titicaca, the largest lake in the world. The population of Pomata is about 23, 000 and the people are spread over 18 villages. Most of these are up to 4,200 metres high. The climate is very cold and the houses are unsafe. The native language is aymara. As well as the problem of illiteracy, attendance at school is rare because few people can afford to study. The level of education is therefore very low. Most of the people are engaged in agriculture. Only those who live near Lake Titicaca are able to fish as well. There is a very high level of malnutrition. The soil is so poor that it can only yield a very small crop so there is no possible way the people could trade their produce.

The people have a very characteristic mixture of religious beliefs. The focal point of these is “pachamama” (mother earth). When the people plough, sow, dig or reap the harvest they are very careful to “*make payment to the earth*” that is, to pay homage to “mother earth” for her gifts, even if these are not very plentiful. The shortage of priests here means that these pagan beliefs are very widespread. Moreover, in most of the parishes most of the pastoral work is done by lay people who are very generous peasants but they have had no Christian formation. That is why the parish of St. James, which has no resident priest, has been confided to the Daughters of Charity.

For centuries, the aymaran peasants have been marginalised, except at election times when they were given a small amount of money or food – a form of manipulation. After the elections they were once more abandoned and they were never given what they had been promised. Each time this happened, the people became more resentful and more distrustful of any form of authority...

One day, however, a President of the Republic, during his time of office in “caretaker“ government, tried to practise consultation and decentralisation. He inaugurated the “*Registers of consultation for combating poverty*” and the “*National Commission for truth and reconciliation*” in order to shed light on the terrible events that had happened during more than twenty years of terrorism in the country. So this was a unique opportunity for the aymaran peasants to bring their problems and their needs before the authorities...but they had no leaders. So they came to us and asked us to support them in their efforts to live a democratic way of life. But how were we to do this? We had absolutely no experience in this matter, it was completely new to us.

After a period of discernment, we decided to **support the people in this process of citizenship** so that they might become true children of God, and we asked advice from the Diocesan Secretariat for Solidarity and Human Rights. We had trained four young people to explain matters to the village elders and see with them how they could make the others aware of what it means to be citizens. So our own “Consultative organisation for the struggle against poverty” was set up. Leaders were chosen from the health and education sectors, from agriculture and from the authorities representing the 18 villages. After that we all drew up together a development project which would last until 2010 and would alleviate the poverty of our region.

After organising our project we went to see the people in charge of Foncodes (National Funds for solidarity and social development, established in 1991 by the Peruvian government). On August 15th, projects were chosen at random. We learnt that we were going to receive a large sum of money for our project for the improvement of rural roads and mule tracks. The people were very happy and everyone set to work and got the project started.

One day we went to a place that was so high up that we lacked oxygen and found it hard to breathe. In this place we found the peasants very worried. To repair a mule track they needed to move a boulder! They weren't strong enough to do this by hand and so they thought of using dynamite. But in this region the use of dynamite is forbidden because it is too dangerous. So nothing could be done; however, they really needed this mule track... It was an enormous boulder! The workers in the group included very old men and even some women, all of them undernourished: we couldn't let them go on trying to break up this rock with pickaxes that were already blunt. Suddenly, one of the workers, who was quite an old man, told me that he could prepare industrial dynamite because he had learnt how to do this during his obligatory military service. I was afraid to agree and I left in a very troubled state of mind as I thought of the hard life they led and all they had to suffer in order to make a living. Many of them had had no money in their pockets for a long time. Matters stayed as they were.

Some time later I came back to this place and found a fine, usable road. When I questioned the man who had made the industrial dynamite, he told me what he had done. This mule track was absolutely vital for them if they were to move their products, make “chuno” from potatoes and bring their harvest home. Everything turned out well. We continued our journey and when we got to the top we admired the wonderful countryside: a blue sky, and down below, the little houses, and in the background, the lake.... We gave thanks to the Lord!

Foncodes put me in charge of financial administration. On pay day, the peasants waited in their respective communities. It was a real joy to see them so happy when they got their wages (Aymarans are, by nature, rather reserved). There were many men there but also some mothers of families living on their own, some old men and some very old abandoned women, orphaned and abandoned children who had to take responsibility for their younger brothers and sisters, and handicapped people. I found it very tiring going

from village to village ...but in every place there was celebration, joy and sharing. Everything was fine but after a while disputes arose. Then we had the idea of setting up surveillance committees, not just on a general level, but also in each of the villages. It was a good idea.

Then came the time for electoral campaigns for voting in the regional Deputy. We called together nearly all the candidates so that they could present the programme of work they would put forward if they were elected. Many people came to listen to them. This time the peasants could make an informed choice.

At last came the day of municipal elections and it was now time for us to withdraw. The Deputy who was elected decided to continue the work we had begun. Some weeks later, this Deputy was appointed President of that "Consultative organisation for the fight against poverty." The people who were now better organised and more aware of their needs and their potential, now understood that they were persons, independent citizens responsible for their own future and also for becoming God's beloved children.

All this gave us a better understanding of the real needs of the poor. We learnt that the work we had been doing was not always appropriate for their real needs. Some of the more traditional forms of service we had been offering since our foundation, did not necessarily correspond any longer to today's needs. In fact, the State is now taking more responsibility for the poor. More and more religious institutions and lay movements are working in solidarity with the poor. However, there still remain many forms of poverty that need to be helped.

