

March-April Echoes 2005

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### Information

## **Our new Pope, Benedict XVI**

**John Paul II has left us. His death was officially announced on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005**

The whole world paid particularly warm tribute to the person and the works of John Paul II. Throughout all the events, the dramatic happenings and the upheavals that took place during his pontificate, people were impressed by the fact that he always remained true to himself. Through his teaching, the many aspects of his mission, his role in contemporary history, his personality, his prayers, his life, his charism, and even his long illness, his acceptance of sufferings and handicaps, his last agony when he was

“supported” by the presence of tens of thousands of people and by the hundreds and millions of people thinking of him, he leaves us so many rays of enlightenment. His dispositions, his reactions, and the way he talked to people, make him appear today in the eyes of millions of young people, like a master who teaches us how to live, as much as a master who teaches us how to think.

This man who chose to be at the service of all humanity, put his human talents, his gift for languages, his spiritual dynamism, his culture, the depth of his thinking, and his physical strength, at the service of his faith in Jesus Christ and this led him to say that every human person is unique, irreplaceable and sacred. To Catholics he was their Pope, but he was also recognised as a world leader with strong views on human rights and this has had an irreversible influence on all governments today. John Paul II brought about a veritable transformation of the papacy and a different world perception of christianity. He leaves behind a completely new sort of Church, one that is “expert in humanity”, forever seeking ways of justice, reconciliation and peace throughout the world.

**On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2005**, the cardinals who were gathered in conclave, took less than 24 hours to elect **the new Pope, Benedict XVI.**

An eminent theologian after the pattern of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Ratzinger is a man of faith, experience and deep reflection. Born on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1927, into a village family in Bavaria, Germany, Joseph Ratzinger was ordained priest in 1951. After working in a parish for some months, he was appointed in October 1952 to the major seminary of Freising near Munich. For nearly twenty years he was professor of fundamental and dogmatic theology and held this post successively at Bonn, Munster, Tübingen and Ratisbonne: in the last named university he was the most senior member of the faculty. In 1962, at 35 years of age, he advised the Second Vatican Council as an expert. In 1997 he was ordained archbishop of Munich and Freising. He was made a cardinal by Paul VI at the consistory of 27<sup>th</sup> June 1997. He was a brilliant theologian and in 1981 Jean Paul II appointed him Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was also President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the Pontifical International Theological Commission. In 1986 he was appointed President of the Commission for preparing the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and after six years work he presented the new Catechism to John Paul II. He was elected vice-leader of the College of Cardinals in 1998, and then leader in 2002.

It was as head of the College of Cardinals that Joseph Ratzinger played a key role in the events following the death of John Paul II: from presiding at the funeral of his predecessor to saying the Mass “pro eligendo Romano Pontific” on the Monday before the conclave began, and presiding at daily meetings of the various Congregations.

Among his many published works, special mention should be made of *Christian Faith, yesterday and today*: a collection of university lectures on the profession of the apostolic faith, published in 1968, to *Dogma and Revelation*: an anthology of reflections and sermons on pastoral work, in 1973. Wide publicity was also given to his address to the Catholic Academy of Bavaria on the subject “*Why am I still in the Church?*” in

which he stated, *“It is only within the Church, not alongside it, that one can be a christian.”* In 1985 the book *Discussion on the faith* was published, and this was followed in 1996 by *Salt of the earth*.

*“Benedict XVI, “said Cardinal Lustiger, “is certainly an intellectual of the highest order. We might say that he is the last representative of that generation of very great theologians at the Second Vatican Council...His culture, his openness to contemporary thinking are extraordinary. Like John Paul II, he speaks several languages fluently. He is a man of great sensitivity, with a very open mind, he is very perceptive and kindly...”*

German by nationality, we can see in this a wonderful sign of deep reconciliation which, from a Christian point of view, puts the seal on Europe’s destiny. The name he chose is also significant. He took the name Benedict XVI, after St. Benedict who was declared “the patron of Europe” by Paul VI in 1964, and after Benedict XV, archbishop of Bologna who was elected Pope in September 1914 and who worked hard for peace and for openness towards the eastern Churches, thus encouraging what was to become the “ecumenical movement.” His name implies a desire and willingness to work for peace among peoples.

On the day of his election, Benedict XVI introduced himself to the crowds gathered in St. Peter’s Square, as *“a simple and humble worker in the Lord’s vineyard.”* In his speech to the cardinals he pledged to continue along the paths opened up by Pope John Paul II and to work for peace and communion throughout the world. At the dawn of the third millennium, he will lead the Church in a new stage in its mission. In a world that is characterised by global communications and the coming together of very different cultures, the universal mission of the Church strongly urges it to proclaim the message confided to it, in very diverse cultures and civilisations. There can be no doubt that the new Pope’s highly cultured background and his theological background, can only serve to develop this new approach started by John Paul II.

**On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April, Benedict XVI celebrated the solemn inauguration of his pontificate,** before a crowd of more than 300,000 people in St. Peter’s square.

His smile, though a little less timid than in the days before, was in no way triumphant. His face had the inner glow of serenity that characterises the man who has just accepted the mission entrusted to him. It was the face of a good shepherd; not of a powerful leader but a servant.

In his homily he set out his mission and renewed his commitment to Christian unity. Benedict XVI, wishes to be, more than anything else, *“the servant of the servants of God.”* He presents himself as a pastor who speaks his mind freely, without constraint,...but someone who wants to give the good news to all people.

Echoing the words, *“Launch out into the deep,”* the phrase John Paul II used in similar circumstances, Benedict XVI has given a very clear signal that he means to

continue along the same path; he is committed to this basic task of giving the world the “*joy of serving God.*”

In the following pages, Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for culture, pays tribute to the great achievements of John Paul II’s pontificate, and the Italian Archbishop Bruno Forte describes Benedict XVI as a theologian who is anxious to dialogue.

## **Life of the Church**

### CARDINAL PAUL POUPARD

#### **John Paul II, a Pope for all eternity!**

When Solzhenitsyn heard that the College of Cardinals had elected Karol Wojtyla on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1978, he exclaimed, “*This Pope is a gift from God!*” This statement by a Russian Orthodox intellectual was as unexpected and astonishing as the election itself, the choice of a Polish cardinal, archbishop of Cracow. Since the death of Adrian VI in 1523, a native of Utrecht in the Netherlands, we had grown used to having Italian Popes, and we were also accustomed to the election of cardinals, like Paul VI, who were in their sixties, or even those in their eighties, like John XXIII. This insight of Solzhenitsyn was so remarkable that even after twenty-three years, I did not hesitate to use it as the title of my book (Ed. Plon/Mame, 2001).

Everything has been said and written about this extraordinary Pope: a Slav by birth and by culture, he was latinised by formation and conviction, and he never ceased to forge ahead; bishop at 38, archbishop at 44, cardinal at 47 and elected Pope at 58. His life was full of contrasts: he was a worker in the Solvay quarries and had a successful university career, being twice awarded a doctorate in theology; at Rome for his thesis on Saint John of the Cross, and at Cracow for his thesis on Max Scheler. He was a poet and a philosopher, an actor and a professor: he was a deep thinker and was equally at home with intellectuals as he was with students, with farmers and workers. An experienced polyglot, he was as faithful to the age-old faith of the Church as he was innovative in his daily routine. A man who is impossible to classify, who is amazing and disconcerting for commentators who are content simply to use easy methods of assessing people, John Paul II is first of all his own man, someone completely dedicated to his ministry as a man of God, someone who is not affected either by the criticism of his detractors or the perfumed incense of his admirers. “*This Pope who chose Catholicism*” was the profound expression used about him by the philosopher Etienne Borne.

#### **“Being Pope? It’s like having a terminal illness”**

“*Holy Father, what is it like to be Pope?*” a Polish priest naively asked him shortly after his election. And John Paul II gave the quick, humorous response, “*It’s like having a terminal illness!*” In other words there is no getting away from being Pope! In

fact, John Paul II literally wore himself out in this task for a quarter of a century and more than anyone else he left his mark on this period of time and had a lasting influence on it. Over the years, “God’s sportsman” as Cardinal Francois Marty, archbishop of Paris, addressed him at Princes Park during his first apostolic visit to Paris on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1980, was a man who after many physical trials, especially the attempt on his life on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1981, became the suffering servant. But he wanted to continue his arduous task as long as his strength allowed....

## PHOTO

He was a Pope to break all records – for the number of encyclicals published, cardinals created, bishops appointed, audiences granted, journeys made, countries visited, the number of people he declared blessed or canonised....and also for the months spent in hospital – he fulfilled the mandate given to him when after his election by the conclave in 1978 the valiant and intrepid Cardinal Wyszinski, archbishop of Warsaw and Primate of Poland, said to him, “*Karol, you must accept, so that you can lead the Church into the third millennium!*” Mission brilliantly accomplished!

The great Jubilee year 2000 shattered all records for the number of people taking part in it, the number of pilgrims, the manifold and diverse celebrations that people all over the world were able to witness because it was the first Jubilee to be covered by the media.

“*Don’t be afraid*”, cried the young Pope on the first day of his ministry as he stood in the vast sunlit St. Peter’s Square that was overflowing with pilgrims. “*Open wide the doors to Christ, open up the frontiers of States, the economic and political systems, the vast domains of civilisation and culture.*” John Paul II did not give way to fear and his example was unequalled.

He fearlessly overcame the assassination attempt and called the whole Church to grant pardon after doing this himself when he went to visit Ali Agca, his assailant, in prison. He stood up to the inhuman and totalitarian atheistic Marxist-Leninist ideology and confronted and brought down the powerful Soviet empire as well as the potentates Marcos, Duvalier and Stroessner. He crossed the threshold of the Anglican cathedral, the Protestant church, the Jewish synagogue and the Islamic mosque. He denounced the injustice of embargos imposed on innocent peoples, called for a reduction in the debt owed by poor countries, condemned the evils of abortion and euthanasia, and in the heart of Central Asia, in Kazakhstan and in Afghanistan, in the presence of thousands of Muslims, Orthodox believers and atheists who had joined the Catholic pilgrims, he denounced hatred, fanaticism and terrorism as an insult to God’s name and a crime that disfigures the true image of man.

## **“Become what you are meant to be”**

If, over the years, his step became more hesitant and his hand increasingly shaky, his will remained strong and resolute and his energy inexhaustible. The cry “*Viva el*

*Papa*” never ceased to rise in deafening chorus from the two million young people gathered from the four corners of the earth at the World Youth Days held in Rome during the Jubilee Year 2000. *“Thank God he has lived for more than eighty years! Thunderous applause and endless calls to him. John Paul II managed to control the crowds, using the microphone with the consummate skill of an actor. The frenzied crowd broke out into the Polish millennium wish: “Stolat!” “May you live to be a hundred! And he answered, “You don’t have to wait till I’m a hundred before you let me speak!” Suddenly, after an enormous burst of laughter and clapping that followed this unexpected joking, an impressive silence fell on these millions of youths and girls, exhausted after walking so many kilometres and worn out by hours of waiting, and they listened to his inspiring message “What have you come here to find, or rather, who is it that you have come here to find? It is Christ, the Way and the Truth. He is the one you are looking for. You are the morning sentinels. Become what you are meant to be – wholehearted Christians – and you will set on fire the whole world.”*

This is the fiery message bequeathed to us by the aged recluse battling against trials but a man who remained young at heart, his faith shining through his physical weakness till the last beat of his heart. Personal and yet cosmic, the message of John Paul II braced over his pastoral staff, his words as a pilgrim prompted by the force of Christ’s Gospel, this message is that of a prophet of hope, for whom man’s rights and God’s rights crisscross and become one.

Pope John Paul II came to us from afar and he takes us far. His pontificate which opened with Christ’s words to the terrified disciples on Lake Tiberias: *“Fear not”*, were followed by Jesus’ invitation to the disciples who were discouraged after catching no fish, *Duc in altum! “Launch out into the deep.”* Do this by the power of your faith, your sure hope and the joy of shared love.

Yes, the intuition of Solzhenitsyn was certainly well-founded when he told us, *“This Pope is a gift from God.”* And at the end of an extraordinarily fruitful pontificate, we can say with deep gratitude that the fruits surpassed what the flowers had led us to expect.

Cardinal Paul Poupard  
*President of the Pontifical Council for Culture*  
 (Extract from *Pelerin*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2005)

## **Benedict XVI** **the Pope of truth and of mercy**

### PHOTO

For me, Joseph Ratzinger is a man of faith and of prayer, a truly good person. A man of sober habits, he has an extraordinary spirit of poverty. I admire his detachment, his humility, his inner freedom and the respect he always shows towards those he is

conversing with. You don't understand Joseph Ratzinger if you separate charity from truth. They are complementary virtues in the service of the Gospel.

If these two virtues do not exist side by side, there is the danger of falling into relativism or intolerance. The theologian who has just been elected Pope is first of all a Christian and a priest who practises what he preaches: what strikes me most about him is the man's consistency. This pastor has a unified inner life.

His spiritual reference points are first and foremost Augustinian. He takes as his teacher Saint Augustine, whose notion of faith is based on lived experience. With this patristic foundation, the Pope's theological thinking, based on living out the Gospel and encountering Christ, is no vague collection of ideas but a way of expressing a life dedicated to witnessing to the truth. In this, Joseph Ratzinger is in line with the Fathers of the Church: he is basically an incorruptible and courageous man but at the same time he is very loving towards people.

I was able to work with him on the International Theological Commission. I liked the way he spoke and his well thought-out arguments which made people think but he never forced through issues or acted in an authoritarian way. For example, during the Jubilee Year 2000, I was responsible for the document on repentance (Memory and Reconciliation). He respected everyone's point of view and favoured tactful dialogue as well as, I repeat, great charity. He saw that differences could be fruitful.

He was in favour of inter-religious dialogue as long as Christ's truth was not relativised. Since the historic meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1986, "the spirit of Assisi" was notably one of praying for peace and working together to build this peace within one same spiritual movement but with no confusion of traditions. Confusion does not come from God.

Joseph Ratzinger favours a Trinitarian theology: he has at heart the "perichoresis"<sup>1</sup> model of the continuous interplay between the persons of the Trinity, each living within the other but retaining his own identity. This outlook which is both theological and rooted in history, also provides the key to the way he sees the relationships between the Churches, particularly between Rome and the local Churches: he speaks of ecclesial "perichoresis."

This pastor had no burning ambition to be Pope and it took courage for him to accept the cardinals' decision. When he appeared on the balcony of St. Peter's I was moved to tears because I knew the value of this man...Then, during the Mass in the Sistine Chapel, he quoted the Second Vatican Council, on which he based his mission. He was one of the two men who "made" this Council. He is deeply attached to it. Vatican II defines the theologian Ratzinger and the Pope he has, by the grace of God, become.

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<sup>1</sup> "Perichoresis", reciprocal relationship and interpersonal communion. Contemporary theologians are fond of using the term "perichoresis", a word borrowed from the Greek Fathers, to reinterpret the unity of the Trinity: perichoresis of the divine persons.



The name he chose has a message for us. Benedict XV, who followed on from a saint, Pius X, did everything he could to preserve peace at the time of the First World War. Benedict XVI takes up his mission in a world where the outlook for the future is sombre, where many are fearful and drift into a sort of nihilism that manifests itself as terrorism. This Pope has come to give us hope again, to remind us that history has a meaning and is part of the mystery of God incarnate.

I believe that in the light of his long experience and his close union with Christ, he will offer those in the global village of our humanity who go astray, clear guidelines and reasons to believe. This Pope has the confidence that is rooted in the primacy of God. As St. Benedict said, *“We must not put anything above loving God.”*

Archbishop Bruno Forte  
*Archbishop of Chieti*  
*Member of the International Theological Commission*  
 (Extract from La Croix, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005)

### FATHER GREGORY GUY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

## **The Vows, gifts to help us to live in a way that is contrary to today’s culture**

### **Introduction**

You are a Community of Apostolic Life with a mission to serve the poor. Before you renew your vows you should first look compassionately but critically at the world in which you live and work. Your special vocation in the Church challenges each of you to see the world as it is, to look at it with faith, hope and love. The grace of God dwelling in your hearts urges you to act with sincerity.

