

Echoes September-October 2007

Spiritual life

Outline for the monthly retreat: "The language of the parables"
Father Javier Alvarez, Director General

Present day challenges

The universality of the human person (contd)
Professor Henri Joyeux

News from the Provinces

Appointments
Designation of Visitatrices and Provincial Directors

Visits by Superiors

Sister Evelyn Franc and Sister Marlene Rosa, General Councillor: Visit to the Province of Portugal
Sister Isabel Silva Ales, Echoes correspondent

Sister Evelyne Franc and Sister Mariarosa Camminatti, General Councillor: Visit to the Province of Naples
Sister Cecilia Di Giuseppe, Echoes correspondent

Sisters' Testimonies

Province of Belo Horizonte
Sister Heloise Helena, Daughter of Charity

Province of Curitiba: Seminary in Curitiba celebrates its 80th anniversary
The Seminary Formation Team

Province of Fortaleza: Jubilee Year (contd)
Sister Marie Dijesu Pinto, Echoes correspondent

Provinces of Italy: Session for young Sisters at the Motherhouse
Sister Annamaria Corallo, Daughter of Charity

The poor speak to us

Japan: Hiyo's wink

Beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira; 2nd December 2007

Province of Recife

History of the Company

Special centenary celebration of the birth of Mother Guillemín

Mother Suzanne Guillemín, Daughter of God, Daughter of the Church, Superioress General of the Company
V Mother Guillemín and the Second Vatican Council (contd)
Sister Claire Herrmann, Archives Service

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

A guide for the monthly retreat

Prophecy and hope, now and everywhere

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PARABLES

For this retreat I am putting before you another approach to the theme of the coming Assemblies; one based on the gospel parables. There is an obvious connection between prophecy and the use of parables: the prophets used the language of parables to communicate their message. Some prophets, like Hosea for example, even made their life a parable. As always, Jesus is the best example of the point we are making. He proclaimed the Kingdom through parables, adapting his teaching to the mentality of the people of his time. A parable is a story or a simple comparison which is meant to help people understand a much more important reality, in this case, the Kingdom of God. People like reading the gospel parables and their message is always stimulating. They are much, much more, stimulating than a classical symphony and never lose their power to move people. The parable of the sower, for example, brings us gently to the idea that we are responsible for making grow the seed of the word that we listen to and welcome (cf. Mt 13, 1-25). How many times must Jesus have seen the men of his town performing this task after the rainy season! Nearly all the parables are based on real situations, be they taken from the world of nature, human situations or matters connected with Palestine. This is precisely the way that parables differ from fables. Fables can be very appealing but they are not realistic and they always take place in a dream world of fiction.

The parables of Jesus are very beautiful and evocative. They are the very opposite of philosophical treatises which try to reach the truth through reasoning and logical conclusions about matters which are more or less abstract. The story of the Prodigal Son, for example, is an interweaving of fantasy, imagination and emotions but at the same time it is full of realism (cf. Lk 10, 25-37). And it is highly evocative because over and above all the details of the story, we see clearly the mercy of God. People who take to themselves the contents of this parable will inevitably be filled with joy and peace because they will have known at close hand God's mercy and forgiveness.

The parables challenge the listener or the reader, whether these be the people of Jesus' times or those of our own day. They are not little stories which are meant to be entertaining. The parables illustrate a point, denounce, bring joy, they are a wake up call..... They don't leave people indifferent, they make them become involved, they bring the listener into the heart of the scene and of the message they carry. The parable of the wicked vineyard workers is a clear example of this (cf. Mk 12, 1-12, Mt 21, 33-46). Jesus was condemned, not for telling stories but for telling parables.

Following on from this first reflection we might ask ourselves in what sense is the Vincentian vocation a parable? It is a parable in so far as it represents the historical Jesus, the Jesus of the Gospels. Saint Vincent used to often say to the

Daughters of Charity with great conviction that their vocation consisted in doing exactly what Jesus did (cf. C.8b). As a man, Jesus is no longer among us, because his existence was subject to the coordination of time and space, just as any other human life is. However, Christ lives on in his Church, in charisms and in people. So whoever sees a Vincentian person must see Jesus who heals, consoles, is concerned for the sick, the abandoned and the marginalised.

A Daughter of Charity who serves the poor is a living parable. She challenges others, using language that is more meaningful to our contemporaries. In her, too, people can appreciate those very features that characterise the parables that Jesus told. These parables are based on reality, and the Daughters of Charity were founded to work amid the realities of everyday life. The Daughters of Charity have for their cloister the streets of the city, that is to say, everyday life. The Vincentian parable springs from living with human beings, with life, with reality, with the great problems facing humankind. The Vincentian parable is lived out in hospitals, in homes for the elderly and among the wide variety of groups of excluded people.