With the audacity of our Founders, we need to revise our forms of service so that we can go to these poor places that nobody helps and do this with humility and with the eyes of faith, living the life of the poor. We have learnt how important it is to listen to the cry of the poor and to let ourselves be led by the Spirit, knowing that it is He who is the inspiration for our works. Thank you, Lord. for allowing us to serve you in this way!

Sister Julia Rivera Lazo
Echoes Correspondent

TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of Austria

“People’s pilgrimage” to Mariazell

The “People’s Pilgrimage” to Mariazell, in Austria, took place on **22nd May 2004**. The bishops’ conferences of central Europe: Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech regions of Slovenia and Slovakia, had been preparing for this event for more than a year. 107 dioceses numbering 60 million Catholics, were mobilised to prepare a year of reflection on the theme, “*Meet, pray, mobilise.*” The intention during this year, was to remind Christians of their need to participate in the construction of Europe by being signs of reconciliation between these peoples who were so divided by the tragic events of the 20th century. The bishops asked Catholics to rediscover the origins of their faith and to breathe new life into their Christian roots in order to become agents in the rebuilding of Europe and promote the unification process of these countries. The closing event of this year of reflection was a huge gathering of 100,000 pilgrims at the Marian shrine of Mariazell. The theme of the Assembly was; “*Christ, the Hope of Europe.*” During it, the bishops of eight countries sent out a message, calling for Europe to continue to be built on Christian values.

The Daughters of Charity of the Austrian Province had invited the Sisters from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia to join the great crowd of pilgrims. For this occasion, the statue of Our Lady of Mariazell was clothed in a robe incorporating the coats of arms of all the countries and the logo of the Assembly. The statue was carried in procession from the basilica to the main square. More than 130 bishops, priests, lay people, religious and many social and political personages, took part in this day. Cardinal Sodano, Secretary of State and the Pope’s personal delegate, brought a message from the Holy Father. Then a video showed John Paul II addressing the whole assembly to remind them of their responsibility in building the “house” of Europe on Christian values. During the Mass, (transmitted live by the television channels of many countries in Europe), the Cardinal of Vienna, Christopher Schonborn, spoke in his homily about a reconciled Europe that could live in diversity and be free from prejudice and mistrust. He asked for Europe to be built on Christian values, and for people to commit themselves to respecting life and practising solidarity, as well as keeping Sunday holy. He added that there is a personal dimension to the Christian faith, but it also has a social and a political aspect.

The main points of this message from the Bishops’ Conferences reminded all Christians of the need to:

- Join with all men of good will in building up Europe:
- safeguarding Sunday observance
- protecting human life from the cradle to the grave

- creating genuine families, the foundation stones of society and of the Church.

This day of the “Gathering of the Peoples” will be written on our hearts as a sign of unity. It is a springboard for *“being more conscious of our faith in Jesus Christ who came to live among us and to pass through the door of hope opened by the Cross and the resurrection of Christ”*, as Cardinal Schonborn said.

The next day, Sunday 13th May, a Solemn Mass with young people animating the liturgy, marked the closing of this big pilgrimage. Our Lady of Mariazell, pray for all who have recourse to you.

The Sisters of the Province

TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of Switzerland-Turkey

A day's retreat "with a difference"!

In the course of Provincial Days organised this year at Grolley and at Cornaux, we prepared for the Renovation during a day of recollection which was truly exceptional. The day was led by two lay theologians, Marie-Dominique and Bernadette (this latter is a painter and a musician). In their very individual way, they helped us to explore in a deep way the themes of poverty and charity.

1st part: the poor Christ

What image do we have of Him? Which scenes from the Gospel, which words of Jesus, come to our minds? Personal reflection, sharing in small groups, visual material on a huge poster: from Christmas to the Cross we contemplate a Christ who was poor, dependent on the Father, available to all...and we ask ourselves about our own way of practising poverty.

2nd part: the hymn to charity (1 Co 13)

In line with the first stage, we are invited to put this hymn into practice by discovering how Jesus himself lived out the "deeds" of love as Paul defines them using 15 verbs in verses 4 to 8. "*Charity is patient*"; in a calm, quiet voice, Marie-Dominique reads the passage from Mark where we are told that "*Jesus had pity on the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length*" (Mk 6, 34). During the reading Bernadette displayed a wonderful painting she had done, representing this scene, and she played a melody on her flute to help us to take in its meaning. Then followed: "*love serves others*" (Jesus washes the apostles' feet), "*charity is not boastful*" (Jesus and the children), "*charity (Jesus) believes, hopes and endures to the last.*"...as all this is presented the silence becomes more and more intense. In the afternoon, after becoming aware of our own poverty as individuals, we are invited to "be poor with other poor people."

Still in silence we courageously set to work, to express through painting what had affected us and touched our conscience during the morning sharing. The aim was not to produce a work of art but to allow emotions to surface; wonder, praise... Overcoming our fears and our shyness, we picked up our paintbrushes...and we were happy to discover unsuspected talents. A sisterly sharing helped us to accept our gifts and our limitations and this revealed something of the deepest level of each of us.

The liturgy of the Word at the Eucharist was developed right through the day and these "works" continued thanks to the presence of our Provincial Director, Father Perez.