I would like to share with you, in a very simple way, my reflections on your vows and what you need to do to be faithful in following Christ in the service of the poor. Look at the world just as it is today. Let the Word of God light up your vision of this world and then act according to the promptings of your heart. Today you have renewed your vows; let this be a day of celebration; humbly and simply celebrate who you are and what you do.

One of the means that your Holy Founders, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, handed down to you, to help you to be faithful to your call and to your mission, is the four vows: service of the Poor, poverty, chastity and obedience. Before reflecting on each of these, let us see the context in which we live these vows today.

### **Our world as it is**

We live in an egocentric world. I might describe it as the world of a child who has never grown up. The main aims of today's philosophies are: think, first of all, of myself. How can I get the best out of situations and do this as quickly as I can and with the least possible level of commitment? My aim is to be successful and happy, with the minimum of effort. And as for the world, what benefits can I gain from it? As regards the people with whom I live: how can I best use these to achieve my mission in life? These are the attitudes we can expect to find in the world we are living in today.

We are living in a materialistic world. Its slogan could well be: to have or not to have, that is the question. People judge me not so much by what I am, as by what I possess. The masters of today's world are the heads of commercial enterprises; they exploit our liking for various things and easily transform yesterday's luxuries into today's necessities. We are asked to adore the false god of the consumer society. Hunger for possessions makes us continually want more, and without being conscious of it, we think that the more we have, the happier we will be. All this makes for a world where there are huge contrasts between the "haves" and the "have nots."

We live in a hedonistic world. Its slogan could well be, "If you like doing it, do it." The distinction between true love, pleasure, and all aspects of sex, has become blurred. From a selfish point of view, we need to be loved and this need is sometimes so pressing that we settle for ways of loving that are less authentic. The love we are called to give to others is often misdirected. We can find ourselves loving things, comfort, or other people, in a way that is unhealthy, obsessive or dependent. The false god we adore is any person or thing that gives us satisfaction.

We live in a world where I do as I please. Its slogan could be: I do things my way. Its philosophy: I'm the one to steer the ship. I am in charge. What I think, what I feel, what I want, has priority. I will vent my feelings, I will shout, object and protest until I get what I want. Pity help anyone who defies me and tries to say the opposite of what I want to hear, even if somebody has better ideas. The real problem is that I am afraid to let go. I feel more secure when I know that I am in control of situations and of other people, and I make them accept my way of thinking. My own insecurity leads me to dominate others: my false god is myself. My will be done on earth!

I am describing here the sinful dimension of the world; the way that St. John understands it. This is the unredeemed world - a world that we are all part of, and which, but for God's grace, could easily engulf us.

## **The Word of God**

Before going any further, let us see how the Word of God can enlighten our understanding and help us to see the world with the eyes of faith, hope and love. The passage I have chosen for us to reflect on, is St Luke's account of Jesus being tempted. I particularly like this text because St Luke's gospel often speaks from the perspective of the poor person and running right through this gospel is the unifying theme of the Holy

Spirit at work, prompting Jesus and those who follow him, to be faithful to the love of God the Father.

Jesus underwent these temptations in the desert, an arid place that was parched, desolate and hostile. It was here, perhaps, that he learned to depend on God, and God alone. From the prayer that arose from the depths of his heart, he conversed with his Father and was given the grace and the love he needed to carry out his mission in the world; the mission to bring the Good News to the poor and to confront everything opposed to life and to love, the things that the Father desires for our world. Finally, after forty days of preparation for his mission, Jesus is tempted by the devil. The ways in which he tempted Jesus are the same ways that continue to tempt humankind today.

The first temptation is that of changing stones into bread. Jesus replies to this temptation, “Man does not live by bread alone.” (4, 4b). Jesus has the strength to withstand the pitfall of materialism. His poverty of spirit enables him to stand up to the devil himself.

In the second temptation, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, saying, “I will give you all this power and glory if kneeling down you will adore me.”(4, 7). And Jesus answers, “You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.”(4, 8b) All the love that is in the heart of Jesus is directed towards God, his Father. He finds in this the strength to love God with an undivided heart. His chastity allows him to again repulse the devil.

In the third temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and says to him, “Throw yourself down from here.” In other words, “Do as I tell you.” Jesus says in reply, “You must not put the Lord your God to the test.”(4, 12b). He is strong enough to do only what God commands, never doubting his Father’s word or questioning his wishes. Jesus’ gift of obedience makes him victorious in his struggles with the devil.

Sisters, the vows you have renewed today are gifts which run counter to our modern culture, they are a source of strength that God gives to each of you so that you can be messengers of Good News, particularly for the Poor.

## **Poverty**

Poverty is a value that is at odds with our culture. When it is recognised as a gift, it can give us the strength to stand out against our consumer society.

*“The Son of God assumed poverty in a spirit of abandonment to the Father and as a sign of his mission in the world. In following him, the Daughters of Charity acknowledge that all that they have comes from God. Happy to have no other treasure than God, they give thanks for this...”(C 30a).*

We are called to encourage one another in community, to live simply, so that our life style may be, as far as possible, like that of poor people. This simple life style will help us to give strong support to the poor who are often downtrodden by pressures from the business world. We do not need a lot of possessions, just the essentials. Our simple life style can help us to give witness to this value in today's world.

## **Chastity**

The vow of chastity, when understood as a gift, can give us the strength to go against the current of today's hedonistic world. It is a gift that brings us simplicity of heart and enables us to be on fire with love for God and for those who reveal Him to us.

*“In following Jesus Christ, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves by vow to a life of chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. They embrace chastity as a gift that frees their heart and gives it the dimensions of the heart of Jesus Christ for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor.” (C 29a)*

Chastity flourishes when it is lived out in a community where Sisters love and support one another.

*“The community is a milieu based on affection, which fosters human and spiritual growth, as well as apostolic creativity. The Sisters, united in the conviction of responding to the same call, accept one another with esteem, respect and trust. This faith vision disposes the heart to true friendship and the acceptance of differences.....” (C 32a)*

The love that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise encouraged us to have for one another is something that gives support to our unconditional love of God. Here the challenge lies in increasing our love for God through our friendships in community but we have always to be careful to see that our friendships are a liberating experience that helps us to love God more deeply through our love for the poor.

## **Obedience**

Obedience is the gift which in the end enables us to do God's will. It makes us able to listen to what God is saying to us, to discern his will in community and with regard to happenings in the world, in the events of daily life, and especially in matters that concern the poor.

*“All **obedience** in faith is patterned on the attitude of the Son of God who, to carry out the Father's loving plan, became obedient unto death and the death of the Cross. (Phil 2,8) In following Him, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Daughters of Charity make to God the offering of their freedom.....” (C 31a).*

It seems to me that the key to practising well the vow of obedience lies in dialoguing with one another, in listening carefully to what God is saying to us through other people's experiences, particularly when these experiences have been in dealings with the poor. Obedience also signifies my ability to state frankly my opinions, my thoughts, my reflections on how God has acted in my life, especially in my experiences of working with the poor.

### **The service of the poor**

So we can see that for you who are members of a Community of Apostolic Life, the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are meant to be at the service of the Company's mission which finds its fulfilment in the vow of service of the poor. Each of these vows helps you to serve the poor more authentically: the vow of poverty through your solidarity with the poor; the vow of chastity through your living in the love of God which you experience in the sufferings of the poor, and the vow of obedience, through your discernment of God's will as it is manifested in the different events that take place in the lives of the poor.

### **Conclusion**

Each of the vows then, runs counter to the prevailing culture, especially when it is lived out in a world that pays attention to those who have material goods and tends to marginalise those who do not. Sisters, the best way of celebrating the vows you have renewed today, is to show solidarity with the poor. Love the poor with all your heart. Talk to them, so that your service may be as authentic as possible, a service worthy of the servants of the poor, the Daughters of Charity.

Father G. Gregory Gay, CM  
*Superior General*

FATHER J ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

**2<sup>nd</sup> study document on the revised Constitutions**

## **VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE COMPANY**

C.7-15, 23, 26; St. 7, 14

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The title and the contents of this second chapter of the Constitutions remind us of something that Saint Vincent said so many times to the Sisters; God is the only author of the Company. It is He who calls each Daughter of Charity and entrusts to her the mission of serving the poor. In numerous passages from the writings of the Founders, we are reminded of this important truth. Here we will just quote one of the most important of these texts: *"I have told you before, but as you were not all present then, I will tell you again. It is not Mademoiselle Le Gras, it is not I, it is not Father Portail, it is God who*

*has given this great spirit to the saints there are. When the author of a work cannot be found, we can be sure that God is the author. I never thought of it and consequently it is God Himself who has done it....It has to be said that according to St. Augustine, when it is not apparent who the author of a work is, then it is God who has done it.*"<sup>1</sup> From the earliest times and throughout history, this truth has never been questioned.

Since this chapter is of fundamental importance, we advise you to meditate on it. It would also be good if you were to memorise certain key phrases because as time passes this will be a great help in preserving the identity of the Company.

From another perspective, this second chapter is a synthesis of all the Constitutions because we find stated here all the features that make up the Community's identity, elements that will be developed in more detail throughout the Constitutions. The chapter opens with Constitution 7, which is, itself, a succinct summary of the chapter.

In order to facilitate study, we have kept to the same order and numbering of the Constitutions. Naturally we will spend more time considering some articles rather than others, depending on how important the topic is or whether it is appropriate material for study in this second document.

## **II. MAIN POINTS OF THE DOCUMENT**

Constitution 7 begins with a reference to baptism. This is echoed in the two formulas for the vows. The vows are based on our baptismal promises (cf. C.28b). It needs to be emphasised that our baptismal consecration is the first and most important step in our sharing in the life of Christ. Everything in the life of a Daughter of Charity is based on her baptism though baptism does not represent the whole of that life. It marks the beginning of a progressive growth in the process of being conformed into Christ. In fact, the evangelical counsels are simply a specific way of developing the way we live out our baptismal promises in everyday life.

This is, in fact, what Saint Vincent was saying to the first Sisters, ten years after the Company was founded: *"If you are really faithful in the observance of this way of life, you will all be good Christians. I should not be saying any more than that if I were to say that you would be good religious. Why do people join Religious Orders if not to become good Christian men and women? Yes, my daughters, consider it a great thing to become good Christian women by the faithful observance of your rules. God will be glorified by this and your Company will edify the whole Church."*<sup>2</sup>

In the first part of article 7 there is quite an important change that we should stop and think about: article 1.4 of the 1983 Constitutions used the expression, "they consecrate themselves", with reference to the Daughters of Charity's service of the poor. We now use the phrase "give themselves." We find this particular amendment repeated in other places, e.g. C.16. The intention here is clear; the word "consecration", at least in

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<sup>1</sup> Coste IX, Conference of 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1653

<sup>2</sup> Coste IX, Conference on Explanation of the Rule, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1643

one of its connotations, applies to the profession of the evangelical counsels that religious make. This, of course, does not apply to the Daughters of Charity who are not “professed” and are not religious. Other interpretations of this word can be applied to the Company as, for example, when the word “consecrate” is understood to mean “*to give oneself*”, “*to offer one’s life*”, “*to give oneself without reserve.*” In short, the word “consecrate” is ambiguous and the Constitutions have preferred to use the expression “*give themselves*” when referring to the Daughters of Charity. So the only reason for this change is to clarify the Company’s identity within the Church as envisaged by the Founders.

### **1. Given to God (cf. C.8)**

The person of Jesus Christ is the principal focus that all founders and saints of the Church have in common, in the sense that they all follow him. Well, just as no one person can embody and embrace the totality of Christ, each founder discovers and emphasises those features of the Christ of the Gospels that will mould and give meaning to their whole life and to all their works. By his radical option for the poor, by his contemplation of Christ in the poor and of the poor in Christ, Vincent de Paul discovers, and reveals to others, a new way of following Jesus.

The life of the Daughters of Charity will have more solid foundations and will be more authentic if they and their works are based on this spirituality which is clearly Vincentian. We can therefore say that the Christ that Vincent de Paul experienced and followed, and that he passed on to the Daughters of Charity, is the focal point of their spirit. This is clearly stated at the beginning of article 8: “*Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity. They endeavour to follow Him as Scripture reveals Him to them and as their Founders perceived Him: Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan, Evangeliser of those who are poor.*”

**\*“.....They endeavour to follow him”**

The 1983 Constitutions use the word “imitate” while the new ones say “follow.” Why this change? From a theological and linguistic standpoint the word “following” has a more dynamic connotation than “imitating” which suggests a process that is more static and individualistic. In the Gospel, Jesus himself invites people to follow him (cf. Mt. 4, 19-20; 19, 21; Lk 5.11). This change is also more in keeping with modern theological thinking. The word “following” conjures up the image of a journey, the word “imitating” gives the image of a mirror. It is the first of these symbols that best expresses the configuration with Christ that every Daughter of Charity should be striving to attain. This change of wording is also to be found in Church documents. See, for example, number 18 of *Vita Consecrata*.

**\* “.....as Scripture reveals him”**

It is not difficult to track down the passages from Scripture that Vincent de Paul drew on to construct his Christology:

- In St. John: *“My food is to do the will of my Father”* (Jn. 6,38; 7, 17-18). The washing of the feet (cf. Jn. 13, 1-17). Love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbour (cf. 1 Jn.4, 19-21).
- In St. Luke: The Messiah sent to evangelise the poor (cf. Lk, 4,5) The various miracles worked on behalf of the poor (cf. Lk. 8-9).
- In St. Matthew: *“I was hungry and you gave me to eat”*. St. Vincent meditates again and again on the fact that Jesus identifies himself with the poor and the marginalised (cf. Mt. 25, 31-46).
- In the apostle Paul: the “kinosis”, the self-emptying and abasement of Christ (cf. Phil 2, 6-8).

***“...and as their Founders perceived him.”***

It was from these and other Scriptural passages that Vincent de Paul traced out his “Christology.” The Constitutions bring out three specific features:

***“Christ, Adorer of the Father”***. Behind these words we can picture Vincent meditating long and often on this theme before he used the phrase to sum up his teaching. This aspect of the Vincentian Christ urges the Daughters of Charity to make God the only Absolute in their lives. This disposition of Christ also gives rise to the virtue of simplicity which is simply the way that their lives reflect their total gift of themselves to God.

***“Christ, Servant of the Father’s Loving Plan”*** As with the previous phrase, this expression is a concentrated summary of Saint Vincent’s reflections on Jesus Christ. This second aspect of Jesus shows the Daughters of Charity how they should live, and the way that they should serve. They are to be real servants of the poor. This second disposition is linked to the virtue of humility, the first and principle virtue of servants.

***“Christ, the Evangeliser of the poor.”*** This third feature is surely the aspect of Christ that is most deeply etched on the faith and experience of Vincent. It is also the one that most influenced the direction his life was to take and on the works he founded. Indeed, this poor Christ who went among the poor and who was sent to announce the Good News, especially to the poor, is the image of the Saviour that most appealed to Vincent. As people who continue Christ’s mission, Vincentians are bearers of the Good News to the poor. It is easy to see how this third aspect of Christ gives rise to the virtue of charity. The love of Jesus Christ urges the Daughters of Charity to serve and to evangelise by living in “the state of charity.”

We will end this commentary on article 8b of the Constitutions with the two following observations:

***\* “To follow him and continue his mission.....”***



The phrase “more closely” has been omitted because even if the Second Vatican Council and the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* both use these words in the documents, they do so with reference to the profession of the evangelical counsels that is made in religious life. The way we follow Christ in the Company is perfectly expressed and summarised in article 7a. This way of following Jesus is truly a way of following “more closely.”