The Vincentian life is wonderful and it has an appeal, not because it is easier than other walks of life but because the elements that make up this life are wonderful: seeing God as the absolute gives meaning to this life; the ideal of fraternity has to be lived out in communities. And the third element, a life dedicated to service in order to bring life to others, is an ideal form of fatherhood-motherhood which renders the vocation fruitful. We have seen, too, that a parable stimulates and challenges. It does not impose its message with the force of a prohibition or a commandment. A parable serves as a constant reminder which pricks our conscience. It does this in a way that is both gentle and firm. A Daughter of Charity, in her service of the poor where she practises the particular virtues of the spirit of the Company, attracts people much more than learned discourses full of theological reasoning. Over 30 years ago, Paul VI said that *“our world is more ready to listen to people who give witness than it is to teachers.”*

The theme of the Assembly can be interpreted as a call that the Company is making to all the Sisters and local communities to live a parabolic or prophetic life in accordance with the demands made by the Vincentian vocation within the Church. I would like to put before you three principles without which it is impossible to live the Vincentian vocation on a personal or community level, and fulfil the demands made by prophecy. I have borrowed three metaphors from the literature that deals with the parabolic nature of consecrated life.

1. The “desert” principle

In Sacred Scripture we see how the prophets used to go out into the desert in order to encounter God and to have a clearer and deeper insight into the message which they would later have to communicate to the people of their times. Before Jesus began his public ministry he withdrew into the desert (cf. Lk, 1-13). It is easier to find God there. However, people go into the desert in response to an interior call and never in compliance with a commandment, because the law regards the desert as a place accursed, a form of punishment, not as an opportunity to encounter God.

The desert can be thought of as prayer at a deep level and this brings the person to an experience of God, it is formation that suggests reasons for serving the poor and for living in community. The desert inculcates in us “the Vincentian mystique”. Without this there can be no prophets, at best there will be activists. *“The Founders reminded the Daughters of Charity that they could not persevere if they did not pray.”* (C.21b). Prayer, silence, the desert and formation are the roots of the tree,

the foundations of the house, the engine of the car. The Constitution just quoted says that perseverance is dependent on prayer. Prayer is not just a “need”, it is a matter of life or death and this is particularly true in our times that are characterised by cultures that are only on the horizontal level and which tend to ignore any reality that cannot be grasped by the senses.

If we are convinced of the importance of this first principle for living in a parabolic or prophetic way, we need to pay attention to some aspects of life that I shall be mentioning. For example, one’s day of service needs to be reasonable or balanced. Chapter II of the Constitutions is arranged according to this sequence: *“Given to God”...“In community”...“To serve Christ in those who are poor.”* (cf. CC. 7-15). We know that if we do not cultivate a balance between these three aspects of our life (spiritual, apostolic and community life for the mission) something is weakened and the way we live our Vincentian vocation deteriorates.

The desert principle alerts us to the possible danger of excessive attachment to the computer (internet), to television, to one’s mobile phone. On this matter, too, the Constitutions have something to tell us (cf. S 24). A healthy reduction in our affective (and in some cases effective) relationship with these methods of communication will bring us to see them for what they are: useful instruments and not ends in themselves. If these do become ends in themselves they can easily become sacramentalised. Also, these modern methods of communication have brought a lot of noise into our houses. To be aware of this is something, but we need to go further, since prophets need real spaces of silence in order to reactivate themselves. Can we really live out the “desert” principle if we are constantly surrounded by noise? Saint Vincent spoke to us about the “great silence” as a time for rearming our spiritual forces, a time for seeking the psychological and spiritual balance that we need. It would be a very good idea if, as we draw up our Community Plan, we were to spend some time reflecting on this and coming to an agreement on times of silence, if this has not been done already. This could be a new version of the Vincentian “great silence.”¹

Finally, the “desert” principle can invite us to take a closer look at how deep our prayer life is, particularly our meditation. Is this based on the Word of God and on the teaching of the Founders? We have to avoid the spiritual consumerism which plunges us into a search for new things and ends up obscuring, in a cloud of attractive offers, the indispensable fundamentals of our vocation. The depth of our meditation is proved by its ability to transform the person from within: mind, hands and heart. The mind, because one continues to acquire standards and gospel values that are opposed to those offered by the world. The heart, because one continues to grow in love for the poor, for one’s Sisters and for God. The hands, because genuine love needs to express itself in works of service and evangelisation. An everyday “maintenance” level of prayer is never to be disparaged but this was certainly not the deep prayer of the prophets, of Jesus or of Vincent and Louise.