In union of heart, and in a spirit of thanksgiving, we spent this day with Christ, the poor man, and witness to the Father's love, inviting us to "*do for others, what he himself has done for us.*"

Sister Bernadette Porte
Echoes Correspondent

TESTAMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of Thailand

A programme based on an inter-faith community for old people working with HIV/AIDS sufferers

This testimony was given during the **15th International Conference on HIV/AIDS held in Bangkok, Thailand from 11th-16th July, 2004**. It demonstrated a novel approach which has been made for some years now, to people with the virus, an approach based on the community and the family, rather than on a centre or a hospital.

The Daughters of Charity of Kalasin, organised a programme based on “a community for elderly Catholics “ who experience the suffering connected with HIV/AIDS. Before this group started up, the old people used to come on the first Friday of every month to take part in activities organised by a Sister and some volunteer helpers. Some months later, some elderly Buddhist people asked if they could join them, because their own faith community did not provide a similar service. The Catholic community welcomed them with open arms.

Later on, as the Sister in charge of this programme, I discovered that this group of people were suffering very much on account of AIDS. In fact, their children had to go off to the towns to earn a living because they could only harvest the rice once a year and could not earn enough to live on. When they came back to the village they were infected with the AIDS virus. This brought great sorrow and suffering to their parents because when their children and grandchildren caught the virus they had no access to anti-viral medication and many of them died. There was such fear that traces of the illness might still remain, and such discrimination against the people with this virus, that children became orphans and were not allowed to attend school; young people could not find work if it was known that members of their family had this disease. And the old people who looked after the sick members of their family were also afraid of catching the infection and they suffered in silence.

Through their work at the “Temporary Home for Women and Children with HIV/AIDS”, the Sisters knew that the children from this centre were turned away from the schools. So they were able to understand the silent suffering of these elderly people. The Sisters had stayed up at night with little children who were slowly dying: they had wept as they listened to single women, devoted couples and loving mothers speaking about their sad experience of finding traces of the disease, and the discrimination they were subject to, after being infected without knowing this, by their husbands.

Having seen how much these elderly people were suffering, the Sisters brought them all together to see how they could support one another. Thanks to these monthly meetings these old people found they could talk about the suffering they carried in their hearts. Even if the fear of contracting the virus was dispelled because none of them were actually infected, they still felt very anxious about what would happen to their orphaned grandchildren – who would look after them when the old people died? The Sisters also realised that these people needed help in focusing their attention and efforts on preparing their grandchildren to live in an adult world, to freeing them from tensions, and restoring their hope. Being responsible for young people and having to look after them, gave the elderly courage to live longer and it added meaning to their lives.

Alongside this programme for old people, another project was started up, based on “community for the sick, for carriers of the virus, and their families.” This programme helps people to support one another and help their nearest and dearest who are dying. Thanks to the work done by the Daughters of Charity, the district hospital has given medication to AIDS sufferers to help combat the disease, and our group from Thailand was the first to benefit from this.” Many lives were saved as a result. This second programme also ensured that funds would be available for providing food for the babies and children, and also for the education of children and young people with AIDS. Widows were taught how to make articles of kitchenware as well as herbal shampoos, and this gave them a little more income. Home visiting and links with governmental and non-governmental agencies are an integral part of the programme. Thanks to a series of seminars providing information on the AIDS virus, and sponsored by the “community for AIDS sufferers and their friends”, and thanks, also, to coordinated work with the district hospital and local health services, people have begun to change their attitude to these sick people.

The grandchildren of the old people catered for in the first programme are now allowed to attend school, and sick adults have been able to take anti-retroviral drugs and can now go back to work. The old people now feel that they are accepted by others. At their monthly meetings, as well as learning to do new things and sharing their experiences, they dance, sing and eat together. Today, these people are rediscovering the joy of living.

The old people join forces to fight the disease or prevent it. They are also preparing to present a cultural programme. Some of them play a musical instrument special to their ethnic groups, while others sing and dance. Interspersed with this will be talks explaining how to fight the disease and how to prevent it. This cultural presentation is worked out in collaboration with our local schools – it is also a way of preserving an ethnic heritage because these people are the “Phu Tai” of Thailand.

As we look back to the early days of our programme with elderly people, we can clearly see how the sufferings of these people have become an opportunity for being united with one another and with their environment. Continuing to look after young people, and preparing a cultural presentation, isn't this the best way of growing old in a

serene and meaningful way?

Sister Adelfa Siega

LESSONS FROM THE POOR

Province of Thailand

Namtan

This child's testimony was given during the 15th International Conference on AIDS in Thailand.

My name is Namtan, which in English means "sugar." I am in the 4th grade at school and I am also the 4th child of a family of 5. When my mother died of AIDS everyone left the house except myself and my brother who had caught the infection from our mother. I was only 7 years old at the time and all I could do was cry. We asked our aunt to let us live with her family but they were too busy to take care of us.

I was left on my own to look after my sick brother. One day a Sister and her companion came to visit us and she offered us a place in the "Temporary Home for Children." In this Home we really felt the affection, care and respect they had for us. My brother was regularly taken to the hospital and now he regularly takes the ARV medicines. The Sisters enrolled us in the town school because our village school refused to accept us. I did well at school and I was chosen to be the class prefect. I also came second in a "Young Talent" competition in our town. I know how to cook our good Thai food and I can keep a house in good order. I learnt all this at our Home.

Every holiday we go back to our aunt's house. Sometimes I go on my own to our old family home. The house is empty. I look at it and I ask God to help us.

Sister Adelfa Siega

NEWSBRIEFS

100 years of living in Denmark!