The inclusion of the words “more closely” in the 1983 Constitutions (cf. C1.5), might lead us to think that something was lacking in article 7 and that some additional words were needed. The evangelical counsels that the Daughters of Charity take on by vow, confirm the identity they already have and they undertake to practise them with mission in mind. In short, this phrase has been omitted because it is more in keeping with religious life and it is not in accordance with Vincentian spirituality and the special identity of the Company.

### **Difference between the evangelical counsels and the vows (cf. C.8b,c).**

The evangelical counsels are directly connected with following Christ. Their aim is to configure us to Christ by identifying with four basic attitudes: obedience to the Father, poverty, chastity and the service of the poor. In this sense the counsels are more important than the vows (as regards their scope). They are very closely linked to the corresponding virtues. When Saint Vincent speaks of them he uses the phrase “gospel maxims” or “putting on the spirit of Jesus Christ.” Vows are a way of adopting the evangelical counsels (people can also commit themselves to these by making a promise, or expressing their intentions in some other way). The Church regards the taking of vows as the most serious form of commitment and they are made to God so that the person involved will keep their word. It is like a covenant between God and the one who makes the vow; a covenant which, by its nature, requires fidelity to one’s pledged word.

## **2. In community (cf. C.9)**

We will discuss community life in detail when we study articles 32-37 of the Constitutions and numbers 19-24 of the Statutes. This article 9 presents three realities: the community dimension is an essential part of the Company’s identity. Secondly, the community dimension is embodied in the local community, hence the importance of this in the Company’s life. Article 34 of the Constitutions expands this idea when it states that “*the local community is the primary place of belonging for the Daughters of Charity.*” Finally, this article 9 states that the community is directed towards, and exists for, mission. It nourishes and gives meaning to community life.

Let us look at some small changes:

\*“*This life in common is lived in a local community... is lived*” instead of “*is led*” the phrase used in the 1983 Constitutions. The verb “*live*” expresses in a much better way what we are trying to say, than does the verb “*lead.*” The noun “*fraternity*” corresponds to the verb “*to live.*”

\*In their community life together, the Sisters “*accept one another*” rather than “*collaborate*.” The community is not a working group where people look for collaboration, but rather a group that shares its life. The first thing then is to accept one another. Collaboration is an aspect of acceptance. It must be done “*in simplicity of heart*” a clear reference to the specific virtue of simplicity

### **3. For the service of Christ in persons who are poor**

The heading used in previous editions was simply “*for the service of the poor*.” The new heading includes the word “*Christ*”. This wording is much more complete and accurate. The service of Jesus Christ in the person of the poor is the most characteristic feature of the Company’s identity in the Church. This gives unity to the life of a Daughter of Charity, a life without dichotomy or separation of functions, because in the Company’s spirituality, Christ and the poor, contemplation and action, prayer and service....are all closely linked.

The wording “*servicing Christ in the person of the poor*”, expresses more precisely the “mystique of service”, an expression that sums up so well Vincentian thinking. Also, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this way of understanding perfection and aspiring to sanctity was something that Saint Vincent acquired by meditating on passages from Scripture such as chapter 25 of St. Matthew, chapter 13 of the gospel of St. John (the washing of the feet), chapters 3 and 4 of the first letter of St. John (love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbour), chapter 2 of the letter of St. James (faith and works) and chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians (the primacy of charity).

Article 10 of the Constitutions reminds us that the “mystique of service” means seeing the poor with the eyes of faith, that is to say, knowing very clearly the why, how and for whom the Daughters of Charity serve the poor. Saint Vincent used to refer to this mystique of service when he spoke of “*turning over the medal*” in order to see the face of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The phrase “*they see Christ in those who are poor, and they see those who are poor in Christ*” (C10b) sums up very well the Vincentian mystique which is deeply rooted in Scripture. It is Matthew, in chapter 25 of his gospel, who most develops this inner vision of the poor. “*Seeing Christ in those who are poor*” moves us to serve them in a special way that goes beyond mere professionalism. “*Seeing the poor in Christ*” leads us to pray and meditate in a particular way, bringing before God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, the circumstances and the needs of the poor. The Vincentian mystique brings into harmony “prayer-action”, two extremes that might seem contradictory. It is a way of living and of acting that is different from that practised by other religious families in the Church, it is constantly nourished by service. The Constitutions, of course, present this spirituality as an objective to be put into practice.

#### **.....Every poor person**

Article 11 is a balanced example of the Company’s objective within the Church: all forms of poverty are worthy of the attention of Daughters of Charity. The text says quite literally, “*No type of distress should be foreign to them*.” Of course situations will

<sup>3</sup> Coste IX p.6. Conference of 31<sup>st</sup> July 1634)

arise where a choice has to be made between different types of poverty. Also, when a decision has to be taken, the first consideration should not be proximity, specialisation or any other criteria, but *"the truly poor."* (Cf. C11b). This is the criterion which, like a pole star, must always guide the Company. The Company will always remain in a state of dynamic searching, so as not to lose direction. This is why the works are always being revised. This article of the Constitutions is asking the Company to be continually on the alert because the poor, the signs of the times and trends in the Church are the means that the Company has at its disposal for finding out what God's will is for it.

The poor are referred to as *"suffering brothers and sisters"*. (C. 11a). The 2004 Constitutions added the feminine noun *"sisters"* as this was not included in earlier Constitutions. This inclusive language emphasises the equality of the sexes, and this way of expressing that idea has become part of modern sensitivity in the culture of many countries. Of course, where the masculine form only is used, this is not to deny the equality of the sexes, something that is tacitly understood in such expressions.

### **..Everywhere (Secularity of the Company)**

Article 12 includes the famous passage from Saint Vincent which has come to be known as the "great Charter". By placing these words in this particular context, the Constitutions wish to highlight the mobility and availability that are needed for service, something incompatible with life in the cloister. This is the way we should interpret the first paragraph of the article we are studying. The great Charter and the writings of the Founders that are included in the book of Constitutions, stress the secular nature of the Company. What did this mean for Saint Vincent and Saint Louise? Let us take as an example, two texts from the Founders: *"The Daughters of Charity are not religious but girls who come and go as seculars."*<sup>4</sup> *"I met with the Vicar General two or three times to explain to him that we were just a secular family."*<sup>5</sup>

There were two reasons why the founders insisted on this distinction between the Company and the religious life: they had to safeguard what the Company was established for, that is, the service of the poor. We know that in Saint Vincent's day, the religious life meant cloister, and this was incompatible with the service of the poor. There is another reason why Saint Vincent insists on the secular nature of the Company: this will preserve the particular spirit of the Company. *"You must know the difference that exists between your Company and many others that profess, as you do, to help the poor, but not in the same manner."*<sup>6</sup> The founders maintained that the Company had to be secular in order to guarantee its objective and its spirit.

When we speak of secularity we are not diminishing in any way the obligations imposed by our vocation. Secularity is not the same as secularism when the word is used to signify ideas or modes of action. If we listen to Saint Vincent we will see that the word means the exact opposite: *"There are none who go about the world as much as*

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<sup>4</sup> Coste VIII p. 237

<sup>5</sup> Spiritual Writings of Saint Louise de Marillac, p. 292

<sup>6</sup> Coste IX, p.591, Conference of 9<sup>th</sup> February 1653, on the spirit of the Company

*Daughters of Charity and who have as many occasions of doing wrong as you, Sisters.... that is why it is most important that you should be more virtuous than religious. And if there is one degree of perfection for persons living in a Religious Order, Daughters of Charity need two, because you run a great risk of being lost if you are not virtuous...you are not religious in name but you should be religious in deed, and you are more obliged to become perfect than they are.”*<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the secular nature of the Company in no way diminishes the demands of a radical following of Christ. It proposes the ideals of the gospel: it does not suggest the minimum of effort, it does not settle for mediocrity. In other words, the perfection of charity is just as high a standard for a Daughter of Charity as it is for any other consecrated person in the Church. The only difference is the way that people live out this aspiration.

We are well aware that while the founders defended the Company as being distinct from a Religious Order, they did not scruple to copy some practices of the religious life, for example, prayer and community life, sacrifice and mortification, silence and recollection, poverty, chastity, obedience... Is this a contradiction? Not at all. Saint Vincent puts before the Daughters of Charity pious practices that will help them to live according to their vocation, even if many of these practices are taken from religious life. This is precisely what the Constitutions are saying in the first paragraph of page 35 which gives the thoughts of Saint Louise on this matter.

When we ask ourselves whether a particular practice will help us to live out our vocation, it doesn't matter whether this practice comes from another group within the Church: we judge it by its connection with secularity. Secularity ensures that the Company keeps its eyes fixed on its objective while remaining flexible and open with regard to the best means to be used at any given time, for responding to this vocation. We could say that we are in a continual process of discernment, something that prevents us from getting bogged down in routine with the repetition and monotony this brings. New epochs require us to make appropriate changes for responding better to our vocation.

*“I do not pray that you will take them out of the world, but...they are not of the world.”* (Jn 17, 15-16). This well-known quotation from the gospel sheds some light on the Company's principle of solidarity. “To be in the world” means to work in the world, to be its light salt and leaven, to be able to inculturate it...*“They are not of this world”*...urges us not to let ourselves be moulded by this world's standards, to use the world's goods but at the same time to be detached from them. It is not always easy to reconcile these two things but it is basic to secularity. Who was it that perfectly embodied the dialectic of living in the world but not belonging to it, the dialectic of secularity? Jesus Christ. In short, if we wish to know what secularity in the Company means we must contemplate the person of Jesus as revealed in the gospel. By doing this we will come to understand what secularity means for our relationship with people and with the world. That is why Saint Vincent urged us to *“put on the spirit of Jesus Christ”* That is why Saint Vincent said that the vocation of a Daughter of Charity was to be a “good Christian.” That is why the Constitutions say that *“Christ is the Rule of the*

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<sup>7</sup> Coste X, p. 658, Conference of 24<sup>th</sup> August 1659

*Daughters of Charity*". (C.8). Insofar as the Daughters of Charity identify with Him, He will be able to become incarnate in, relate to, and give Himself to people throughout the ages, while at the same time not being of the world. The Daughters of Charity will have this same understanding of secularity and will live this state in the right way. "*Father, I do not ask you to take them out of this world, but to guard them from evil*" (Jn 17,16), is the prayer that Jesus makes to his Father on behalf of his disciples. It is perhaps the same prayer that Saint Vincent is making today for all the Daughters of Charity in the Company.

### **In the spirit of the gospel**

The gospel virtues of humility, simplicity and charity (C.13-14), are the three dispositions which best sum up the spirit of the Company. These three virtues are the fruit of meditating on the Vincentian Christ and they make a Daughter of Charity a "servant of the poor." This will be the theme for study in the next document which deals with Chapter III.

### **Under the protection of Mary (C.15, 23, 26: St. 7.14)**

In this section we are going to look at all the articles of the Constitutions and Statutes that relate to Mary. The numbers of the relevant articles are given above, next to the heading. The three articles are a summary of the founders' experience of Mary and their teaching about her. They have also been enriched by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, by chapter VIII of the dogmatic Constitution, "*Lumen Gentium*", the apostolic exhortation of Paul VI, "*Marialis Cultus*", and the profound influence the 1830 apparitions had on the history of the Company. This last feature is particularly evident in Statute 14. To complete the picture of Mary given us in the Constitutions we must also mention three references to Our Lady: both formulas for the vows end by asking Mary's intercession (cf. C. 28b). The Sisters put their trust in Mary to help them live in chastity (cf. C.29d). On the subject of initial formation there is one line which speaks specifically of filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin (cf. C.52c).

Article 15 begins with a reminder that devotion to Mary is based on devotion to Christ: "*Whoever seeks to follow Jesus Christ encounters Mary who received him from the Father.*" The spirituality of Vincent and Louise is deeply Christocentric. There is a Christological and Trinitarian basis for the way they present Mary. Also, the founders' devotion to Mary is realistic, practical, restrained, balanced and solid: it is free from the sterile sentimentality or spiritual intimism so characteristic of their times. Their devotion to Mary goes further than simple admiration, they see her as a model to be closely imitated.

In part b) of article 15 we have the three mysteries of the Company's devotion to Mary, taken from the writings of the founders. It is here that we find the dispositions that the Daughters of Charity should have in giving themselves to God for the service of the poor.

***“The Immaculate One, totally open to the Spirit***

In this mystery Saint Vincent contemplates Mary as the temple and worthy dwelling place of the divinity, “*full of grace*”, “*free from all sin*”, “*complete receptivity*.”<sup>8</sup> She is the example held up to all Daughters of Charity so that they may be open to God, emptying themselves and allowing God’s grace to take over. This is what the virtues of humility and purity are meant to bring about.

The mystery of Mary’s life that Saint Louise most likes to contemplate is that of the Immaculate Conception. In her reflections that tend to be somewhat mystical, she thinks about the Blessed Trinity and gives praise and thanks for “*choosing Mary to be so closely united to their Divinity*.”<sup>9</sup> She contemplates Mary’s relationship to the three divine Persons: “*Beloved daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son and worthy Spouse of the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>10</sup> Her Immaculate Conception is the foundation of all the other prerogatives that adorn Mary and make her the masterpiece of God’s omnipotent working in human nature.

***“The humble, faithful Servant of the Father’s loving plan..”***

Mary displays this second attitude throughout her entire life and it becomes her most important characteristic. The founders thought this when they meditated on the Annunciation and saw this as that unique moment in history when Mary accepted God’s saving plan and gave herself entirely to Him, consenting to be the mother of the Word Incarnate. By their total self-giving to God, the Daughters of Charity imitate Mary’s “fiat” and collaborate in God’s saving plan which has the poor in mind particularly. From 1642 onwards, and at the request of Saint Louise, the Sisters have expressed their close association with the mystery of the Incarnation, on the feast of the Annunciation.

***“Mother of God, Mother of mercy and hope of the lowly....Mother of the Church and only Mother of the Company.....”***

In this third mystery, Mary is repeatedly honoured as “Mother.” Saint Vincent has left us many Marian texts, references that are usually found at the end of a conference or in the closing lines of some of his letters. He often presents Mary as the Mother who intercedes for us and the One who is our model for many aspects of the spiritual and apostolic life. He emphasises, particularly, the confidence we should have in her.<sup>11</sup>

For her part, Saint Louise composes prayers and writes meditations on Mary.<sup>12</sup> She stresses God’s choice of Mary to be Mother of his Son, and for this reason showering her with blessings. The pilgrimage she made to Chartres on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1644, shows

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<sup>8</sup> Coste IX, p.1031

<sup>9</sup> Spiritual Writings p.819

<sup>10</sup> Spiritual Writings p.694

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Coste I. P.30: IX, p.113; 538; 623

<sup>12</sup> Spiritual Writings, p. 767

her complete trust in Mary's intercession and her mediation to obtain from God the grace of fidelity and purity. And she named her the "*Only Mother of the Company*."<sup>13</sup>

Article 23 of the Constitutions states that Mary is, for the Daughters of Charity, a "*teacher of the spiritual life*." We find that this is really true when we think how the Sisters find in her and learn the virtues of simplicity, humility and charity as they contemplate the respective mysteries of her Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation and the Visitation.