2 The “periphery” principle

The “periphery” symbolises the place where poor people live. There are many ways of getting into contact with the periphery. One of these is to recognise that Christ is present in those who are poor, since Jesus identified himself with them in chapter 25 of St Matthew, and this should lead us to take action on their behalf. Another way is to commit ourselves to working with them in aid or promotional

¹ I was very pleased to read the recent reflection that Father Luis Vela made on this subject in “Annals”, Spain (cf. July-August 2007, pp. 388-402)

programmes. Working to change unjust structures can be an excellent way of going to the periphery. The common denominator of all these means is commitment in faith, and sharing in the actual life of the most disadvantaged. The periphery is the best antidote to any false spiritualism. *“What use is it if people have faith but not good works? Will that faith save them?”* asks St James. He then goes on to explain the connection between faith and good works: it is good works that prove we have faith (*“I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds; now you prove to me that you have faith without any good works to show.”*) (Cf. James 2, 14-18)

The Daughters of Charity were founded to live and work on the periphery. I have had the great good fortune to witness how the Company is offering the world beautiful communities-parables of charity in places of great poverty like the most marginalised slums of Jakarta, forgotten villages in northern Mozambique, shanty towns in Brazil, or in working with peasant families in Latin America.... Today these might be called “inserted communities”; they are the most powerful prophetic force and so are best able to evangelise the poor since they are motivated by the demands of the gospel and by a mystique that is not tied to any ideology whatsoever. Surely the future of the Company will depend on its ability to translate good intentions and theoretical options for the poor into concrete actions. There is a constant which is common to history and to the Company; this latter has always found renewal by coming close to the poor. And it will continue to do this in so far as it lives at the periphery and for the periphery. Many Provinces in the Company are concerned about the revision of their works. This is a healthy preoccupation if it is aspiring to ensure that the works are a good reflection of the Vincentian spirit. So when a particular work is replaced by one that is more Vincentian, the local community, the Province and the Company will become increasingly prophetic.

We must add a further point that should not be overlooked: it would be very difficult to lead a prophetic life on the periphery if one were sad, disheartened or lacking in zest. Prophecy, of its very nature, breathes joy and this is even more necessary in peripheral communities where people often find no joy in life. *“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness”* (Ph 4, 4-7).

2. The “frontier” principle

We must surely all have had the experience of being at some time at the border between two countries. This is a special place and can have different meanings for us. Indeed, for some people the frontier signifies entry into an unknown land and discovering what it is like, the way its inhabitants live, the places and monuments that are most typical of the country.... For other people the frontier is a place for contraband. There are yet other people who come here full of nostalgia and who, at the last minute, are tempted to return to their native country because they are convinced that they won't find anything worthwhile in this new place. The frontier invites us to look to the future with hope, to have our eyes wide open to discover new ways of living in the midst of life's dangers.

Going to the frontier, therefore, presupposes an attitude of constant searching and creativity. The prophets exemplified this. They were obliged to be like this in order to be able to challenge their contemporaries. Being at the frontier means being creative in order to challenge and to question, but this must always be connected with the testimony of how we live because we do not do this at all for show but to offer the witness of our lives. Let us not forget that it was the prophets' personal life that gave credibility to their words. In what way are we asked to be creative today?

In how we think and in what we do. In how we think, because inculturating the Vincentian charism must be our constant task and it requires the collaboration of all of us (Cf. VC 2d). Reflecting often on the way we live and work should serve to strengthen our personal convictions and present in a new way our vocation of service within the Church. Today, more than ever, evangelisation calls for times of reflection to see how our works help us to evangelise and how we can better transmit the message of Jesus. Creativity must also underpin what we do, our service, so that we can discover new forms of poverty which claim the services of the Company, or ongoing forms of poverty which require new forms of presence and of service.

Without this dynamic principle, our vocation loses its freshness and there is the danger of falling prey to the monotony of paths that are too familiar. When we come to understand that everyday we need to discover God's plans for us, we will see our vocation as an unfinished building, as a living being. The frontier opens our eyes, energises us from within, prepares us to practise discernment in order to discover the values and the counter-values that exist in our society. It brings us to reflect on the quality of our service and opens our ears to hear new cries of the poor. It sharpens our critical judgment so that we can see whether we have a simple, modest lifestyle as our Founders prescribed or whether, on the contrary, we need to reorient some personal and community attitudes. When sisters embrace this revitalising dynamic of the frontier adventure, then mobility and availability naturally follow on. In this matter, as in so many others, Saint Vincent was very clear.