It was in 1904 that the Daughters of Charity took up residence in Denmark, Northern Europe, a country where Catholics are in the minority. The Sisters first devoted themselves to helping poor families, visiting the sick in their homes and caring for old people living on their own, but later they worked with prisoners, immigrants and handicapped people the big State Institutions didn't want to know about. And of course the Sisters did pastoral work in the parishes. Today, 3 Sisters are still very active in Helsingor and Hillerod, alleviating different forms of poverty. The Parish Councils of these 2 towns joined together to celebrate this anniversary and to thank the Sisters for their generous presence here, expressing the hope that they will remain with us for many years to come. (Province of the Netherlands).

Two anniversaries in Germany!

In May 2004, two houses of the Daughters of Charity celebrated the centenary of their foundation. The first, at Kullstedt, near Thuringe, used to be the regional hospital but now it is a retirement home and a nursery school. The second, at Speicher, is a home for children with behavioural and psychological problems. These 2 events were a wonderful opportunity for the parishes, dioceses and the towns to show their gratitude for the educational, social and health care works carried out over these 100 years. Great creativity was shown in the celebrations, particularly in the children's dramatisation of scenes from the life of St. Vincent, St. Louise and Sister Rosalie. (German Province).

Vincentian Family

JOSE RAMON DIAZ TORREMOCHA
PRESIDENT OF THE SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL CONFERENCES

The Saint Vincent de Paul Society today

Given the limitations of this form of communication, it is difficult to describe in detail and as precisely as I have been asked to do, what is happening on the international scene with an Institution as complex and widespread as the Saint Vincent de Paul Conferences. And since I am writing this for the Daughters of Charity's publication, I would like to begin by thanking them for this opportunity to share these reflections. This opportunity arises, no doubt, from the bonds of affection that have, from our earliest days, linked our two Institutions, the Daughters of Charity and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. On several occasions I have said that it would be difficult to understand the life and the philosophy of the Conferences if we didn't know about Blessed Rosalie Rendu's kindness to this Vincentian group in the first third of the 19th century, and the deep understanding that our first President General, Emmanuel Bailly, had of Saint Vincent.

Perhaps one of the keys to what is happening in the Saint Vincent de Paul Society today is this; we are rediscovering a fundamental aspect of our history. This may not seem a very important or interesting topic but it leads to some valuable and profound reflections which, I believe, will have a positive influence on the future of the Institution itself. Indeed, the 170 years that the Conferences have been in existence have distanced us from some fundamental truths that we are now striving to rediscover. The wealth of intellectual talent and the spirituality of one of our founders, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, often described as our Principal Founder, has led us to forget that the Conferences were really founded by a group of lay people, acting as lay people, and that no one person, except God himself, can be regarded as the founder. In other words, we forget to reflect on and give due importance to the “**collegial**” nature of our foundation. As I said before, this subject is not without interest for us and I will explain why this is so.

In fact, neglecting to refer to this collegiality has prevented us from seeing – or maybe we did not want to see – the community of faith and life that these first Vincentians represented. We were unwilling to see that one of the marvellous things about the founders was that they formed a real community of prayer and Christian friendship, even before they devoted themselves to the service of the poor. We allowed people who came to us, and, what is more serious, we allowed our confreres, to believe that what united us from our earliest days was our service of the underprivileged. So the Society's image with regard to what these first confreres, the founders, experienced and wished to pass on to others, was a blurred and incomplete picture.

Rediscovering that the “**Conference is a community**” is perhaps our most urgent and necessary objective today. All the more so, since the first article of our new Rule

gives, for the first time, the name of each founding member and it puts particular emphasis on this idea of a community of prayer and action – a collegial group of lay people – which is what each of our Conferences ought to be. (Readers who are interested can read the full text of the Society’s Rule on our web page: www.ozanet.org).

The Society thinks that the Conferences today are lacking something important if we do not study more seriously this idea of community. We are a community of lay volunteers spread throughout the world and we need to serve others by recognising and accepting that we are lay people and, I repeat, our work is voluntary.

Following on from what has been said up to now, another fundamentally key element for understanding the international state of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in our times, is to realise its radically lay nature and to take up the challenge to continue and develop its **ecclesial and ever more committed** aspect. Indeed, since the time we were founded, the Society has always been exclusively directed by lay people: lay people, most of whom bequeathed to us the treasures of our philosophy. Beginning with our first President General, mentioned earlier, Emmanuel Bailly, and followed by Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Francois Lallier, Jules Gossin, Adolphe Baudon and so many others, without whose valuable contributions we would not be able to appreciate what the Conferences are like today.

This radical laity serving the Church of the Poor, was something well understood by Blessed Rosalie Rendu, mentioned at the beginning of this article. In the course of our long history, the Society has rarely been served so wholeheartedly as it was by that well-loved Daughter of Charity. When, on the advice of our first President General, the confreres went to see her to have some “lessons” on how to serve the poor, Sister Rosalie took the trouble to help them, to show them the way, and **she then asked them to take seriously their vocation as lay people**, without any kind of supervision. She acted like a mother, not being in any way possessive and aware that her mission was to help to form this group of young men and then, like any other mother, to be at the service of this “son who is becoming independent”, who is growing up. Her role was to be useful to the group and to be on hand if these first young men had the slightest hesitation when it came to taking their first steps.

But Blessed Rosalie wanted them to be their own men and she urged them to take responsibility for their service of the poorest of poor people. Sister Rosalie is surely the best blueprint of what the Spiritual Counsellors in the Society should be like and I recommend them to frequently take her as their model and ask her to help them in their mission. She teaches us in a wonderful way how to grow as persons.