But Marian devotion is not just a matter of solid, theologically based principles. We have to go beyond these and turn to specific practices. These are put before us in Statute 7. Our founders used the traditional pious practices of saying the rosary and the Angelus. These same practices are recommended in the Statute just mentioned, but they have a special nuance – they are the prayer of the poor; in them we contemplate Mary's servant attitude with regard to the mystery of salvation. In saying the prayer "Most Holy Virgin", the Daughters of Charity are at one with Saint Louise's devotion to Mary, as they ask Mary to intercede for them that they will be faithful to their vocation and the spirit of the Company. It is very fitting that these practices mentioned in article 2.16 of the 1983 Constitutions should now appear in Statute 7 of the new edition. This change signifies that devotions specific to different times and cultures can be more easily changed than the principles that inspired them.<sup>14</sup>

Article 26 speaks of "*the Marian character of the Company*". What does this phrase mean? That the whole Company, that is to say each Daughter of Charity, has inherited the spiritual treasure handed down to us by the founders. This spiritual heritage has to be preserved, made relevant for our times, and increased as much as possible. As part of this heritage, this specific form of spirituality, we find devotion to Mary. If this were to disappear, our Vincentian charism would be impoverished. Mary can no more be absent from the Company's spirituality than she can be absent from the Church. 25 years ago, Mother Roge referred to the Marian character of the Company in these words: "*Just as we cannot imagine the Church without Mary, neither can we imagine the Company without her, as we have often been told. She has been its **only Mother** from the time it was founded and this reflects the confidence that Saint Vincent and Saint Louise had in her. A Daughter of Charity who fails to pray to Our Lady or who no longer takes as her point of reference, the life of the Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, is in danger of deviating from her vocation.*"<sup>15</sup>

Statute 14 logically follows on from the principle we have just noted in article 26 of the Constitutions: if devotion to Mary is part of Vincentian spirituality, then we should strive to spread that devotion. The Statute proposes two means of doing this; the Miraculous Medal and the Marian Associations. The founders' devotion to Mary has been enriched by the events that Saint Catherine Laboure experienced in 1830 in the Chapel of rue du Bac. The Company has been so markedly influenced by these events

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<sup>13</sup> Spiritual Writings p. 120

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Paul VI, exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, nos. 24, 36, 40, 54

<sup>15</sup> L. Roge. *To the Sisters making the retreat (18<sup>th</sup> July 1980)* "Echoes of the Company, no. 9-10.

that devotion to the Miraculous Medal and promoting it have now become its main form of devotion to Mary.

### **III, SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP PROMOTE PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNITY SHARING (at local community or Provincial level).**

\*After carefully studying Chapter II of the Constitutions, which statements move you to reflect on specific aspects of your life? What commitments do they lead you to take?

\* Compare the wording of the 1983 Constitutions (cf. C.1.3 to 1.12; 2.11; 2.16;St.7; St 14), what are the main changes and why were these introduced?

\* With reference to the Vincentian Christ, what do you understand by the phrase, “*Christ is the Rule of the Daughters of Charity*”?

\* In article 12 (based on the secularity of the Company) and the explanation given in this study document, which aspects of secularity seem to you to be important?

\*Do the guidelines given in the Constitutions relating to Mary help you to have genuine devotion to her?

### **IV SUPPLEMENTARY READING TO EXPLORE IN GREATER DEPTH THE ISSUES RAISED IN THIS SECOND DOCUMENT.**

\* Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul to the Sisters on the spirit of the Company. (Cf. Coste IX).

\* John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* no. 28

\* F. Quintano, *Being good Christians in the Company of the Daughters of Charity*, “Echoes of the Company” no. 4 (2002)

*Devotion to Our Lady in the Company*. Echoes of the Company, no. 10 (2002)

\* M. Perez Flores, “ *The Company of the Daughters of Charity, Secularity.*” Echoes of the Company no. 10 (1997)

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

**Living the Eucharist**



This year we are celebrating the year of the Eucharist. It began on October 17<sup>th</sup> last year, at the end of the 48<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress which was held in Mexico. It will finish on 29<sup>th</sup> October, at the 51<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of Bishops during October and will have as its theme the Eucharist. In organising this year of celebration the Pope wanted to achieve two things: he wanted the Eucharist to be better understood, particularly Sunday Mass, and he wanted adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to be more widely practised. His fervent hope was that all Christians should discover “*the gift of the Eucharist to be light and strength for our daily life in the world.*”

Following on from this call that the Pope made to the whole Church, as well as his two most recent reflections on the Eucharist (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and *Mane nobiscum Domine*), I offer you, in this first Renovation conference, my reflections on the Eucharist, which Constitution 19a describes as “*source of spiritual life*”. There is no doubt that the liturgical season of Easter is an appropriate time for thinking about how we understand and experience this saving event instituted by Christ himself and which is renewed and renews people every day. Easter time is the season of the Eucharist. We need only think back to the account of the disciples at Emmaus in chapter 24 of Luke’s gospel. The Pope used this same passage to present the Eucharist in the last of the apostolic letters just mentioned.

The Eucharist is linked to the evangelical counsels that you commit yourselves to practise through the vows that you renew every year. This connection is not simply because the Renovation takes place during a beautiful and carefully prepared liturgy, but more particularly, it is in the daily reception of the Eucharist that you find the strength you need to live out the vows. Let us think again about the two Emmaus pilgrims. In chapter 24 Luke tells us that after the disciples met the Lord they hastened back to Jerusalem to tell the other eleven that Jesus was alive. From where did they get the strength to do this? No doubt it came from their encounter with the Risen Lord whom they recognised when “*he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them.*” It was then that their eyes were opened and they set off (cf. Lk 24, 30-35) The Eucharist gives us strength and light to support us on the next stage of 365 days.

## **THE EUCHARIST, CENTRE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

When speaking of the Eucharist, the Church always uses words that are appropriate and carefully chosen. This is very obvious in the quotations that follow: “*No Christian community can be built up unless it is **rooted and centred** in the celebration of the Eucharist.*” (Presbyterorum Ordinis 6). “*The Eucharist is certainly the **source and summit** of all evangelisation.*” (Presbyterorum Ordinis 5). “*The celebration of the Eucharist is to be the **centre** and the culmination of the whole life of the Christian community,*” the Council told Parish Priests and Bishops (Christus Dominus 30). “*The Eucharistic sacrifice (is) the **source and summit** of the whole Christian life*” (Lumen Gentium 11). “*The Eucharist is the Church’s fundamental experience*” (The French bishops in their document for the International Eucharistic Congress at Lourdes). “*Were*

*we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?”, John Paul asks himself in “Ecclesia de Eucharistia “ no. 60. “The Eucharist is **at the centre of the consecrated life**, both for individuals and communities.” (Vita Consecrata 95).*

When referring to the Eucharist, the Constitutions of the Company echo these statements by the Church: *“At the Eucharist....**centre of their life and mission**, (as Daughters of Charity)...and further on, “The Sisters are conscious of the vital importance of the Eucharist” (C.19b).*

After listening to what the Church and the Constitutions have to say about the real significance of the Eucharist, I reflect and I tell myself there is a striking dichotomy, an enormous difference between what is said about the Eucharist, and the way we celebrate it. Of course our teaching must use every possible means of bringing the reality closer to the ideal, even if this is difficult. It is not a question of devaluing the Eucharist but of perceiving it as it really is. Perhaps in our case the difference between the reality and the ideal is not so great but I think that we, too, have to come closer to the ideal. When Saint Vincent spoke to the Sisters he told them clearly that the benefit they derive from the Eucharist depends on their dispositions when they receive the sacrament. Let us listen to his words: *“Go to Holy Mass every day but do so with great devotion....What do you think you should do during Mass? It is not only the priest who offers up the holy sacrifice but also those who are present, and I feel quite sure that when you have been well instructed, you will have great devotion to the Mass, for it is the centre of devotion.”* (Coste IX, pp4 and 5).

## **SOME DANGERS THAT BESET US IN OUR EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATIONS**

Today it is not enough to keep rules, we need to evaluate them. After we have done something we need to evaluate so that our actions will have the best possible effect. Every day we celebrate the Eucharist but have we thought about the way we do this? This could be a good question to ask ourselves during this year, and in this season of Easter. Before we answer this question let us think about the inconsistencies there can be in people’s lives and the wrong ideas they might have about the Eucharist.

### **The danger of routine**

Anything we do over and over again brings with it the risk of falling into routine. Let us think first about repeated actions and then reflect on the danger of routine. Why do we celebrate the Eucharist so often when its value is infinite and conclusive? We do this because our ability to comprehend the Eucharist is quite limited. The spring flows without ceasing but we need to go back to it time and time again because our poor vessels are so tiny. There is only one sun: it is life-giving, it warms us and gives us light without ever being diminished or used up. Every day we go out to take the sun for a little while because we need its light and its warmth. The same is true of the Eucharist: countless people can benefit from its infinite value.

Daily repetition, though, brings with it the danger of routine. We are present at the Eucharist on a superficial level though we know, of course, how to make the correct gestures. We are bodily present at Mass but our minds are far away, or at least they are sufficiently distanced from the action to stop us being too occupied with what is taking place. Routine turns the Eucharist into a window display that we see too often or a drama that we know too well. When the Eucharist does not bring about a change in us, when it does not spur us on to be life-giving people, it is because we have put on the “raincoat” of routine.

How can we prevent our daily Eucharist becoming banal and routine? Saint Vincent’s words to Fr. Gautier, Superior at Richelieu, show that he was aware of this danger: *“I have prayed, and will continue to pray that God will always give them renewed good dispositions for the Sacrifice, and the grace never to offer Mass purely out of routine.”* (Coste III p.297). Speaking to the Daughters of Charity he gives them the remedy that will help lift them out of routine or, as he put it, from “custom”: *“I am sure that when you have been well instructed (about the Eucharist) you will have a great devotion to the Mass.”* (Coste IX, p.5). Perhaps this is the key to the problem: a certain amount of knowledge is necessary for nourishing our devotion and we need to live according to the different parts of the Mass, each of which has its own special significance. For example, **the penitential rite** should express conversion and reconciliation so that we can come to the celebration with purified hearts; the **liturgy of the Word** is the proclamation of God’s works and signs in the history of salvation and the way this continues in our own times; the **presentation of the gifts at the Offertory** signifies that through these gifts which will be consecrated, we repeat our acceptance and readiness to comply with God’s commands; and the **Eucharistic prayer** is something we need to experience as a memorial of the Last Supper and the death and resurrection of Christ, and as a time of praise and blessing, as an act of thanksgiving that the Church offers to the Father for the Son’s work of redemption through the transforming action of the Holy Spirit; we must see **receiving Communion** as our way of becoming members of Christ by sharing in the gifts we offered to the Father and which He transforms and gives back to us; **the conclusion of the Mass** is another time of thanksgiving, with the final blessing and the sending forth.

If, in addition to all this, we spend a few minutes before Mass reminding ourselves interiorly about what we are going to celebrate and make this our immediate preparation for our worship, then these words of the Spanish poet, Leon Felipe, will be effective in us, *“Lord, may the things of this life not harden my hands or my spirit.”* We must never grow “accustomed” to the Eucharist.

### **The danger of spiritual escapism**

There is the very subtle danger or temptation that we might use the Eucharist as an escape from real life. We all know that service and work today are arduous and complicated. We are subject to a thousand tensions and sometimes we do not respond to what is being asked of us. In such situations we can be overwhelmed by fatigue, stress or anxiety. In the midst of all this we can view the Eucharist as a place of rest, somewhere

where we can forget everything, savour the liturgy, and sing to God: somewhere where we find satisfaction in the feeling that we have fulfilled religious duties that guarantee our salvation. We see this same danger in Peter's reaction during the Transfiguration when he said, "*Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents...*" (Lk 9, 33) and, Peter must have thought, let us forget the rest of the world." Fortunately he did not give voice to this thought.

Why are there risks involved in our Eucharistic celebrations? Because they can lose their meaning. If we enjoy a well-prepared liturgy and Eucharistic celebration so much the better, but if this celebration does not help us to find God, to be reconciled with those around us, to show greater solidarity with the marginalised, then we have remained at a very superficial level, even if we have fervently joined in the singing and feel very happy after Mass. The Eucharist can never be a sort of anaesthetic or morphine; rather it must be a stimulant and food for life.

### **The danger of separating the sacrament of the altar from the sacrament of our neighbour**

Without life, the Mass is nothing. What we celebrate in the chapel has to become a reality in our lives; and what happens in life has to be brought to the altar. This is one of the cardinal points and the main feature of Vincentian spirituality. The altar is the place of close contact with others, be these in the community or outside it. "*So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.*" (Mt 5, 23-24). The words of Jesus are very clear; any dichotomy between the Eucharist and our brothers and sisters is contrary to the teaching of the gospel.

This division occurs when celebrating the Eucharist does not make us less selfish or individualistic, when injustice continues to exist in the world. We see that this form of dissociation has existed from Old Testament times, judging from the words that the prophet Isaiah puts in the mouth of God: "*Bring me your worthless offerings no more...new moons, sabbaths, assemblies...I cannot endure any more of your festivals and solemnities...when you stretch out your hands I turn my eyes away. You may multiply your prayers but I shall not listen.*" (Is 1, 13-15). The reason for this rejection is then given; it is because your worship is empty and it does not move you to "*be just to the orphans, to plead for the widow.*" (Is. 1,17)

## **ASPECTS OF THE EUCHARIST**

Sacred Scripture and the Church's Tradition give us at least five ways of referring to the Eucharist, each way concentrating on a different aspect of it. Of course the Eucharist is one single reality and it combines all five dimensions.

### **1. The Eucharist or the "Last Supper of the Lord."**

Here the Eucharist is referred to either as a “meal” or as “the table of the Lord.”(cf. 1 Cor 11,20: Ac 2, 47; Lk 22, 14...) Scripture naturally speaks of the Eucharist in terms of the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples. This took place in the context of the paschal meal that the Jews celebrate every year (cf. Mt 26, 26-30; Mk 14, 22-26). In doing this they call to mind the wonders that God performed to bring his people out of Egypt. The Lord’s Last Supper was rooted in the Jewish tradition but Jesus went beyond this: he stayed with us in the form of food. From that time onward, the Jewish Passover was superseded by the Eucharistic banquet. This is what Jesus “invented” to assure us of his love and his presence. *“Love is infinitely inventive”* (Coste XI, p. 146) Saint Vincent says when he explains Jesus’ continual presence among us in the Eucharist. This is the background to that phrase we know so well.

The word “Eucharist” understood as “meal” or “the Lord’s Supper” speaks to us of values such as brotherhood, conviviality, welcome, and shared friendship. It should be pointed out that eating is not simple an animal function that involves ingesting calories to keep us alive. It also involves sharing, and relating to other people. People who mix with one another should preserve and deepen this spirit of brotherhood. The early Christians had a good understanding of the Eucharist as a celebratory meal that they ate together. This is how they celebrated the Eucharist in the context of an ordinary meal: each person brought what they had and put it in common so that they all ate as brothers and sisters. Their assembly concluded with the Eucharist. This meal eradicated all differences and helped them to realise that they were all brothers and sisters. However, in the year 55, Paul was angry with the community in Corinth because instead of the Supper being a shared agape, it became a source of division; the rich formed their own little group and they outshone the poor and looked down on them; these people were not given anything. What should have been a sign became a counter-sign. Paul denounced this state of affairs and told them that in such a case it would be better not to celebrate the Lord’s Supper at all. *“When you hold these meetings, is it not the Lord’s Supper that you are eating? When the time comes to eat everyone is in such a hurry to start his own supper that one person goes hungry while another is getting drunk.... What am I to say to you? Congratulate you? I cannot congratulate you on this.”* (1 Cor 11, 20-22).

In the second century, the Eucharistic celebration changed so much that the ordinary meal which formed part of the service was now suppressed and there remained only the ritual celebration. The ordinary meal was not considered important and emphasis was placed on seeing the Eucharist as the sacrament of fraternity, friendship, community and the bond of unity, for without this unity the sacrament lost its meaning. We who live in community should ask ourselves if the Eucharist helps us to be more sisterly. To receive the Body of Christ and not be united with the members who form his Mystical Body, is most certainly a counter-sign. The Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass, the Our Father (forgive us ...as we forgive) and the sign of peace all lead us to be reconciled first with our brothers and sisters. The Eucharist not only calls the community together but it also builds and sustains it. This is confirmed in Constitution 33: *“This community draws its strength from a shared faith, from the Eucharist and from praising the Lord.”*

## 2. The Eucharist, “breaking of bread”

This second way of speaking of the Eucharist is found mainly in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Ac 2, 42; 2,46; 20, 7; 20 11....): it reminds us of the Jewish custom where it is the father of the family who hands out bread to the guests. Jesus does this same action at the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26,26; Mk 14, 22).