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNICATION

- **Meditate on Mt 13 so as to appreciate deeply the language of the parables**
- **Reflection and personal review of our life, based on the three principles mentioned**
- **Given that the Company has called us to prophesy (or to be a parable), what aspect or aspects of this should be of particular concern to your community?**

Father Javier Alvarez CM
Director General

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Professor Henri Joyeux

The universality of the human person

Notes taken during a talk given by Professor Henri Joyeux at the formation session for the Chapel Pastoral Team on the subject of WELCOMING (contd)

Following on from the first part of my talk, I would like to draw your attention, first of all, to some important points with regard to welcoming people. In a second section we will spend some time considering how all human beings function, for the human person is both unique and universal

I – HOW CAN WE WELCOME PILGRIMS?

Before we look at the way human beings function, let us address the question of how to welcome people. Four verbs are important: observe, listen, understand and advise.

OBSERVE

To observe means to pay attention. We possess two cameras that function with great precision: the eyes that we have were not made to be left “in our pockets”, as is sometimes said in jest. Observation is important. My profession as a surgeon and a person in health care obliges me to observe continually. Twenty years ago, for example, whenever I went into an examination room, I never had to ask who the sick person was, because the person was staring me in the face. Today, however, I have to ask who is ill, because it is no longer so obvious: persons with cancer do not necessarily appear to be skin and bone, except of course, when they are at the end of their lives. Since the illness is not so easily seen, we need to be more attentive. The first thing that we see is the way a person is dressed, their appearance and their face. A person’s face is the outward representation of what lies inside. But what can be hidden behind one’s face? We need to see beyond the outward appearance of a person and especially to look for traces of the Spirit, because even in the most disturbed people, there are traces of the Spirit, even if they are but tiny traces. Zundel insists a great deal on the smile: *“Be the smile of divine goodness; the smile is the greatest power in the world.”* God’s smile is a creative smile. A smile costs nothing but does a lot of good. That’s what it means to be attentive to the person.

LISTEN

After observing, we need to listen. Listening means understanding. When we describe the ear, we can say that the external ear is made for receiving secrets. For example, when a mother wants to tell a bedtime story to her child, she whispers it into their ear. There again, we can’t forget that there are two ears: one for mummy and one for daddy! And all the secrets that pass into one’s ears are never erased because memory is quite extensive. We can store in our memory the fables of La Fontaine or mathematical formulas but memory capacity varies from one person to another. But we also have an emotional memory that reaches into the deepest part of our being: it is an endless wellspring, absolutely indelible in comparison with a computer’s memory. That means that if your computer has a memory of 30 gigabytes, it can’t store 31 gigabytes of memory. If you reach the 30 gigabyte capacity, you have to replace your computer in order to continue working or you can erase something. But emotional memory is different. If someone has suffered some horrible event during their childhood, such as sexual abuse, that memory can never be erased. Nevertheless, a person in these circumstances will try to forget this past abuse, and will bury it deep inside. They might be able to do so for a time, maybe 20 or 30 or 40 years, but one fine day, some chance circumstance will cause this event to surface again in a very specific way. This will be very disturbing, for it has already upset this person’s life since it is something that has never been resolved. That’s why it’s important to see how we can learn to manage and resolve difficulties that are rooted in our emotional memory, how to manage them for ourselves and also for other people. We need to listen to the interior voice within another person. That is the only place where the response to these difficulties can be found. We are the ones who must learn how to listen to another’s voice inside them, a voice that does not come to us via fax or email, but communicates something very profound for us. Zundel said that in order to learn how to listen to another person, we need to place ourselves in an attitude of silent acceptance like that of the Blessed Virgin. This

interior attitude calls for a silent heart that is able to listen to the other person. In our role of offering hospitality, we need to develop this interior attitude of listening.

UNDERSTAND

After listening comes understanding. In order to understand, we need to know how human beings function. I have learned a great deal about this subject thanks to persons who are ill.