Being an ecclesial and responsible laity is particularly important today. The Church needs committed lay people who take seriously their pledge to serve the Church. This is even more true in the case of Vincentian lay people who are, in so many places throughout the world, **the only contact and the only representation of the love** that the Church has for the poorest people.

Today, we need to show special sensitivity in recognising these people's poverty. We have many examples of this. **Personal contact** with those who suffer is the basis of our apostolate and it makes us particularly effective in working against the form of poverty which is people's lack of belief, something which is spreading like a plague in many of our rich countries. This unbelief often leaves human beings empty and defenceless because they take no account of God's presence in their daily lives. Only committed lay people can, by their presence in the work place, in their social and family life, and in the routine of every day living, once again bring to humanity the message of God's love. The Vincentian confreres of the Conferences have to follow the example of what can be achieved by committed lay people and must try to remain open to discovering new forms of poverty that cause people distress today, so that they can fight against them.

The third key to understanding the international Society's current situation is to be found in our commitment to using all the means at our disposal to provide a better service for those who are suffering. Too often our Conferences have operated (and a number of them continue to do so) as though they were the only one in the world, as if they were the be all and the end all of the Society. This could be one of our greatest faults and one of our most dangerous failings; dangerous because it could lead us away from the blessing we have in being members of a Society that has branches all over the world. We must bring to this society all our talents, while remaining open to receiving the benefits contributed by others.

This situation gave rise to such concern at the General Assembly (Rome, October 2003) that the delegates decided to involve all the members of the Society in an effort to work together and in this way overcome the isolationism which has had a bad effect on the service we offer. An international strategic plan for the next five years was drawn up as a working basis for the next General Assembly. This is evidence of our determination to work together. We have to gradually make sure that none of our Conferences feel they are working in isolation. On the contrary, we aim to act in such a way that each Conference is aware that it forms part of whole great international Conference that has members all over the world and that an individual Conference only represents the whole organisation in the locality where it is serving. We must take advantage of the benefits of globalisation that we hear so much about today, so that we can contribute to lifting the poor out of their terrible circumstances. Globalisation cannot only be for the benefit of those who are just out for personal economic gain.

Our aim is that each Conference will feel responsible for the work and the prayer of all the other Conferences throughout the world. It has to learn from all the others and to offer them its resources to help them function and serve the poorest of the poor.

The isolation of many of our Conferences leads us to recognise another significant failing which we are trying to correct: our **internal communication** is flawed. To tell the truth, the huge efforts we have made in recent years have not always been as successful as we had hoped. On an international level, we are working, as far as our modest resources allow, to correct the tendency towards isolationism that I highlighted earlier

and which leads directly to a poorer quality of service being offered to people who are most deprived.

So it is very clear that the broad outlines of our work that I have mentioned in this article are all very important but they are not the only indicators, and their only objective is to provide, day after day, a better and more committed service for people in need. The worldwide community of prayer and action founded by those dear confreres seventy years ago had just one aim in view, the service of suffering humanity. But, as I pointed out earlier, in the days when we were founded suffering took on other forms than those we see today. This means we have to be constantly open to what is happening, to keep our eyes wide open, so that we can initiate the work of **integral formation**, something which must also be an ongoing process.

If the Conferences have rendered great service to the poorest people in the world, those who are rejected by everyone else, and if they continue to give such a service, it is our intention to continue to do this by constantly renewing our organisation (the Society is now established in more than 130 countries) and with a real desire to improve. In other words, we will recognise and admit our failings in order to correct them, so that we will not stagnate, and so that we will be of use to the poor people of today's world, of use to our brothers and sisters who ask us to continue to reveal to them the tender love that Christ has for each of them.

The space allotted to me in this publication is running out and I would not like to end this article without putting forward a topic for reflection for those to whom the Echo is principally addressed: a suggested topic for reflection by the Daughters of Charity who will have taken the trouble to read this short article.

I suggest you meditate on this question: are the times we are living in so very different from those of Sister Rosalie Rendu? I would honestly say yes and no. Suffering takes on different forms and the causes of it are different. But people remain the same and they still need the loving care of their brothers and sisters. However, maybe one historical difference between these two eras with regard to caring for the needy is that in our times committed lay people are taking on a mission which up to now had been exclusively reserved to consecrated people in the Church.

Will we be able to find in our own times other “mothers” who will be willing to believe in lay groups and collaborate in their formation for the service of the poor and later be able to let these groups spread their wings, respecting and emphasising their need to be independent? Some of you will say, as did Sister Rosalie one day, “This can be done.” Serving the Church of the poor is well worth the effort.

Jose Ramon Diaz Torremocha
*14th President General
of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul*

History of the Company

SOURCE MATERIAL AND NEWS

Mathurine Guerin (1631-1704)

2nd Superioress General after Saint Louise

Her generalate spanned 21 years with three breaks when the following Sisters were in office: Nicole Haran – Francoise Michaud – Marie Moreau. The Superior General was Father Jolly.

For reasons of clarity, and in accordance with the outline given earlier, in this presentation we will be looking at:

1. Her birth and upbringing
2. Her Seminary and different placements
3. Her generalate
4. Her virtues

I Her birth and her upbringing

Mathurine was born on 16th May at Moncontour, a village in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc, in Brittany. Her parents were not rich in this world's goods but rich in faith, and they brought up their daughter in an atmosphere of piety, teaching her to read and write.