What value is the Eucharist pointing to when it is described as “the breaking of bread” and includes the rite of sharing and distributing this bread? First of all, sharing is a symbol of service. When, during the Last Supper, Jesus shared bread with his disciples, he was giving a retrospective summary of his whole life and indicating what his death would be: both were “diakonia”, “gift”, “the service of humanity”. The Synoptics recount the institution of the Eucharist. The only gospel writer not to do this is John. Instead of telling us about the institution of the Eucharist, John introduces the episode of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, something that is a sign for us (cf. Jn 13, 1-17). Isn't this a way of telling us that celebrating the Eucharist means putting ourselves at the service of others?

But there is another element in this aspect of the Eucharist: the breaking of bread signifies the sharing of goods. Bread has to be shared not only with those who are celebrating, but with those people, absent or present, who have nothing. When, in the second century, the agape was suppressed, the faithful did not stop serving and helping the needy because they understood very well that this is a fundamental aspect of the Eucharist proper. We have St. Justin's testimony for this: *“At the Offertory each one brings up what he has brought to help the widows, orphans, the sick and the needy, prisoners and strangers: in a word, they are careful to see to everyone's needs (Apologia 1,67).*

To sum up, this second way of referring to the Eucharist reminds us of our need to serve the poor and share with them what we have. The Eucharist is truly revolutionary! It is interesting to note that the concept of a Company of the Daughters of Charity, which devotes itself specifically to “sharing and distributing bread”, began to emerge precisely within the context of a Mass. This happened on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> August at Chatillon. Let us briefly recall what happened. Vincent was ready to say Mass when Madame de Chassigne told him about a poor family in the village who were in very great need. Vincent gave a different homily from the one he had prepared and when he preached to the parishioner he urged them to show charity towards this family. The people's response was amazing. From that time onward, Vincent thought of organising charitable works and he established first the Ladies, and then the Daughters of Charity.

If we live the Eucharist this will necessarily help us to live our vocation to serve, because service is one of the essential facets of the Eucharist. Saint Vincent explained this very clearly to the first Sisters: *“Holy Communion gives us the strength to face life's difficulties...prayer is good but it is still better to unite oneself with God in Holy Communion.”* (Coste IX, p.508).

### **3 The Eucharist, “thanksgiving”**

There are many examples in Scripture of the Eucharist being seen as “blessing” or “thanksgiving.”(cf. Mt 26, 16-28; Mk 14, 22-24; Lk 22, 19-20) even though the term (Eucharist = thanksgiving) only came into general use during the second century. This aspect of the Eucharist was also part of the ritual followed at Jewish meals where the breaking of bread and the distribution of the wine was accompanied by prayers of blessing and thanksgiving: this is reflected in the great Eucharistic prayer and in the thanksgiving we make after receiving Communion.

In order to live in accordance with this third aspect of the Eucharist, we need to revise our idea of God: if we think of Him as an awesome and threatening being then we will feel mistrustful and fearful. In other words, if we have this image of God, one that is far removed from the God presented by Scripture, we will not be able to give thanks to Him sincerely. But if for us, as for Scripture, God is a good Father who comes to meet us on the pathway of life as he came to meet the pilgrims of Emmaus ((cf. Lk 24, 13-25), a Father who forgives us as soon as we open our heart to him, then it will be easy to make the Eucharist an act of thanksgiving and joyful adoration. Only people who understand this in depth can be grateful because they will know that everything comes to us from God’s love. They will find it easy to recognise signs of God’s presence in the world and bring these to the Eucharist in a true spirit of thanksgiving

### **4. The Eucharist renews the sacrifice of Jesus Christ**

The Eucharist renews Christ’s sacrifice through a “memorial” which is more than simply remembering an event: *“Do this in commemoration of me.”* (Lk 22,19; cf. 1 Cor 11, 24). Christ’s death on the Cross is the greatest manifestation of God’s love for humankind. John the evangelist tells us, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.”* In the Mass we are not just calling to mind Christ’s death on the Cross and his resurrection; more importantly, the sacrifice of Calvary is happening in our own times. In the consecrated bread and wine Jesus offers himself to the Father as he did on the Cross. In other words, the Mass is a celebration which represents and brings about the event that was a beacon in the history of salvation, Christ’s redemptive death on the Cross and the Father’s response in raising his Son from the dead. Saint Paul reminds us, *“Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death.”*

So the Eucharist is not an action that simply evokes Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. It is the memorial which re-presents Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and makes present its redemptive grace today.

Two things are needed if we are to celebrate this fourth dimension of the Eucharist. First of all we need to deepen our faith so that we will come to understand that in every Mass God generously and freely bestows salvation on us. Secondly, we call to mind Jesus Christ in order to continue doing what he did: “he gave himself in life”, “he emptied himself even to the point of dying” according to the fourth Servant Song. (cf. Is

53,12). In short, to live out this fourth aspect of the Eucharist means we have to take the same risk that Christ did, that is to say, we have to be ready to bear with the criticism and the hostility of the powerful ones of this world who are not a bit concerned about the poor or the demands of God's justice.

### 5. The Eucharist: "communion"

*"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him"* (Jn 6, 56). *"As I myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me."* (Jn 6,57). *"The bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ."* (1Cor 10, 16). To receive communion means to eat Christ, to be in communion with him, "to swallow" Jesus. Perhaps this last verb sounds a bit strong but in fact it expresses exactly what we do when we receive communion. From time to time we might use this word so that we don't forget what we are doing when we go to communion.

What does this "communion" dimension of the Eucharist mean for us. Swallowing Jesus means swallowing his message, having a changed outlook (cf. Mk 1,5), in other words *"in your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus."* (Ph 2,5). This entails adopting his preferences, his life style, his way of living, of responding, thinking and acting. Saint Vincent was saying the same thing in his conference on communion: *"Another infallible sign of a good Communion, my daughters is....when we labour zealously to render ourselves like unto Jesus Christ in our conversation and in our ways of acting."* (Coste IX p. 328) Going to communion should lead us to identify more closely each day with the One we eat; if not, there is no point in going to Mass and communion.

On the subject of communion, Fr J M Castillo asks some questions that could help us in our reflections. *"How can we explain the fact that a person could spend most of their life receiving Holy Communion every day, and after many years of receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, still have the same, or even greater faults, than they had when they first started to receive this sacrament? How is it possible that these graces accumulated over the years have not changed the person's life even a little bit?"* (J M Castillo, *"Without a faith experience there is no sacrament,"* Sal Terrae 67/11, Nov. 1979, p. 739-740).

I would not wish to end my reflections on this theme without briefly mentioning Mary. The Pope has called her the *"woman of the Eucharist."* (EDE no. 53), not only because she bore Jesus in her womb but also because when the Community of the Acts of the Apostles came together for *"the breaking of bread"*, she was there with them to encourage them ( cf Ac1, 10-14; Ac 2, 42-47). She drew strength from remembering that her Son was risen and from encountering Him in the Eucharist. **Holy Mary, help us to fully live the Eucharist!**

### **THANK YOU, LORD, FOR THE EUCHARIST**

Thank you, Lord, for the Eucharist.....

Thank you, Lord, for so ardently desiring to celebrate the Pasch with us...



Thank you, Lord, for sharing your bread and wine at the Last Supper; for dividing these an infinite number of times in order to satisfy our hunger and our thirst...

Thank you, Lord, for giving us in this bread and wine, your life and your presence among us..

Thank you, Lord, for loving us to the end, loving us to the utmost: for dying for others...giving your life for others...

Thank you, Lord, for wanting to celebrate the gift of your life, round a table with your friends, so that with you they might form a community of love..

Thank you, Lord, for telling us to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of you...

Thank you, Lord, for uniting us to yourself so that we become one, you unite us to your own life insofar as we are prepared to give our own...

Thank you, Lord, because in each Eucharist we are able to celebrate and renew our life of union with all our brothers and sisters who share your bread and wine...and with all people..

Thank you, Lord, because the whole day can be a preparation for celebrating and sharing the Eucharist...

Thank you, Lord, because we can celebrate the Eucharist every day....

Thank you, Lord, because every day I can begin again...and continue my journey of solidarity with my brothers and sisters, and continue along the path of being transformed into you.

## **SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP US IN OUR PERSONAL PRAYER AND COMMUNITY SHARING**

\* Read and meditate on Jn 6, 1-71; Jn 13, 1-17; Lk 24, 13-25 and/or Saint Vincent's conference to the first Sisters on Holy Communion, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1646. (cf. IX, 229-240).

\* Are the risks that we mentioned earlier in reference to the Eucharist, real dangers? Could there be others that we haven't mentioned?

\*Which parts of the Mass do you consider to be the most important?

\*How can you, personally, and as a community, celebrate the Eucharist better?

### VISIT OF SUPERIORS

Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor for the continent of Africa

### **Visit to the Province of Mozambique**

16<sup>th</sup> October to 13<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Mozambique, which is situated opposite Madagascar, is separated from this island by the Mozambique Channel. The Indian Ocean washes about 2500 km of the country's coastline. On many sides there are frontiers: Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland and part of Lake Nyassa – 4,500 km of land borders. Most of the

population is concentrated in the coastlands where the soil is fertile and easier to cultivate, and on the outskirts of towns. So population density varies from approximately 5 inhabitants per sq km in the north-western region (Tete), to 30 in the north (Nampula) and as many as 1,300 in the south (Maputo, the capital).

The 68 Sisters belonging to the Province of Mozambique are in 11 houses and these are situated in the regions of Maputo, in the south; Beira in the central part of the country; Tete in the north-west and Nampula in the north-east. The Sisters serve the sick, prisoners and refugees; they do catechetical work in the parishes, see to the children's education in school, help to promote a future for young people (knitting, cutting out clothes, dressmaking, needlework, typing..), and work for the promotion of women.

On **16<sup>th</sup> October 2004**, Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor for Africa, was welcomed by the Sisters of the Provincial house and those from neighbouring houses who performed the welcoming dance "Hoyo hoyo."

On 17<sup>th</sup> October the communities from the north and the south of the country gathered at the Provincial House for the opening of the Visitation. After some words of welcome by the Visitatrice, Sister Felismina Sambu, Sister Wivine spoke of her joy at being with us, assuring us of the prayers of the General Council and their interest in the development of our Province. She urged us to continue to learn more about the Inter-Assemblies 2003-2009 Action Lines. These urge us to set out on a path of conversion so that we may live at a deeper level that sisterly charity which calls for openness and liberty of heart. "*The new Constitutions*, " she said, "*are rays of light that guide our service of the poor.*" Then Sister Wivine ended by reminding us that every Visitation is a time of grace for the Province because it is God touching the lives of the Sisters. As the Psalmist said. "*If today you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.*" During the Opening Mass, Father reminded us of the importance that our founders attached to the spiritual life for it is this that energises our service of the poor. Our close relationship with God also allows us to overcome difficulties in our lives and in our service.

From 9<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> October, Sister Wivine brought together the Sisters from communities in outlying areas of the capital: Sisters from Xinavane and from the region of Chokwe. Sister Wivine shared her thoughts with the Sister Servants and joined them in reflecting on their mission of spiritual leadership and accompaniment. Finally she joined the Sisters in meditating on "how to be a servant in today's world" and she emphasised the place that prayer and reflection should have in our lives.

From 27<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> October Sister Wivine met, at Maputo, the 4 Sisters from the Alto Mae community, the 18 from the Provincial House and the 4 Seminary Sisters, to reflect with them on the Action Lines. On 31<sup>st</sup> October the new Provincial Director, Fr Armindo Baloi, was installed. Sister Wivine gave him the register of all the Sisters and she thanked him for his availability.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November the Visitatrice and Sister Wivine left for the north, going first to Nampula and then to Nacarua. Here the staff and young students sang a joyous welcome.

Next day it was the turn of the aspirants and the children from the infants' school, to come and welcome her.

On 5<sup>th</sup> November Sister Wivine met the Sisters from the communities of the central regions of the country, Tete and Beira, to reflect with them on their experience of community and of being with the poor. Then she visited St. Joseph's Health Centre at Mavudzi- Ponte and the Reception Centre for Students.

On the final day it was a matter of taking stock with the Provincial Council. Sister Wivine encouraged us to continue to bravely face today's challenges. Together, we thank the Lord for this time of grace for the Province.

Sister Elisa Fatima Uassiquete  
*Echoes correspondent*

### SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Amazonia – Brazil

#### **Project of moving into the Rio Gelado Region of Novo Repartimento**

The Sisters of Our Lady of Grace community have been on mission in the Novo Repartimento Region for many years. They gradually began to realise they needed to give priority to a place there that was situated at an altitude of more than 150 km and where the cries of the poor were most urgent. The people here endure many forms of poverty: unreliable health and educational facilities, there is no agricultural policy, the roads have fallen into disrepair, transport difficulties, isolation, violence, insecurity.... In spite of all these problems, the people continue to come together to learn more about their religion and to try and find ways of making a better life for themselves.

**In 2003** the Visitatrice, Sister Eleni Bezerra, came with Father Director to talk to the community about revising our works. After they had listened to us very carefully, we thought about the petition that the people of this area had drawn up, asking for the Daughters of Charity to go and live with them. Later, the leaders of the Christian community showed us the land they had purchased for our Sisters to build their house there.

After studying the matter with her Council, the Visitatrice agreed to the project and sent another Sister to help us so that we could respond better to the many needs of this mission.

In **March 2004** our community met the Vincentian priests of the parish and the leaders of the Christian community, in order to plan the mission's activities and to choose as theme for this year: "Discovering Jesus as the way, the truth and the life." Our community decided to spend the first fortnight of the month at Novo Repartimento and the second fortnight at Rio Gelado. While we waited for our house to be built in Rio Gelado, we would stay with one of the people from that place.

On **15<sup>th</sup> May 2004** we arrived, as scheduled, at Rio Gelado. Members of the Christian community came in procession to welcome us with flowers, candles, streamers, food and, of course, the statue of Nuestra Senora de Aparecida. This welcoming celebration was punctuated with poetry, singing, applause and hugs. The children presented each Sister with a flower that had a kind message attached to it. Very soon afterwards we began our work of health care, catechetics, and the formation of catechists and the town's health care workers.

On **15<sup>th</sup> of the following month** we returned to Rio Gelado to continue our works there:

- Health care at Vitoria da Conquista and in the village of Neteolandia,
- Formation of Christian community leaders
- Catechetics meeting in the village of Neteolandia.

As the days go by we will be finding out more about the suffering and poverty in this area. The building work on our future house is making good progress. Thanks to donations, bingos, fetes, etc. the Christian community has been collecting funds. We think we may be able to move into the house at the end of 2004.

We thank the Lord for sending us to this remote region. We are happy to be able to respond to one of the calls made by the 2003-2009 Inter-Assemblies Action Lines, *"Let us go further down the path already taken..."Develop new responses to the appeals coming from 'here and there' with courage and with creative charity."* The Lord's response was summed up by a poor person in Rio Gelado who said, *"Someone has listened to the voice of the poor."* May Saint Vincent and Saint Louise help the Province of Amazonia to respond with love, audacity and fidelity to the appeals of the poor in northern Brazil. We place this new mission in the hands of Mary, our Blessed Mother.

Sister Esmeralda Antoni Sapin Correa  
*Echoes correspondent*

Province of Rome  
**120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Daughters of Charity's presence  
at the Vatican**

On Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2004 a solemn service took place in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in “Domus Sanctae Marthae” to thank God for the 120 years that the Daughters of Charity have been at the Vatican. Cardinal Angelo Sodano retraced the main stages of that history which dates from 1884 to our own days.

### **A glorious history**

“In view of the outbreaks of cholera that threatened many Italian cities, Pope Leo XIII asked for a hospice to be opened near St. Peter’s Basilica to care for victims of the disease. That was 120 years ago.