ADVISE

Finally, you have to advise people. It is not easy to offer advice, however, because you are not psychologists or physicians. Also, the person before you may be ill. That makes it very difficult. So you should not say very much but your words ought to restore the other person's confidence, patience and endurance. These are three very important things that we need to practise, especially with people who are most in need. Zundel said: *"There is something about words that reveals what cannot be fully expressed, but which captures the most essential element."* When a person shares something terrible that has happened to them, our listening in compassionate silence is more valuable than any judgment we can make. It is often better to say nothing at all. It never serves the truth to respond immediately and automatically, even if that seems to us to be the best thing to do. At times we might think that if we don't speak the truth, we are lying. That is wrong and can even be a serious mistake. Even if we feel better for saying it, we may be doing a terrible wrong to the other person. Any lack of patience, flexibility or know-how can be a failure in the service of truth. That is why it is important to arm ourselves with patience and flexibility. I love the other person, and that's why I must pay attention to this individual. Know-how will also help us to wait years, if necessary, before we know the best way to present the truth. Finally, it is not easy to give advice. Perhaps we need to dialogue a bit longer with this person. Let us avoid the danger of wanting to act on our own, and let us know how to direct a person towards a physician, a psychologist or a confessor as necessary.

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN PERSON

Having been a surgeon since 1972, I decided 25 years later to support sick persons in the final stages of their life. I had come to realise that they asked important questions about life, and for them, details no longer mattered or had lost their importance. That's why I suggested to the patients in my care that they take part in a reflection process on the way human beings function. At first, they were astonished and protested: *"But Doctor, after all your studies, you must already know all this yourself."* I answered by saying that I was very knowledgeable about the functioning of the body, the feet, the liver, the pancreas, etc., but that all that is only part of what it means to be human. I can recall sick people who were a week or several months away from the end of their life, and who knew this. I would say to them: *"You must know more things, because I am not in the same situation as you are."* Also, I noticed that the day a person loses a limb is the day that he or she better knows its function. In the same way, it is only after having lost a loved one from our life that we realise the importance of that person's presence. When one is in the process of losing one's life, that is the moment when one can, without a doubt, better understand how human beings function. In a general way, people who are ill say: *"on the one hand there is the body, on the other, the spirit."* In their room, their television is always turned on, and they see the news, but it doesn't interest them. For them, it is no longer important. One day, an elderly woman said to me: *"Look at the walls of my room."* Several small pieces of paper had been hung up there: on one was

written: *"to my dear Granny, I am thinking about you, signed Alexandra"*; another one said: *"Granny, we love you, come home soon."* She added: *"That's my heart."* In this way, she clearly made the distinction between the domain of the mind and that of the heart, meaning the spiritual-understanding part, the neural functioning, and the part that is heart. When I ask young children in school where their secrets are, the boys point to their heads and the girls to their hearts. That means that boys are Cartesian, they reflect with their heads, while girls have a more developed dominant part in the order of feelings or emotions. In this way, men and women do not function in the same way. This complementarity is something extraordinary. So we have a body, a mind, a heart or the emotional side; and there are patients who have written in their medical records when they come into hospital, that they would like to meet a chaplain, an imam or a rabbi. For my studies, I tried to choose persons who didn't have that written down. In that way, I didn't know if they were Catholic or of another faith. Among the 30 sick persons I included, at least half of them did not want to talk about the soul, but they sensed that there was a fourth dimension in addition to the body, the mind and the heart. They spoke about something else without being able to express it concretely. By using a different word: *anima*, which is from a foreign language, it was more acceptable. In fact, the term *anima* sounded to them like: *"it animates"*. One day, a young person who was ill and close to death was having difficulty breathing. While I was sitting on the chair, he said to me, breathlessly: *"look at your chair."* I immediately looked at it, thinking that something had broken. He said: *"the four legs"*. Since I still did not understand, he added: *"nourish the four legs"* and continued to explain to me that like a chair with four legs, we have four things to nourish each day: the body, the mind or understanding, the heart or emotions and then the last part. I said to him: *"the soul"*. He said no! *"So what is it?"* I replied. He responded: *"It's deeper than that, deeper."* In the end, he was in the process of explaining to me, without realising it, what Saint John of the Cross spoke of as the central point of the human person. Using this image of the four legs of a chair, he was speaking about the complementarity of the parts of our being. In effect, if one of these four legs is not in good condition, we will not be stable. And I notice that many of my colleagues are "not very stable" since they refuse to acknowledge the spiritual in their life. This is where those who are ill can play an important role for their physician, because when people are at the end of life, they are the ones who give; we have nothing to give to them. We can only give medicine to ease their physical suffering and morale. And after that, we hurry away...Why? Basically we are fleeing from this spiritual element that is in the process of departing. One day, as I entered a room, I heard a voice that made me stop. In the room however, there was only the sick person. I said to her: *"I had the impression that there was someone else here. Were you talking to someone?"* The woman who was sick said to me: *"Yes, I'm in the process of recording messages for my children and grandchildren."* She wanted to leave them a cassette tape because she knew she would soon be departing this life. Standing there next to her, I asked her very gently what she wanted to tell them. She replied: *"I'm telling them that I'm like a butterfly that is coming out of its cocoon and is going towards the light."* When we hear something like that, we are touched at the deepest levels of our being, and that remains engraved in our emotional memory. After that, the Holy Spirit does what He wants.