The Notes show that from her earliest years she received special favours from God both in the order of nature and the order of grace: as soon as she reached the use of reason, people noticed in her all the physical and mental attributes one would wish to find in a well-bred girl, that is to say, she was beautiful, had a natural grace, was very tall and had the modesty of an angel.

They noticed that she had a quick, penetrating mind; solid judgment and an excellent memory: she was open, honest and obliging by nature, so everybody loved her. The daughter of Seigneur de Langouria was fond of her and showed a great interest in this young child's education.

People who knew her testified that from childhood she had a natural goodness and those around her noticed that she had about her a certain air of modesty and piety not found in other girls so mothers held her up as an example for their daughters.

From her earliest years, she felt within her the pressing urge to consecrate herself to God and when she was eleven or twelve she made a vow of chastity. Her parents gave permission for her to enter the Carmelite convent in Rennes. Her joy there knew no

bounds. A serious illness prevented her from becoming a novice there and she had to return to her parents' home. When she recovered, her father was determined that she should marry. She rejected this suggestion and, when he insisted, she told her father about the vow she had made, and he left her in peace.

Some Missionaries gave a mission in the area and she attended it regularly. She opened her heart to Father Thibault, a Priest of the Mission, who told her about Monsieur Vincent and Mlle LeGras: our only model is Jesus Christ and we have to try and conform our lives to his: in brief, we must renounce our own feelings and our own way of thinking. Mathurine was delighted. She asked the Missionary to help her to contact the Company and he did this.

Some time later she had a reply. She was accepted but there remained the problem of gaining her parents' consent. Her father was very upset, wouldn't listen to reason and promptly left the house to see to matters some distance away..

Mathurine was very distressed. Torn between the strong sense of being called by God to be a Daughter of Charity, and the obedience she owed to her parents, she could not follow her own inclinations without their consent.

She was inspired to pray to Our Lady in a chapel dedicated to her, and she asked Mary to soften her father's heart. Then she had the idea of waiting for her father who had to pass by that chapel on his way home.

As soon as she saw him she fell at his feet and said, *"Father, how can you go against God's will any longer? You want to keep me with you, but remember, dear Papa, that you will not live for ever and you might perhaps leave me an orphan in the world, something which by God's grace, I do not wish to think about. Let me leave you and don't let me miss this opportunity to do so. If you love me as you say you do, I beg you not to delay my happiness because you might regret it for ever."*

The poor father was so moved that he gave his permission and accompanied her to Rennes where she postulated. Mathurine was 17 years old.

II Seminary and placements

She entered there on 12th September 1648. She met Monsieur Vincent and Mlle Le Gras. Some days after her arrival she was asked to make a retreat and during it she renewed her ongoing resolution to give herself completely to God and to practise ready obedience all her life. Sisters who were her contemporaries reported that her outstanding virtues were piety, humility, exact observance of Rule, her constant amiability, her rare and angelic modesty and her religious silence; she spoke little and always to the point.

She received the habit on 24th December 1648. Trials were not wanting. There was a Sister there who was a troublemaker and gave bad advice: she did all she could to make her unhappy with her state in life and said to her, among other things, that *"once*

her physical strength wore out she would be sent home without another thought.” Mathurine went to see Mademoiselle Le Gras and told her what had happened, adding, in a simple and humble way, that if Mademoiselle did not think she was suitable for the Company, would she please ask her to leave, sooner rather than later...

Mathurine never revealed the name of the Sister but just mentioned her. Mademoiselle Le Gras said to Sister Mathurine, *“My dear child, we never send away people who show as much goodwill as you do.”* She was at peace and never again allowed herself to be discouraged.

First placement: serving the sick poor in the parish of Saint-Jean en Greve, but she soon fell ill. When she recovered she was sent to Liancourt. A second big trial came in the shape of her Sister Servant who was very worldly. She tried to make Sister Mathurine act in the way that she did, dining with externs, going to different functions and doing other things that were against the Rule. Sister Mathurine steadfastly refused. Calumnies were spread regarding the Sister Servant’s good name and these were unjust because although her conduct was very irregular, she was falsely accused of immorality and this charge rebounded on her two companions.

What was happening? The people of Liancourt thought the Sisters were leading an immoral life and people were pointing a finger at them even before the Sisters realised this. On the feast of Saint Joseph they went to confession and Sister Mathurine was the first.

The confessor had been told they were there and he refused to give her absolution, *“Go away you hypocrite, you come here and accuse yourself of slight faults and you keep quiet about the grievous sins you commit. Go and find another confessor because I am not prepared to give absolution to you or to your two other Sisters.”* They humbly went away and matters stayed like this for four months, they were deprived of the sacraments, even at Easter.

Sister Mathurine Guerin told Monsieur Vincent what had happened. He decided it was best that they should stay where they were. Mademoiselle Le Gras asked the Duchess de Liancourt to investigate the matter. Sister Mathurine spoke candidly about the crime they were alleged to have committed. She ended her account by saying, *“Madame, I place all my trust in God and I hope that He himself will be my justification, it is more His affair than mine, and my cause is with him.”*

“Madame de Liancourt was immediately inspired to get to the bottom of the calumny by doing what Daniel did on behalf of chaste Susanna, that is, to question separately, and then together, the two young men involved. She asked the parish priest to be at hand in a room nearby where he could hear their replies to her questions. Now, as justice was not on their side, their accounts did not tally and they contradicted one another so much that it turned out that they were the ones on trial. They were so taken aback that they openly admitted their lies and malicious calumnies. When the Parish Priest heard this he was very dismayed that he had lent credence to all these false stories

and had treated the Sisters so ignominiously. The Duchess de Liancourt was so angry with these calumniators that she would have had them publicly punished if Sister Mathurine had not, even after all this, asked for them to be pardoned. She did not even wish to know their names and was so unmindful of self that she courageously denied herself the satisfaction of knowing their identity.”