But Rome itself was not affected by cholera and in 1891, Pope Joachim Pecchi put this new hospice at the disposal of the most needy people in Borgo and Trastevere, as well as making it a place that offered help to pilgrims. So began the history of zealous service of many men and women, who, even though they didn’t have much money, made their way to Rome. The Pope’s house was always to be a house of charity.

Improvements were gradually made to the residence. In 1901 electricity was installed and the following year a new chapel was built. You were asked to broaden the scope of your works and provide accommodation for priests in need, the police and the Swiss Guard.

During the Second World War, St Martha’s was furnished to receive ambassadors to the Holy See from countries that Italy had broken off diplomatic relations with: the United States, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Yugoslavia and Poland.

After the war the doors of St. Martha’s were opened to many priests whom the Holy Father had summoned to work in the Secretariat of State or other services offered by the Holy See. In 1996, the present residence was built in order to pre-empt the changes required these days.

### **As at Bethany**

During these 120 years, the spirit of the Daughters of Charity prevailed in this house. In 1884 the first four Sisters arrived with Sister Louise Lequette, an energetic and generous woman who later became Superioress General. After that, countless Sisters passed through the house. They were part of that legion of Daughters of Charity who, in the wake of Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac and Saint Catherine Laboure, devoted their lives to the service of their neighbour. I myself remember with deep gratitude, the help that the Sisters gave me during the 7 years I stayed at St. Martha’s. How could I forget, among others, the gentle face of that wonderful Sister Ines, a true mother to so many young priests?

I would like to stress again the spirit of tranquility that the Daughters of Charity never cease to communicate to us, their spiritual joy that springs from a heart totally

consecrated to the Lord and totally open to others. As well as looking after the priests, the Sisters also work with children and the needy in addition to serving pilgrims and the Vatican personnel in other ways.

Dear Sisters, for all the good that you have sown among us, you can be happy to make this house a new Bethany. May the Lord reward you for all you have done and may he nourish, each day, the flame of your love.

Dear Sisters, I want you to know that the Pope thinks kindly of you and he blesses your work, as he has done on many occasions.

We Bishops and priests of the Curia, also give you our support and we are delighted by the excellent service you give. We would like to express our thanks, too, to all the Staff working with you in this house.

So press forward with renewed commitment, following in the furrow traced out 120 years ago by Pope Leo XIII. Your work has been very fruitful up to now, may it continue to be so in the future.

*Extract from the Vatican web site*

Province of Belgium

### **Being creative when we visit the sick**

As a Sister who visits the sick, I have been asked to give some reflections on the following subject: **creativity in the relationship between visitor and patient**. At first I was surprised by this choice of subject. For me, the word “creativity” conjures up an artist, painter, sculptor or composer. So do you have to be an artist to visit the sick? Of course not. It would seem that we have to find creative ways of forming relationships, but how can this be done? The Petit Larousse dictionary links the word “creativity” with the word “creation”: in other words, the action of bringing something into being that does not exist, something original. Can this be applied to people who visit the sick?

As I thought about this article, the word “to create” kept coming into my mind, thanks to the response I noted in Mariette.

In fact, this sick lady, **Mariette**, never reproaches anyone for her loneliness. “*The children have their families and their work; they do what they can,*” she says. When one of her neighbours came to see her, she said before she left, “*I’m now going home to sit and look at the wall and wait.*” Mariette replied, “*You shouldn’t feel that you are on your own. You should **create** an inner life and then there will be two of you, yourself and your inner life. And you’ll feel much better already.*” Mariette’s clear and definite response gave me inspiration.

We often struggle against our loneliness by trying our best to ensure someone is present or that we are a presence for other people, as far as this is possible. Although there are political, social, family and group activities that help us to overcome loneliness, I feel that the work of caring for lonely people is of quite a different order. However, I could not see any way of doing this. Thank you, Mariette! You reminded me that we have to create an interior life for ourselves, so that we can feel at ease with ourselves. I know this is possible because you have done it. This is the secret of your serenity. This tranquility that comes with old age always seems to be the best way of ending life's journey that I could possibly imagine.

Are not we who visit the sick called to get in touch with the inner life of the person we visit through listening very attentively to what they say? Should we not be rekindling the flame that is sometimes quenched by too much suffering or by worries about material things? Should we not be doing everything we can to help such people to be at ease with themselves by reminding them of the positive side of what they said to us, the value of some experiences that they hadn't realised? We should be helping the sick people we visit to create for themselves, or to re-create or breathe new life into an inner life which, according to what Mariette said, and her own personal experience, will bring pleasure and maybe, even, a sense of God's gentle presence.

When, in all good will, I go to visit a sick person for the first time, I have mixed feelings. Will this person accept me? How am I going to accompany and help them? What will we be talking about? I am still a bit afraid. Afraid of what? Of not being in control of the situation, of course. Fear of the unknown, uncertainty about my own emotions and feelings. In fact, though, I am going to meet somebody who is unique. From the beginning of time and for ever that person has been and will always remain unique. And the same is true about myself (cloning is an insult to creation). In our dealings with one another, the sick person and myself know there is nothing "contentious" between us, no unresolved conflicts, no unspoken prejudices. Nothing has gone wrong, nothing "misunderstood or clumsily expressed, no awkwardness or ill-feeling", in short, none of those things that have always been a hindrance to relationships. Today, as I visit this sick person for the first time, we both have a blank page in front of us. Aren't we lucky for once!

We are both, in our own way, going to be inspired, perhaps, by artists. Our new relationship will be coloured by our personal history, what we have been able to do in life. And we will blend these colours together in order to create a unique picture.

During my first visit to Pauline, she spoke to me about her work as a dressmaker and she took me into the next room. "*Come and see the (much enlarged) photo of the lace evening dress I made for a competition. I won first prize! I am very happy in my work.*" Pauline had a difficult childhood. She lost her only son. Read between the lines, please, and see the dark colours of her sufferings. Like everyone else, Pauline has brought to the picture her shadow and her patches of light. And the shadows make the light more intense.

Time has gone by, and as I write this I think back to the colours that Pauline has brought to our relationship; joy in work well done, courage, tenacity. And as well as that, I find that Pauline continues to cultivate an interest, through the stamp collection that has been her passion since 1930: 75 years of stamp collecting: “*I love my stamps*”, she says.

There are two things that have to figure largely in my dealings with the person I visit:

- the aspirations that this person has, their love, their hurts, their work or their family, their culture, any commitments they have (Union, parochial or other commitments)...and
- the colours of my own life.

The person visited, and I myself, bring to the common picture of our relationship, both light and shadow. The other person brings their own personal touches of a life that is unique and I bring the colours of mine. It is good for someone who visits the sick to have a bit of colour in her life.

The picture of a relationship that has been jointly created will be unique for all time. I think that is precisely where we see the creativity of the person who visits the sick and who “constructs” something that did not exist before, an original model. Every relationship is creative or it is not a true relationship. Do we not speak of “creating a relationship”? So there can be no doubt that the believer becomes part of the eternal movement of creation, and we who visit the sick are united to the Creator, and in our modest way, join in this movement.

Sister Marie Louise Dawagne  
*Daughter of Charity*

Province of Emmitsburg

### **The dynamism of the Daughters of Charity, a positive force for the world**

For the first 20 years of my life as a Daughter of Charity, I was a teacher. I loved teaching and I loved my students. I had my highs and my lows but I was very happy in Community. My Sisters have always been supportive and given me great joy.

After these years in teaching, I was named Provincial Councillor. I found this change very difficult but gradually I came to realise that listening to people was just as important as teaching. I visited the Sisters and greatly admired the work they were doing in deprived areas, and their closeness to the poor. I didn't just listen to the Sisters' problems; I shared their missionary joys, their anxieties and their desire to do more and better things for the poor. They also talked to me about their efforts to grow in the spiritual life and the progress they made; this gave me great encouragement.



My life changed again when, 8 years later, I was appointed General Councillor for the English-speaking Provinces throughout the world. I had responsibility for 11 Provinces and their missionary works. This meant leaving Emmitsburg for Paris and joining a community where the Sisters spoke French, a language I wasn't very good at, and it also meant I had to travel a lot.

I didn't find my early days in Paris easy and I shed many tears. But I remembered what an old priest said to me when I was young, and I placed myself in God's hands. As I travelled from one country to another, a new world of poverty opened up before me.

I saw our Sisters working in very poor villages in India. I witnessed the misery of people in refugee camps in Thailand. I met Sisters and victims of famine in Ethiopia, and the neglected and despised pygmies of Burundi. I saw once again the efforts Sisters were making to create a better life for the poor in my own country, in England, Ireland, Australia, Japan and the Philippines. My admiration and love for the family grew stronger during these 12 years of travelling, and so did my trust in God.

At the end of my mandate as General Councillor, I was asked to go to Taiwan where there were 4 houses belonging to different Provinces. These houses wanted to combine and form a Region. It would take too long to tell you about the 18 years I spent in Taiwan; I would just like to say that we did manage to combine the different houses and that when I left, the Chinese Province had expanded.

During all these years and different experiences, community life was very important to me. The Sisters were always there to support and encourage me and to make me happy. I am deeply grateful to God and to the Daughters of Charity though I feel I cannot express this very well. I hope that young women will hear the call of Jesus and trust Him to guide their lives.

Sister Hilda Gleason  
*Daughter of Charity*

Province of France-South

### **Being a Daughter of Charity at Taize**

*“You pass through Taize, as you might pass near a spring of water. The traveller stops, quenches his thirst and then continues his journey, “ said John Paul II in 1986. And one day Pope John XXIII greeted Brother Roger with these words, “Ah, Taize is a place of spring time.”*

The Taize community was established in 1949. Its founder is Roger Schultz, known today as Brother Roger – a pastor of the Evangelical Reformed Church – who came to Taize, a village in Burgundy, in August 1940. Together with some other

Brothers he made religious vows: they would live in celibacy, recognise the authority of the Prior, live in community and put all that they had materially and spiritually in common.

From the very beginning the group was interdenominational and ecumenical. Their work is to pray for Christian unity, which will serve as a model for reconciliation between nations and religions. Today there are 100 Brothers from 25 countries in the community: there are Catholics and Protestants (in the beginning the majority of these were Protestant, but today the greater number are Catholic).

Towards the end of the 1950s, more and more young people began to arrive in Taize. In 1966 the Sisters of Saint Andrew, an international Catholic community, came to live in a village nearby and they took on some of the work of welcoming pilgrims. Much later on, some Polish Ursuline nuns also came to help in the work of welcoming young people.

Some years ago, Brother Roger asked the Company to send a Daughter of Charity to work with these young people and be a presence at Taize. An Austrian by birth, and having been attached to the community of Chatillon-sur Chalaronne (Province of France-South) for 4 years, I now share this work with Sisters from two other religious communities.

From early spring to the end of autumn, young people from the different continents, arrive in Taize every week. They are looking for meaning in their lives and they join others who are doing the same. By going to the wellsprings of trust in God, they undertake a spiritual pilgrimage which helps them to build trusting relationships with others. Some weeks in the summer, there are more than 500 young people from 75 countries joining in this common adventure. Every summer we can count on 400 volunteers to help them. And this "adventure" continues when they return home: this is shown in their eagerness to deepen their spiritual life and by their commitment to taking responsibility for building a more just and more fraternal world,

Central to the meetings which take place three times a day, is prayer in common, which brings together all those who wish to praise God through hymns and silent prayer. Every day the Brothers of the community explain a passage from the Bible: this is followed by periods of reflection and sharing. The young people share the common chores: keeping the premises tidy, doing work in the garden or in the church, doing the cooking, taking a turn at reception, animating the liturgy..... In the afternoon there are forums on more specific themes to help them to see the connection between the sources of religion and the pluralist nature of our contemporary world: "Is it possible to forgive?" "The challenge of globalisation", "Building a fraternal Europe." There are also topics relating to art and music.

Many young people have suffered deep inner pain through lack of affection or through being abandoned, and we need to spend a lot of time listening to them. I am

more directly responsible for accompanying young volunteers who have committed themselves to working here for a year. It is also my job to look after their health.

At Taize we try hard to live in unity between the different Christian Churches. When they find their differences accepted and respected, young people understand the connection between their experience of this and their union with God in prayer and reflection, and in their experience of solidarity with others. By meeting people from all over the world, those who come from countries that are at war discover that it is possible to open up paths of unity and peace, and that divisions and violence can be overcome. They discover that it is possible for adversaries to talk to one another, to forgive and even to become friends. After their stay at Taize, these young people are urged to live out at home what they have discovered here, and to become people of peace and unity. This is the message of hope that the young people take back to their families, to the places where they live, and to their parishes.

Sister Maria Ruth Marchl  
*Daughter of Charity*

### THE POOR SPEAK TO US

Quasi- Province

#### **Patrick, prophet of love**

Last month we had an important regional competition where handicapped people took part in races. Patrick was desperately anxious to win this race and to be awarded the cup; he had a very good chance of winning. The race started and Patrick shot away and quickly outran the other competitors. When he was nearing the finishing line he turned round and saw his friend George, who was also in the race, trip and fall to the ground. Patrick stopped and went back to his friend. He helped George up, and they both continued running, but this time, hand in hand, until they reached the finishing line.

After telling us about this incident, Frances said, *“At school, in the family and in society we are taught to defend ourselves, to be strong, aggressive, independent; we are to hide our weakness from others and from ourselves. Everything is pushing us to climb the ladder of human promotion, to win the prize, to be successful, to prosper and to win people’s admiration. In this competitive and individualistic world, Patrick witnesses to other values. The most important thing for him is relationships. If persons who are mentally handicapped have not been able to develop the intellectual and manual skills that other people have, they are prophets of good relationships and masters in love.”*

### The poor speak to us

Provinces of France North and France South

Declaration concerning persons who have problems in speaking and communicating

*“The human person cannot be reduced to the level of his or her handicap or illness, whatever this may be.”* (Charter of the Association of paralysed people, France)

We, the people who cannot speak, or who have difficulty in communicating, we are handicapped but we can understand what you are saying. We would like, however, to dialogue with you directly. And we have the means to do this (facial expressions, gestures, symbols, voice synthesis, software, the written word, carers.....).

Ask us how we communicate or whether we use a special way of doing this.

When speaking to us, make sure to face us, position yourself at our level (sitting down or in a lower position).

Speak to us directly; not to the person looking after us, in our presence don't refer to us in the third person.

Speak to us in a normal way: don't treat us like children or talk down to us.

Take the time to listen to us or to patiently make out what we are saying. Even if you haven't the time! Ask us to repeat things rather than pretend you have understood because we will know you haven't. Let there be silent pauses in the dialogue. Allow us to finish our sentences. At regular intervals ask us if you have really understood what we wanted to communicate. As a last resort, get us to answer simply yes or no to your questions.

Sometimes our facial expressions or bodily movements are not normal. This does not mean that we are in pain or that we are aggressive. These movements are involuntary so do not be frightened by them.

When people are attentive and respectful in the way they listen, it helps us to feel closer to others, to be part of society, and it helps to eradicate the effects of our handicap. Together let us create bonds that are strong and lasting!

*March 2004*

## NEWSBRIEFS

### **25 years on mission in Equatorial Guinea**

**In February 1980** 18 Daughters of Charity left for Micomeseng, Equatorial Africa, to lend their support to the country's health services; in collaboration with FERS (

Spanish Federation of nursing religious) and the Spanish government. In 1986 support for the work with lepers was withdrawn but the Daughters of Charity stayed on there. That same year, other Sisters arrived in Mokom to respond to the needs of people living in the forest and to set up a first-aid post. This mission gradually expanded and at the present time a young woman from the region has entered the Company. She is in formation at the inter-Provincial Seminary in Madrid. (Province of Gijon).

### **Study session “Archives and the work of Archivists” at the Mother House**

*“ To the Church’s way of thinking, Archives are treasures which preserve the memories of Christian communities; at the same time they are cultural factors in the new evangelisation.”* (Circular of 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1997 on the pastoral function of Church archives).