For us as physicians, and specialists, when someone comes to the end of their life, we send them to a specialised Medical Centre for the terminally ill. We try to prepare the person: *"Well, we've done everything we could here; now we're going to send you to a Medical Centre."* We don't mention the name of the Centre because the people know that its name is synonymous with death. So we don't really tell them that they are going to die. But when they come to the Centre and they see its name, they understand everything. In my opinion, that's not the best solution. I don't mean that we shouldn't tell the truth, but, in my opinion, we need to always keep a lamp of

hope burning. I often tell my collaborators that if some day they come to see me in my room and say to me: *"You are very sick and are going to die"*, I will throw them out because I will tell them: *"I know that, you don't need to tell me."* Sick persons at the end of their lives have the deep inner conviction that they are in the last moments of their life. It is in these moments that they have the most to give us, their doctors. They welcome us into their room and we receive a great deal from them. Within each human being, we find these 4 parts that can be intellectually separated from each other but in reality are inseparable. It's the interconnection between our body, our mind, our heart and our anima. But how can we ever express it? Here is how another terminally ill person explained it in a different way. He was a French colonial, which means he was born in another country, in Morocco. He said: *"During my treatments, I thought I was going to die, but something in me was stronger than that and said to me: you need to hang on to life."* Because he loved his son, daughter and wife, he had something inside him urging him to live. He drew a picture of the human being like a dwarf palm tree, that is, a palm tree with a rather small trunk and beautiful palm leaves. Let us imagine the three palm leaves as the body, the mind and the heart. These 3 palm leaves are in good condition as long as one enjoys good health. And these three leaves are so beautiful that they hide the trunk by covering it up. We know very well that a dwarf palm has a trunk, but it is not visible. However, the moment that one of the leaves becomes ill, it becomes translucent and transparent and then the trunk comes into view. Seeing the trunk appear is a way of seeing what happens when people become ill. If we suffer in all three dimensions at the same time: body, mind and heart, we then see what animates the person, the anima. That is the moment when we see the trunk appear, that is, the thing that animates us. What strikes me most is that people in the final stages of illness are all hyper-spiritual, even if they say they don't have the least bit of faith. You might say to me: perhaps that is fear! Did not Pascal say: *"If God exists, it would be as well to reconcile oneself to him before dying to perhaps avoid being punished."* Of course, that might be the case, but I don't think that's the reason. I think that there exists in the depths of every human being a very deep spiritual root. And this is shown in a very specific way in these moments.

II – HOW ALL HUMAN BEINGS FUNCTION

I am now going to focus on the essential components of all human beings, calling your attention to several dysfunctional aspects that are more common in our society today.

THE BODY

Whenever we look at someone, what we notice first is their face and hands. Of course, they have feet, but in general, hands are visible, not hidden by gloves. We shake hands as a way of saying hello.

When I am with young children, I often ask them: "Which part of your body is secret?" Depending on the profession of their parents, they say: their skeleton, their liver, red blood cells... all the parts that aren't seen. Then a little boy, using a child's language, says sex organs. So I answer that he is right. And as a way of explaining it, I tell them: *"You see, your face is not secret, you show it to everyone; your hand is what you extend to everyone to say hello, etc. But the most secret part of your body is located in the region of your sexuality."* It's important for them to know this because today, we need to teach children to be careful of adults who want to have contact with the areas of their body that they have no right to touch. It is important to explain to children that their body belongs to them, without having to feel obliged to give them an anatomy course with diagrams. I end by pointing out to them that our skin is

the boundary of our body. If we could spread the skin of an adult on a table, we would have 1.5 square metres of surface area of skin, interwoven with billions of sensitive cells capable of perceiving touch, gentleness or the lack of it, heat, cold, pain, etc. There are also areas referred to as erotic zones, related to sexuality, about which today's society is obsessed. Why these obsessions? A first part of the answer to this question might be that this sexuality was more or less stifled for 2000 years: in the end this has led to a real explosion. Sigmund Freud, born in Austria in 1836, is one of the scientists who most influenced the thinking of his century. Inventor of psychoanalysis, he brought to light a certain number of elements which contribute to or have an adverse effect on a person's state of health.