“Our Most Honoured Father, Monsieur Vincent, was very edified by the remarkable prudence she showed at such a young age, and the way she had conducted herself with her Sister Servant. He only reproached her for bearing such heavy trials for so long and not letting him know earlier. From that time onward, she was appointed Secretary to Mademoiselle Le Gras”.

Extract from the conference quoted earlier

She carried out this office so well that several Sisters who were her contemporaries and some who were under her direction in the Seminary, spoke of this during the conference on her virtues.

Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle Le Gras considered her to be a very gifted Sister and well able to take office. She was first appointed Sister Servant at la Fere-en-Tardenois. Later she was recalled to Paris by Monsieur Vincent to start the foundation at Belle-Isle. She found it extremely hard to adapt to this but she managed everything so well that in a very short time she worked wonders there. She had a chapel built there and worked as a labourer, carrying the stones and building materials herself.

After Belle-Isle she was elected Assistant of the Community and called back to Paris. It was then the harshest season of the year. Carrying her bundle on her back, she had to walk most of the way because there was thick snow everywhere. She sprained her ankle badly and this was *“made worse by her efforts to press on with her journey.”* At Angers she was immobilised for some months. For a second time she was told to return to Paris and here she was elected Superioress General instead of Assistant.

III Her life during her generalate

Sister Mathurine was thirty-seven when she was elected Superioress. She found this a very heavy cross to bear and one that was just as heavy each time she was elected to this office. It was only her submission to God’s will that helped her to *“bow her head”* under so heavy a burden. During the conference on her virtues, Father de Chevremont said that *“she wore herself out like a candle, that is, by lighting the way for her neighbour.”*

Father Jolly, who was Most Honoured Father at that time, held her in high esteem, recognising how discerning she was in spiritual and temporal matters. He realised that Monsieur Vincent and Mademoiselle Le Gras had only had time to think out the project of the Company and that Sister Mathurine was destined by Providence to accomplish their designs and follow them out to the letter, as well as to maintain the primitive spirit

of the Company to which she added lustre and perfection. In what way?

1. **The Holy Rules** were arranged in chapters.

Until now each Sister drew from what Monsieur Vincent had given them, whatever her devotion led her to choose. Sister Mathurine knew this because she had been secretary when she was a young Sister. She spoke about this “*little irregularity*” which led to a multiplicity of different texts, none of which was complete....Father Almeras asked his assistant, Father Fournier, to collate all the Rules again and to arrange them in chapters.

2. We also have Sister Mathurine Guerin to thank for:

- the **first civil register of the Sisters’ names,**
- the **minutes book giving details of the elections,**
- the **first catechism of prayers** used by the Company (1694)
- the **Book of Customs**

3. It was during her time as Superioress General that the Sisters adopted **the cornette** as their head-dress.

4. The decision was taken to **open a second Seminary at Eu**, in Normandy, in 1685. This was to remain open until the time of the Revolution. The documents of this Seminary and the names of the Sisters are preserved in the National Archives.

5. **On a spiritual level**, she recommended:

- that the Rules be read on the 25th of every month,
- that the Sisters prepare for the annual Renovation by reading the 1st February circular,
- that Sisters should ask for spiritual charity once a month,
- that they should kneel down and take holy water on coming in or going out,
- that they should wear the Community chaplet on their side and say it,
- she was firm in making Sister Servants aware of their responsibilities.

6. It is to her that we owe the **four big volumes of Monsieur Vincent’s conferences** that Mademoiselle Le Gras had collected but did not have time to edit. In addition to these conferences, she edited those on the virtues of our deceased Sisters.

7. On a material level, she had several buildings erected and these formed the largest part of the Community’s property.

8. During the third period of a three year term in office, God rewarded her faith and granted her prayers through the intercession of Monsieur Vincent, by **the miraculous cure** of an ulcer on her leg that she had suffered from for three years. This sore, which was terrible to look at and gnawed the skin away right to the bone, was said by famous doctors to be incurable. Sister Mathurine

grew weary of taking remedies that proved useless and stopped taking them. Instead, filled with confidence and with faith, she prayed to Monsieur Vincent and began a novena at his graveside. On the last day of the novena she was suddenly and completely cured.

We cannot end this section on her generalate without mentioning what we call Our Lady of the Mission. This account is given by Sister Marie Moreau, later Superioress General, Sister Ann Varin and several other Sisters: *“There was a statue of Our Lady which, when a house fell down, was left in a very bad state of repair and covered with dirt. Our Sister had such respect and veneration for statues of Our Lady that she was very moved when she heard about this and immediately resolved to rescue the statue from that filthy gutter where it had lain for so long and remove it to a more fitting place. She quickly went to the people who owned the statue and these very willingly gave her permission to take the statue away, though they warned her that she would find this very difficult to do because eight men who had been there a few days earlier, had done everything they could to lift it on to a wagon and drive it to someone else who wanted it but they weren’t able to budge it. Our Sister did not lose heart. First of all, she prayed to Our Lady, asking her to grant her the consolation of seeing her image moved out of that squalid mess and brought to our house, and she promised that if this request was granted she would do everything she could to see that the statue was honoured and respected. Then she sent just two men with a cart and told them to summon others to help them if necessary. But when they arrived at the place the two of them were able to load the statue quite easily on to the cart and they didn’t need any help, something that must have been a miracle. When the statue arrived at the house, our dear Sister installed it in the corner of the building where she had installed a huge stone pedestal for this purpose...”* It was called Our Lady of Victories because that was the day when it came into the house, and on the following day Our Lady worked another miracle.