**From 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2005**, a study session on the archives of the Company was held at the Mother House. As well as Sister Evelyne, Sisters from the Secretariat and the Treasurer General’s office and the Sister translators, six Sister archivists came from Cologne, Madrid, Marseilles, Naples, Rio de Janeiro and Saint Louis (USA) and they all took part in this meeting with the Sister archivists of Paris. This international study group had the task of organising the work of Provincial archivists. Two experts gave specialised advice on the work of the archivist. Fr Leroy OSB, President of the Association of Church Archivists in France, gave a conference on professional ethics with regard to ecclesiastical archives matters, and Brother Ribault, Sacred Heart Brother, further developed the theme of working with archives and the role of the archivist. The outcome of our work was a manual on archives and archivists which will be distributed to the Provinces in order to ensure a certain consistency in archival work throughout the Company. (Quasi-Province).

### **Charity is contagious**

A father of a family lived by himself, he was a Muslim hermit. Noticing him in his straw hut I went up to him and spoke to him. He asked me where I came from. Later he explained his way of life to me and the reasons why he became a marabout. At that time he had nothing to eat and no clothes to wear. I went back to my community and talked to the Sisters about this. We asked the young people of the parish to help and then we decided we would build him a small house made of brick.

Everyone helped in his or her own way: some brought baskets of straw, someone brought a door, etc. When the house was finished everyone was very pleased. Later on this man said to me, *”Madame, I see that your God is good. You did not know me and yet you have done all this for me, free of charge. Can I not come into the house of your God?”* I said, *“Certainly, that house is for everyone.”* From that day onward he began to visit the church. Some time after this, he fell ill, and everyday he had his meals brought to him. Neighbours arranged to give him food and to bring him water and wood. But his condition deteriorated. Our community then decided to bring him into a little house next to ours so that we could look after him. Shortly before his death he asked to be baptised

and he never stopped thanking God. Yes, charity is contagious! (Province of Cameroon).

### **A day of celebration for the Vincentian Family in Mozambique**

**On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2004**, the young and the not so young members of the Vincentian Family gathered at the Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity for a day of celebration. In Mozambique there are more than 1200 members of the Vincentian Family (AIC, SSVP, JM, AMM, Misevi, DCs, CMs.) During the Mass all showed how eager they were to share with the poor. When Mass was over, the gifts that had been brought up at the Offertory procession were distributed to poor people. Later, games, raffles and other activities were organised to raise funds for solidarity projects. Belonging to the Vincentian Family means listening to the cries of the poor, joining them in trying to find ways of solving their problems, and working together to create a more just and fraternal world. (Province of Mozambique).

## VINCENTIAN MARIAN YOUTH ASSOCIATION

### **The Vincentian Marian Youth Association, people growing in joy, trust, faith and love**

#### **What is the history of these associations?**

During the apparitions that took place at rue du Bac, Paris, in 1830, the Blessed Virgin looked very tenderly on Catherine Laboure. She entrusted her with a message she was to take to Fr Aladel, CM, her spiritual director, *“The Blessed Virgin wishes you to fulfil a mission....you will be its Director...it is the Confraternity of the Children of Mary.”* This new Movement in the Church was given official recognition by a decree of Pope Pius IX on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1847, and it was to bring together young people from very ordinary backgrounds who were experiencing many difficulties because of the hard conditions under which people had to live in XIXth century France. The zealous work of countless Daughters of Charity and the firm commitment of thousands of people, have borne fruit over the last 175 years. With the passing of time, the Association of the Children of Mary has undergone change as it adapted to the new situations that young people found themselves in. It became the Marian Youth Association. Now that this Association is active in more than 65 countries, its leaders have had to make the JMV more structured and more closely coordinated. The international gathering of its members in Paris in 1997 led to the setting up of a provisional international Council and an international secretariat. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1999, the new international statutes of the JMV were approved by the Holy See. The first JMV General Assembly took place in Rome from 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August 2000 and this was an opportunity for the Association to reaffirm its Marian spirituality and ratify its membership of the Vincentian Family.

## **Who are we?**

We are young people, about 75000 in number, who belong to this ecclesial, lay, Marian, Vincentian Movement that has been recognised by the Church for its educational work, its mission of evangelisation carried out in a Marian spirit, the life witness it gives, and its commitment to serving young people, especially the disadvantaged.

## **What is our mission?**

Our mission is to help young people to live together and deepen their Christian faith and Marian spirituality, to commit themselves to serving their brothers and sisters, especially people who are most in need, and to collaborate with other organisations in the Church, particularly the Vincentian Family, in working for justice.

## **How do we function?**

*At local level:* young people form part of a team that is guided by a leader. They learn how to live, discuss, pray and work together; they study in depth the theme chosen for the year and prepared by the national team. The team leaders have other people to help them in their work of accompaniment. At regular intervals they meet together with one or two adult leaders (a priest, a Daughter of Charity). They are given some formation to help them in their mission of educating others.

*At national level:* each country has its own way of organising its affairs, depending on the circumstances of the Church and of young people in that particular place, and it chooses to be known as JM or JMV. The national team is responsible for keeping to the Association's general project and its guidelines, and for collaborating with others in living out its founding principles.

*At international level:* the international team consists of a Director General, an Assistant-Director, a General Councillor of the Daughters of Charity, a President and four lay members. The lay members are appointed by the General Assembly of the Association (cf. Int. Sts. Art.2 17). The team organises leadership within the Association and it is careful to see that the Final Document of the General Assembly is implemented. The international secretariat is responsible for animation, communication, organisation, updating the web site and compiling the archives. It sets in motion the programmes established by the international team and the General Assembly.(Int. Sts. Art. 3,21). The international team is currently making preparations for the second General Assembly of the JMV which will take place in Paris , in August 2005.

It is difficult to express in a few lines what is happening in the hearts of the young people in our Association. What I can say is that in the company of Mary they are progressing, little by little, along a pathway of confidence, faith and love.

Gladys Abi-Said  
*International President of the JMV*

THIRD CENTENARY OF THE VINCENTIANS IN SPAIN

**Celebrating the third centenary of the arrival of the  
Vincentians in Spain**

Wasn't it Charle Peguy who said that we understand history, not just by looking back to the past, but also by living the present and fixing our gaze on the future? What we did during the official, solemn closing ceremony in Barcelona marking our celebration of the third centenary of the arrival of the Vincentians in Spain, is a good example of putting this dictum into practice.

**On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2004**, a great many Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, lay members of the Vincentian Family, and numerous friends gathered in the Gothic church of St. Anne, right in the heart of this illustrious city, for a solemn Eucharist. Archbishop Luis Martinez Sistach presided and a great number of priests, mostly Vincentians, concelebrated. At the end of Mass they were all very happy to meet one another in the cloister. If 8<sup>th</sup> July 1704 is an outstanding date in the Annals of the Company, the day when the Vincentians came to Spain, then 26<sup>th</sup> September 2004 will also be a special date in our history. This day was the crowning point of an important event for the Church even though it has hardly been mentioned by the media that are very quick to speak about things that are much less important.

**September 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>** were three days of celebration during which we remembered our past, gave thanks, and looked ahead to the future. Three days of celebration which brought together about 170 people including Fr Gregory Gay, Superior General, Fr Jose Maria Nieto, Assistant General, Sr Rosa Maria Miro, General Councillor, the Visitors and Priests of the Mission from the four Provinces of Spain, the 9 Visitatrices, and delegates from some Provinces of the Congregation in Europe (Slovakia, Poland, Turin, Rome, Toulouse....) from Latin America (Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina), from Africa (Eritrea), and some members of SIEV.

The carefully planned programme was carried out to the letter, in an atmosphere of fraternal joy, our hearts having so many family memories. The days went by and the time was spent in prayer, reflection, celebration, fraternal meetings, leadership input, and thinking about the future. We have to highlight the meticulous way the Province of Barcelona prepared for these days. Everyone who took part felt "at home."

Although we are celebrating three hundred years of living here, three centuries of holiness, work and evangelisation, all of which we can be justly proud about, we didn't just recall the past: we made a commitment to the present and we looked ahead to the future humbly, joyfully and trusting that God, the author of our Congregation, will take care of future missionaries. We shared with one another the happiness of belonging to a three hundred years old family which, in the words John Paul II wrote in his letter to the



Superior General on the occasion of its 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, “*has still got a great future to build.*” And we reflected on the following questions about the present and the future:

- How can we respond to the needs of our times?
- How can we be a Gospel sign in our XXIst century?
- How can we be audacious and imaginative as were those five Vincentian missionaries who sowed the Vincentian seed in Spain 300 years ago?

**The Manifesto** (Declaration), the practical outcome of this third centenary, mentions commitments at national and international level: it sets out commitments to be “*the new form of presence that the Church and society are asking us to be today.*”

Father Celestino Fernandez, CM

### VINCENTIAN SEQUENCE

**The Vincentian Sequence** is a correspondence course which aims to teach people more about Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. It is open to all French-speaking people who belong either effectively or affectively to the Vincentian Family, members of Societies of Apostolic Life, religious communities or lay associations that were founded by Saint Vincent or took him as their patron. Every two months a subject for reflection is presented. There is a brief presentation of the subject and a list of books recommended for study. Each participant is asked to send his or her personal research work. This individual work is corrected either by a Priest of the Mission or a Daughter of Charity. People following the course keep the same tutor throughout the year. Three sections of the course are envisaged:

#### *1. Learning about Saint Vincent de Paul*

This section is for people who want to learn about Saint Vincent de Paul; the different stages in his life, his works and his spirituality. In the first year of the course, people are helped to get to know the man, Vincent de Paul; his origins, his studies, his commitment to the poor. Second year studies focus on an in-depth study of Vincent de Paul’s works and students try to discover the guiding principles behind these.

#### *2. Learning more about Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality*

The texts to be studied are taken from Saint Vincent’s letters or his conferences. During the first year, the following aspects of his spirituality will be explored: Jesus Christ, Humility, The Trinity, God’s Will, the Eucharist. In the second year the areas for study will be: Baptism, Prayer, Compassion, Simplicity and the Blessed Virgin.

#### *3. Learning about Saint Louise de Marillac*

Each person following the course is asked to study the Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac. During the first year they all study Louise de Marillac’s relationships: with her family, the Ladies of Charity and the Priests of the Mission. In the second year they will study Louise de Marillac’s relationship with the first Daughters of Charity.

Sister Elisabeth Charpy  
*Daughter of Charity*

## SOURCES AND UPDATES

### **Celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1830 apparitions**

*“When the Mother of God has been invoked and chosen as the Patroness of an important undertaking, everything must necessarily turn out well and redound to the glory of her Son, Jesus...”* Saint Vincent had a deep love for God’s Mother and on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1617, he wrote those lines into the Rules for the Charity of Chatillon. Saint Louise was imbued with the spirit of the French school of spirituality and she, too, would pass on to her Daughters her own devotion to the Virgin Mary; she did this by her teaching but also in practical ways. So the Company’s devotion to Mary Immaculate is very deeply-rooted. Two hundred years later, the Message given in the apparitions to Catherine Laboure would confirm and renew the close link that exists between our vocation as Daughters of Charity and Mary Immaculate, Mother of God. Through the message she gave in the 1830 apparitions, Mary is asking us to be faithful to the Spirit and to express deep faith and active charity by attitudes and words that will reveal her Son, Jesus, to our world of today.

However, if we are to really understand the founding message given to Catherine Laboure, we need to **take into account the whole series of apparitions**: the revelations concerning Saint Vincent’s heart, the manifestations of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the apparitions of Our Lady. If we concentrate only on the apparitions of Our Lady there is a danger that we might miss the full significance of the message.

**This present year, 2005**, marks the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions that took place in 1830 and for all Daughters of Charity it is a special call to reflect again on these events in order to gain a better understanding of the message they brought, and to see this message in terms of our own day. As we celebrate in the Company these heavenly manifestations, we have a fresh opportunity to thank God for the extraordinary power of grace and to live more in accordance with it.

**On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1830**, Sister Catherine, the young woman who was to witness these apparitions, saw her dearest wish fulfilled when she entered the Seminary of rue du Bac, Paris. Three days later, the body of Saint Vincent was transferred with great solemnity, from Notre-Dame de Paris to Saint-Lazare. The Seminary Sisters took part in the octave of celebrations that lasted from 25<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1830. Three important events took place during Saint Catherine’s time of formation.

**The heart of Saint Vincent: April 1830**

On her return from Saint-Lazare, Sister Catherine went with the other Seminary Sisters to the chapel and prayed in front of the small relics of Saint Vincent. Her own account of what happened shows how deeply she was moved:

*“I had the consolation,” she said, “of seeing his heart above the shrine where the small relics of Saint Vincent de Paul are exposed. It appeared to me on three consecutive days and in three different ways: white, the colour of flesh signifying peace, calm, innocence and unity. Then I saw red like fire that must light the flame of charity in people’s hearts. It seemed to me that the whole community should renew itself and spread to the farthest points of the world. Finally I saw it as red-black and this brought great sadness to my heart. Waves of sadness washed over me and I found it hard to overcome these feelings. I did not know why, or in what way, this suffering had to do with the change of government. An inner voice told me, ‘the heart of Saint Vincent is deeply saddened by the great misfortunes that will fall on France.’”*

On the final day of the octave she saw the same heart but now it was bright red and an inner voice said to her, *“Saint Vincent is a little consoled because, through the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, he has obtained the favour that his two families will not perish in the midst of those great evils and that God will use them to rekindle people’s faith.”*

### **Vision of Our Lord in the Eucharist (June 1830)**

*“On Trinity Sunday, “ she said, “Our Lord appeared to me like a King, with the cross on his breast, in the Most Holy Sacrament. It...was during Holy Mass, at the time of the Gospel. It seemed to me that the cross and all his royal vestments fell to the ground at his feet, and that Our Lord was stripped of all his clothes. It was then that I had the blackest and most sombre thoughts because I understood that the king would be stripped of his royal garments and great misfortunes would follow.”*

Later on, in obedience to Father Aladel, Saint Catherine wrote that throughout her whole Seminary *“she saw the One whose presence is hidden in the sacrament of his love.”*

### **The appearances of Our Lady**

*18<sup>th</sup> July 1830*

On the eve of the feast of Saint Vincent, Mary talked to Sister Catherine in the chapel: the Seminary Sister saw a lady appear on the altar steps, come down on the altar side, and sit down *“in a chair like St. Anne’s one....I did not think I was seeing the Blessed Virgin...the child said to me again, ‘Here is the Blessed Virgin.’”* The conversation was a long one; it lasted two hours. Catherine described it in a few lines. This account is given in Laurentin’s book (Proces de Catherine, p.80).

*27<sup>th</sup> November and during December 1830*

Mary's second apparition, the one in which the Medal was revealed, is better known. *"Have a medal struck after this model, those who wear an indulgenced medal will receive great graces."*

During December, at the time of evening meditation, Mary came and appeared "above the tabernacle and a little behind it". This apparition was similar to the one that occurred on September 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **What can we do to commemorate these events?**

Here are three ways:

- 1. Recall the historical facts about each event**
- 2. Learn more about the significance of the message for our times**
- 3.- Celebrate these events by prayer or reflection**

The apparition of Saint Vincent's heart could be the basis for a "Vincentian Day." Choose the time, the content and the form of this celebration.

The vision of Christ in the Eucharist is something that is appropriate for this "Year of the Eucharist." *"In this year of the Eucharist may Christians be ever more firmly committed to witnessing to the presence of God in the world. The "culture of the Eucharist" promotes a culture of dialogue.."*John Paul II

The events that took place on the night of July 18<sup>th</sup> present many avenues that can be explored in pastoral celebrations: moving "from darkness into light", the theme of confidence, Mary's call to come to the foot of the altar, prayer for peace, young people with problems...

November 27<sup>th</sup> could be celebrated with Christian and parish groups, learning more about the symbols of the globe, the rays of light, the Medal, and the precious message these symbols contain.