THE CONSCIOUS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Another element that constitutes a human being is the mind. On this level, we need to distinguish between the conscious and the unconscious. For a long time, specialists have been seeking to understand the unconscious, and they have not finished this research. For me, I believe that the Holy Spirit is present in the unconscious. In this regard Zundel said: *"To go towards God is to go towards self."* It's all about continually seeking our centre. We have an extremely active unconscious, responsible for a certain number of automatic reflexes that it is good to try to understand. The conscious is easy to explain, while the unconscious is more complicated. One of my friends who is a monk confided to me one day that he spent a long time trying to find himself. One day, he met Jean Vanier who said to him: *"I am not too much in favour of psychoanalysts, but you really need one. Go and see one of my friends in London."* He went to see him. When asked to draw his dreams, the monk replied: *"I don't dream and I don't know how to draw."* That doesn't matter, the psychoanalyst said, *"You will draw in whatever way you can and you will dream in whatever way you can."* And from that day on, the monk began to dream. What had happened? He didn't just begin to dream, for he had already been dreaming, but instead of burying his dreams, he began to remember them. It's interesting because I've noticed it myself. To simplify things, we can say that there are both negative and positive dreams. There are nightmares and there are also dreams like those in the Bible, where we can discover meaning in them. In the Old Testament, when Joseph or others dreamed in visions, they took them very seriously. These kinds of dreams are ones that come from the unconscious and come into one's mind. Is the Holy Spirit at work, then, while we sleep? I believe that it's possible. Even if our brain is at rest, our body continues to work: the heart continually pumps blood from our head to our toes, the blood is filtered of impurities and in the morning, our bladder is full. Our bodies work, but not just as a machine does. That means that the mind is at work. I had the opportunity to go to Medjugorje. There the *Gospa*, as the visionaries call the Blessed Virgin Mary, tells them to go to sleep with her in mind and in that way they will awaken with her. Going to sleep while praying the Hail Mary causes you, when you wake, to finish what you had not said! So it is a question of getting a grasp on our unconscious where many things can be found. There are what can be called foundational memories which are memories that we do not see or understand but which are made known to us after a certain number of years: 40, 50 or 60 years later.

Two examples illustrate this very clearly:

The first comes from **Teilhard de Chardin** who used to play with a reddish-brown stone when he was a young boy. He was fascinated by this stone and all his life He tried to find out the reason for its colouring.

The second example is that of **Israel Zoller**. Born in 1881 to a rich Jewish family in Galicia, Spain, at the time of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, Israel was an outstanding, intelligent child who did well at school. His mother had a very faithful servant who was Catholic. When he was 7 years old, Israel became friends with the son of the servant and would go to their house to play. The first time that he went into his playmate's bedroom and saw hanging above the door a man on a cross, he said: *"He must have done some very wrong things for them to put nails into his hands and feet."* Israel spent his entire life seeking to understand why the man was there. He did advanced studies in Vienna and then in Florence where he attended classes at the University as well as those in the rabbinical college in the city. Named Chief Rabbi of Trieste in 1918, he chose to become an Italian citizen at the start of World War I. He lived in Trieste for 20 years, compiling Biblical texts. While studying the Torah, he also began to read the New Testament. He remembered the time in his childhood when he saw a cross in the home of his young Christian friend. The image of the cross was fixed in his mind and he decided he would try to better understand this crucified man. In 1939, he was named Chief Rabbi of Rome. The anti-Semitic laws under Mussolini obliged him change his name to a more Italian sounding one: Zolli. From the time he arrived in Rome, Zolli alerted the Jewish authorities to the intentions of the Nazis who were streaming on to the Italian peninsula, but got little response. He was treated as a foreigner, as he was born in Eastern Europe and was not familiar with Roman Judaism. In 1943, Commandant Kappler immediately imposed certain conditions on the Jewish community: they were to hand over 50 kg of gold or 300 hostages in 48 hours. The Jewish people in the Ghetto managed to collect 35 kg. Zolli, who had a price on his head by the Gestapo, asked the members of the community to put his name first on the list of hostages. The community managed to collect the gold from the Catholic parishes in the city. In the months that followed, the Chief Rabbi lived in hiding in order to continue to help his flock to escape. He survived, thanks to Roman families who hid him at the risk of their own lives. He told how Pope Pius XII opened the cloisters of the monasteries and the convents in the city and surrounding areas to provide shelter for entire families of Jewish people. The rabbi's daily life was marked by suffering, cold, hunger and anxiety. When the Americans arrived in 1944, his role as Chief Rabbi was restored to him. That same year, on the day of Yom Kippur, Zolli had a crucial experience: he saw the face of Christ. After resigning from his role as Chief Rabbi, he sought instruction from a Catholic priest with a view to being baptised. He was much maligned for this by the Jewish community. He soon found himself completely destitute. At that point, Pope Pius XII offered him a teaching post at the Gregorian University which would provide him with a livelihood and make it possible for him to continue his exegesis work at the Biblical Institute. After meeting the Holy Father on several occasions, Zolli spoke to his daughter about the current hostility in prophetic terms: *"You'll see; they'll make Pius XII the scapegoat for the entire world's silence in the face of the Nazi crimes."* When he became a Catholic, Zolli chose Eugenio as his baptismal name in honour of the Pope. In the final years of his life, Zolli worked to improve relationships between the Catholic Church and the Synagogue. The last part of his life was spent in Rome, where his days were divided between his duties as professor and his work as a writer. With great respect for the Talmud and the Jewish faith, Zolli made a comparison between the Old and New Testaments, explaining that the Old Testament is the love of the law and the New Testament is the law of love. He must have reflected deeply and worked hard to come to such a conclusion. He died in 1956. His life is truly fascinating, and it is easy for us to see how his foundational memory would direct his entire life.