IV The virtues of Mathurine Guerin

The manuscript describing these comprises 199 pages. The Sisters based their testimony on fact and on their experiences of living with her at every stage in her life as a Daughter of Charity.

Father de Chevremont summed it up by giving this picture of his idea of Sister Mathurine:

- A rare example of virtues that you should imitate and we can say of her what Saint Ambrose said about the Blessed Virgin. Not only is she the **model for you, women** and for all those who are consecrated to God, but **she is the model, too, of all Christians.**
- A model of virtue for the old and for the young, for the healthy and for those who are sick and infirm, for Sister Servants and their companions, for Superiors and for Sister Officers.

- You can be certain to find in her all the instructions and inspirations you need to fulfil well your duties as Daughters of Charity.
- Young Sisters; think with what great fervour and meekness this dear Sister conducted herself in the early years of her vocation. Then you will see how **to be faithful to God.**
- Those in authority will learn from her example, forbearance, gentleness, cordiality, the right way to direct their Sisters, her humility and her exact observance of the Rule.
- The older Sisters should reflect on how she acted when she left office: her submissiveness, her love of obedience and poverty, how patient she was in times of sickness and how she was totally conformed to the will of God.
- She had a horror of sin: even the shadow of sin alarmed her. She did not pamper her body or her senses: far from giving way to vanity, she loved humiliations and actively sought them.
- She courageously endured calumny at Liancourt, waiting for God and his holy Providence to clear her name.
- Love of God led Sister Mathurine Guerin to be very fervent right to the end of her life and to be always very exact in observing the Rule and all regulations. This was the special way that God wanted her to belong entirely to him: she was faithful to him from her earliest days and young Sisters should imitate her in this.
- She was most diligent in administrative affairs, her discernment about people and the guidance she gave them meant that she could use people according to their strong points or take into account their weaknesses. She was vigilant but very gentle, she showed prudent firmness when it was a question of observing the Rules or seeing that others did so.

In the face of such a holy life, can we say that we have done enough? I think not: are not the petty faults I commit daily and which prevent me from going straight to God, so many obstacles to fulfilling the wish expressed by Saint Vincent: “Let us give ourselves to God....”?

Sister Claire Herrmann
Archives service

Notes

The following sources were use to retrace the life of Sister Mathurine Guerin:

- Handwritten notes on our deceased Sisters, “Notes on the life of Sister Mathurine Guerin, 2nd Superioress General of the Company after Mademoiselle Le Gras-199 pages with a preface.”

- The life of our Venerable Sister Mathurine Guerin, second Superioress General of our Company after our Venerable Mother Mademoiselle Le Gras. She died on 18th October 1704. This is a printed document. The conference on the virtues of Sister Mathurine Guerin was presided over by Father Chevremont who was Director at that time.

SOURCE MATERIAL AND NEWS

The Angelus

In 1095, during the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II asked that the bells of cathedrals and churches throughout Christendom should be rung morning and evening to ask Our Lady's intercession for the success of the first Crusade.

When the Crusade was over, the cathedral of Saintes, continued to have the bells rung and the prayers said.

Ave Maria....Ave Maria

In 1318 and 1327, Pope John XXII asked for this pious custom , started at Saintes, to be extended to the Universal Church.

Ave Maria....Gratia plena

King Louis XI who had visited Saintes on many occasions, asked that in addition to the bells being rung morning and evening, they should also be rung at midday to pray for peace.

Popes Callistus III and Alexander VI renewed these directives in 1500. Five centuries later, Louis XI's daughter, Saint Joan of France, born at Nogent-le Roi in 1464 and beatified in 1632, was canonised in 1950 by Pope Pius XII after the Second World War and was known as the Saint of Peace.

The three Aves of Peace

In this way, the Angelus of France spread from church tower to church tower, all over the world.

Ave Maria....Ave Maria....Prayer for Peace

In the cathedral of Saintes which lost its status during the Concordat, there is a commemorative plaque explaining the origin of the Angelus, the famous prayer to the Blessed Virgin.

Ave Maria....Ave Maria...the Angelus of Peace

Sister Claire Herrman
Archives service

*He talked to me about his mother,
his mother is white, mine is black,
but they both hug us in the same way.*

*I talked to him about my village,
his is made of stones, mine of straw,
but the elders buried there share the same silence.*

*He talked to me about his childhood
that he spent amid the snow, I spent mine on the sand,
but we had the same games
that taught us about the world.*

*I talked to him about sorrow,
something he knew, as I did,
but we shed the same tears to soothe it.*

*I talked to him about the afterlife
for him there will be sunshine,
for me, there will be water,
but we both hope to meet each other there.*

*Nightfall shed a gentle golden glow over our words
and all that remained, as we sat by the lagoon
was our shining eyes and the gold of the bananas.*