These are just a few suggestions, Every Province and every House can decide how best to celebrate this anniversary.

### **French bibliography**

For more information about the apparitions read Fr Laurentin's first book, "Saint Catherine Laboure and the Miraculous Medal", particularly:

- \*Pages 290-300 ( St. Catherine's own account in 1841)
- \*Page 334, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1856: the heart of Saint Vincent and the Eucharist
- \* Page 350-351, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1876, The Virgin of the Globe
- \* Page 352, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1876

After Sister Catherine was beatified there were many articles in the Echo and many more appeared during 1979-1980 in preparation for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions.

Sister Claire Herrmann  
*Archives*

SPECIAL 175<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1830 APPARITIONS

**A way of interpreting the founding message of  
the apparitions of 1830**

**1. THEOLOGICAL REFERENCE POINTS WITH REGARD TO THE  
APPARITIONS OF 1830 (APRIL- DECEMBER)**

In order to understand the founding message given to Catherine Laboure we have to take into account the whole series of apparitions; manifestations of the heart of Saint Vincent, the apparitions of Our Lord in the Eucharist and also the appearances of Our Lady.

**The heart of Saint Vincent (25<sup>th</sup> April- 2<sup>nd</sup> May)**

The “vision of the heart” which was repeated on three consecutive days, has a tremendously rich significance if we reflect on the symbolism of the colours as explained by the seer herself.

*The colour “white”, according to Catherine, “proclaimed peace, tranquility and calm, innocence and unity.”* These four words complement one another and not one of them should be overlooked. Biblical theology would lead us to give priority to the first of these words. In both the Old and the New Testament peace is the essential feature of Messianic times, God’s greatest gift to humankind that comes to us through the Risen Christ. **The peace** God gives to us and which pervades our whole being, moves us to forge links with our brothers and sisters; bonds of dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation. The gospel of Peace, according to the letter to the Ephesians (6, 15), is a summary of Revelation.

*The “concept of fire” according to Saint Catherine, signifies “something that should make charity burn in our hearts.”* Fire is one of the great symbols of God’s presence and action in human history (cf. “the burning bush” of Horeb): the “*tongues, as it were, of fire*” at Pentecost, (Ac 2,3), One of the most striking sayings of Jesus takes up

this same image: “I have come to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were kindled already” (Lk 12,44).

The visionary understands that it is divine charity that will enlighten people. She is immediately at one with the central message of Gospel Revelation: that God is “Love.” (1 Jn 4, 8). God, who reveals his tender love for mankind in the person of his well-beloved Son who will give his life for the salvation of the world and will make love – love of God and love of one’s neighbour – the great commandment he entrusted to his disciples.

This young seer was, with all the ardour of her being, already a Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul, whom she admired so much that she wanted to follow his example by devoting her life to the service of the poor, and she prayed very fervently to this saint. She realised that the first thing that poor people need is love, that it is only by having a deep love for them that one can give oneself completely to serving them, and that it is from the heart of God that we draw the dynamic love that will make us want to serve them and give us the perseverance we need to do this.

Catherine’s thoughts turn specifically to the Company of the Daughters of Charity that she has just joined. She understands that the Company must “*renew itself*” be converted to a way of life more in keeping with the Gospel, and that it is called to “*spread all over the world*” in order to give witness there to that love which should be their guiding principle, particularly in their dealings with the poor, as it was for Saint Vincent. Let us keep in mind this worldwide dimension which will colour the other apparitions. It is one of the essential features of the Message.

The colours “*red-black*” obviously symbolise misfortune and suffering. The seer explains: “*Saint Vincent’s heart is deeply afflicted at the sight of the misfortunes that are going to befall France.*” We might think back to the troubled times of the revolutions in 1830, 1840 and 1871. But should we be thinking only of these times? Sensitivity to people’s sufferings and deep compassion for them are also part of the founding Message.

### **The apparitions of Our Lord in the Eucharist**

The Eucharist is at the heart of the Christian mystery. In our religion it is the sacrament which most powerfully signifies the presence of the Risen Lord at the centre of the Church and of human life, something Christ promised when he said, “*I am with you, even to the end of time.*” (Mt 28, 20).

How could we fail to see that the apparitions to Saint Catherine are linked to this sacrament? “*I saw...Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament...all the time that I was in the Seminary*”, she said. And she gives us the added details that on Trinity Sunday Our Lord appeared to her “*in the Blessed Sacrament, like a King who was crucified and stripped of his garments.*”

The secrets that Saint Catherine shares with us lead us to interpret the vision of the crucified and risen Jesus as identifying himself with all who suffer, with all the

victims of poverty, exploitation and oppression all over the world. This echoes for us the words spoken by the King, the Sovereign Judge of all humankind, at the Last Judgment (Mt 25, 31-36).

How could we Christians not feel challenged as we contemplate the compassion of the Son of God? This is at the heart of the **mystery of his presence** in human history.

### **The apparitions of Our Lady**

Father Rene Laurentin has been able to establish that there were three such apparitions and that they took place on specific dates.

#### **The apparition of 18<sup>th</sup> July 1830**

In the course of this first apparition, the Blessed Virgin reveals to Catherine that she wishes “*to entrust to her a mission*” that will bring her many trials. “*You will have much to suffer...you will be tormented...you will be contradicted....*” Special missions in the service of God generally bring with them many trials, as happened with Jesus. We can’t help but recall Simeon’s prophecy to Mary, “*a sword will pierce your own soul.*” (Lk 2, 35).

The words “*do not be afraid*” which the Blessed Virgin repeated twice, remind us of the encouraging words God speaks, in the Bible, to those to whom he is entrusting a special mission. The words “*do not be afraid*”, so strikingly used by John Paul II at the beginning of his pontificate, is a very apt call to be **courageous in our faith and in our mission** in times of difficulty. “*You will be given the grace*” said Our Lady, “*...have confidence*”.

Mary continues her revelations to Catherine, warning her in a detailed way, of the great misfortunes that will come on France and on the whole world: “*The whole world will be shaken by calamities of all kinds...the whole world will be plunged into grief.*” She even speaks of the bloody religious persecutions that will come: “*the Cross will be despised...the streets will run with blood...*”

From a theological and pastoral angle, it is interesting to note the emphasis on the global perspective of the message, it embraces all people who are deeply scarred by violence and suffering.

The visionary is asked to be completely open to the needs of all people and to pray for troubled humanity: “*Come to the foot of this altar. There, graces will be poured out on all those, great and small, who ask for them with confidence and fervour.*” So it is not just Catherine who is called to do this but all those who, through her, will come to know the Message. Surely this is an urgent plea for us to pray for the whole human race and to take to ourselves its sufferings and trials; to pray that this world will be one of justice and brotherhood and open to being converted to the teaching of the gospel. How

can we forget that prayer is a radical call to action, to do all in our power to make the world become what we have prayed it will be.

### **The apparitions of 27<sup>th</sup> November and of December 1830**

It would seem that Our Lady's apparition in December added nothing of theological significance. It seemed just to echo the second apparition which, on the contrary, was of decisive importance. This was the apparition that would spell out the special mission that was going to be entrusted to the young woman: that medal which was so original and so rich in symbolism that it wasn't long before people called it the "Miraculous Medal."

The lady who appeared to Catherine was indescribably beautiful, the shining reflection of the Beauty of God, of the glory that radiated from Christ during the Transfiguration, as it will one day radiate from those who rise from the dead, and the beauty which, through grace, can be reflected "as in a mirror" on human countenances even here on earth. (cf. 1 Cor 15, 43).

Meditating on the Beauty of God and the grace that beauty bestows on the saints is one of the most important traditions of eastern theology and spirituality. The beauty that transfigures the face of Mary and the "*rays of shining brightness*" that come from her hands in the vision of the Medal, constitute one of the most striking expressions of western Christian tradition. The rays of light are all the more significant as they are presented as "*the symbol of the graces that Mary obtains for people.*"

This marvellous vision of beauty enfolded against a background round which Catherine read the invocation, written in letters of gold, "*O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.*" As at Lourdes, not long afterwards, Mary is seen as the Immaculate Conception; a very marked feature of western devotion to Mary in the XIXth century. Let us remember a reference made to this privilege in some words of the Second Vatican Council: "*It was customary for the Fathers to refer to the Mother of God as all holy and free from every stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature. Enriched from the first moment of her conception with the splendour of an entirely unique holiness...*"

Then, in the vision, the picture turns over and on the back of the medal she sees the letter "M" surmounted by a small cross and below the letter, the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary. This last stage of the vision is vitally important.

It reveals Mary as being completely orientated towards the Redeeming Christ, as his Mother and as the Handmaid of the Lord (Lk 1, 38), as the One who took care to live always according to the light of God's Word (Lk 2, 23) and who said to the servants at the wedding feast of Cana, and through them said to all her Son's disciples and to the whole human race, "*Do whatever he tells you.*" (Jn 2,5). The vision is a strong affirmation of Mary's powerful intercession. But it remains "intercession", the intercession of a Mother, and of the servant she wished always to be.



Her heavenly mission is “the glory of God”, to go back to the words that she herself used during the first apparition to define the objective of the mission she was about to confide to Catherine. If, in the Message, God’s glory is reflected through Mary, it is so that her intercession and her appeals will lead people to discover the God who is Love. In short, Mary is an evangeliser.

The Medal is an icon for the poor. It is generally made from cheap metal and costs very little. Anybody can obtain one. Wearing the medal is a mark of confidence in and devotion to the One who, by grace, is our Mother, and just like a family heirloom, particularly a wedding ring, it can be of great sentimental value. Because we are human we need signs and symbols. The tremendous popularity of the Medal shows how much people appreciated it. Devotion to Mary is one of Christianity’s most important traditions. We see from the New Testament that Mary is closely linked to the Incarnation and the Redemption. Mary is God’s gift to the human race and she is also the pathway that leads to Him.

The Medal, as part of the general founding message of the 1830 apparitions, is a means of evangelisation. We need to go beyond the symbol, however, and try to discover the significance of the whole message and then put its teaching into practice.

## **II. A REINTERPRETATION FOR OUR OWN TIMES**

The Catholic Church today is the product of the dynamic Second Vatican Council and it is called to live and to develop the Council’s teaching. The principle feature of this Council is the emphasis it places on the social aspect of religion: followers of Jesus have to live their faith, not just in their personal and family life, or even as members of the Church, but also in the collective forms of activity in society: in politics, economic affairs, social relationships and within their particular culture.

Following in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church today has to give witness to the Gospel’s ever fresh power to confront the world’s challenges. These include:

- Globalisation, which, through its staggering proliferation of the means of communication, has made the whole human race interdependent;
- Exclusion and unemployment have greatly increased in western industrial society and so has the level of extreme poverty in all the economically underdeveloped countries: the number of people living in “absolute poverty” is estimated to be between 800 million and a billion.
- The enormous changes that have taken place in society destabilise people and make them fearful

- Dechristianisation continues to be a feature of western society.

This is the historical context in which we should now be responsibly heeding the founding Message of the 1830 apparitions.

**Some brief suggestions of things we might do:**

### **1. Strengthen the personal and community dimension of our faith**

The strong faith and the call to a deep level of conversion that the apparitions of 1830 called for, are just as necessary and meaningful in our own times.

It is essential that in our troubled and dechristianised world, we have a structured faith. We need to give serious thought to this and work out its practical applications during times of regular and solid prayer, as well as through the practice of “revision of life” that we undertake in the light of the Gospel.

The shared life of groups, teams and “fraternities” is the essential basis of mutual support in a world of harsh realities.

### **2. Recognise and develop the social aspect of religion**

Within the context of devotion to Our Lady, it is essential that we rediscover the powerful challenge that the Magnificat puts before society. Far from preaching resignation, it commits us to becoming courageous and generous sons and daughters of God as we strive to create a more just and fraternal world. We must not hesitate to boldly commit ourselves to being part of “the civilisation of love”, “the civilisation of the Beatitudes”, preached by John Paul II. This was already part of our Vincentian heritage and it is seen in the challenging founding Message of the 1830 apparitions.

In our times, **evangelisation and the apostolate of solidarity** have to be undertaken in the context of this “civilisation of love.”

**The preferential option for the poor** fits perfectly into “the civilisation of the Beatitudes”.

We cannot neglect **evangelisation and the apostolate of peace** which, in fidelity to Judeo-Christian Revelation, has to be one of the principal aspects of all evangelisation and every apostolate.

Like Cardinal Etchegaray we could speak of “establishing a civilisation of peace, love and life.” which he rightly says will be “the only way to avoid war, violence and death.” This outlook is very much in line with the founding Message of the 1830 apparitions. The crowds of pilgrims and of the faithful who continue to flock to the chapel of rue du Bac, show the people’s overwhelming response to Mary and to the young woman she honoured by judging her worthy to be her messenger. This shows how Mary can be a powerful evangelising influence for our times. With the great Marian

pilgrimages, the humble “*handmaid of the Lord* “, she whom “*all generations will call blessed*”, plays a major role in evangelising the world. As at Cana, she refers us to her Son, the Son of God and our Redeemer, and says, “*Do whatever he tells you.*”

Father Rene Coste, PSS  
*Doctor of theology*

SPECIAL 175<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE APPARITIONS OF 1830

**Mary is at the forefront  
of those who want to overcome evil by good**

Mary is at the forefront of those who want to overcome evil by good. This is what the Miraculous Medal shows very clearly. The front of the Medal presents this **message of peace and salvation** in three ways:

*The inscription: O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you."*

The Virgin Mary was **immaculate** from the time of her conception. This privilege was granted her through the foreseen merits of the Passion of her Son Jesus, and it is the source of her all-powerful intercession. That is why Our Lady invites all people to have recourse to her in times of trouble.

*Mary's feet are resting on a globe and they are crushing the head of a serpent.*

The globe represents our earth. The serpent personifies Satan and the forces of evil. The Virgin Mary is **engaged in spiritual combat**, the struggle against the evil which has our earth as its battleground. She calls us to conversion so that **we may think as God thinks**, not as the world does.

*Her hands are outstretched and her fingers are adorned with rings from which come rays of light which become more intense at the base.* The brightness of these rays inspires and encourages **our confidence**

**in Mary's faithfulness** to her Creator and to her children (the rings), **in the efficacy of her intervention** (the rays of grace that fall to earth) **in ultimate victory** (the light) since she is the first disciple of the Lord, the first to be redeemed.

On the reverse side of the Medal, the "M" and the cross are intertwined, pointing out to what extent Mary – and all Christians after her – must **unite themselves to the Passion of Christ, the One who completely overcame evil by good**. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, crowned with thorns, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary pierced by a sword, as foretold by the aged Simeon, give the same **message of being united in self-giving for the salvation of others**

The twelve stars surrounding these symbols remind us of Bible prophecies concerning **Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of the Church**. Perhaps it was not by chance that the European flag adopted this sign with its circle of twelve gold stars on a blue background, because this emblem was chosen in the earliest days of the European Community, by Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, two men of faith, who very possibly wanted, in this way, to place Europe under the protection of Mary.

Father, your Son always said “yes.”  
 By his Cross and Resurrection  
 He said it once and for all.  
 He planted in our earth  
 the “yes” that he eternally offers to you.

So we, too, can say “yes”.  
 We too, after Him and with Him,  
 in the strength of his obedient heart.  
 His “yes” has preceded ours,  
 as did the “yes” of his Mother,  
 Mary, Mother of us all.

All that the human heart  
 can hold of humility, availability,  
 of being able to listen and to obey,  
 is already contained in her “Fiat”  
 and finds there its consistency.

Put into our hands and on our lips  
 this “yes” of Mary,  
 even, and especially, at times  
 when in anguish or perplexity  
 we ask, “*Lord*  
*how can all this come about?*”  
 Father, grant us the grace  
 of believing that with You all things are possible  
 and give us the joy of saying,  
 “*Be it done unto me according to your word.*”

Cardinal Danneels