Everyone has these foundational memories. When I was seven years old, I heard my grandfather mutter: *"I am useless."* That made me feel bad, as I wondered how anyone could say that at his age, and I told myself: *"You will always be useful."*

Now, when I see retired persons suffering depression because they feel useless, I tell them: *“There are still many things to do to make life better for people on this earth. Do something for them.”*

Each of us has positive and negative memories, wounds or scars from childhood or adolescence. These wounded areas from early childhood can exercise a powerful influence on our life. A book entitled: *Absent Father, Absent Son* shows the importance of the role of the father for a child. A professor of psychology stressed that the father is even more important than the mother. He isn't trying to diminish the mother's role, of course, but he asserts that in general, maternity is a natural thing and poses fewer problems than paternity. Being a father is a process that has to be built up day after day.

To sum up, then, it is important to be aware of the way we function psychologically and help our unconscious to become as conscious as possible. Let us not be afraid of our dreams; let us try to interpret them. Christians need to learn the theories of psychology. In Seminaries, there needs to be better formation regarding the way the human being functions. We all have passions and compulsions. Zundel said with regard to passions: *“We should not ill-treat our passionate tendencies; we all have them.”*

EMOTIONS

The issue of homoparenting

One of the current problematic issues in our society is homoparenting, the adoption of a child by two persons of the same gender. Careful reflection is necessary before making such important decisions. I think that our society is weak on this point and needs to acquire greater maturity. Are we mature enough to make such significant decisions for children? Because this is definitely about the child. It is not about the right to have a child, but the rights of the child. The situation of having two fathers means that the adopted child does not have a mother. Having two mothers says to the child: *“You have two mothers, but you don't have the right to a father.”* As adults, we have children not because we have the right to have them, but so that we can guide them to a life of autonomy, freedom and responsibility so that they can leave the family home with complete freedom. The media transmit false information to us in the name of false science. They tell us that studies show that these children do well. Obviously, they give as examples children who were born from a father and a mother where the father has gone off with another father. So then they say that the child is the son of two men and that he is fine even if he has no mother. In fact, there was at the beginning a mother and a father. We are not here to pass judgement, but it is not appropriate to have us believe that if this child does well, it is because he is with two fathers and no mother. That's not true because he originally had both a father and a mother. We need to reflect carefully about what is needed for our development. We come from two rivers, as I have said, but we first of all have spent nine months in our mother's womb. I said at one point that the emotional relationship between the child and the mother is clearly ahead of the emotional relationship between the father and child. So, if I were to weigh them against each other, the maternal emotional weight is heavier in the beginning than the paternal emotional weight. The baby receives a great deal of affection from the mother: caresses, nappy changes and all the affection she can give. The problem is that whether this mother is going to parent this child alone or whether this mother indeed has a companion, a husband, a spouse, the man is awkward and clumsy. She thinks he doesn't know how to take good care of the baby.

Let us imagine several types of situations

First of all, the case of two fathers adopting a young boy. While the child is young, everything is fine. He is nice and obedient. When adolescence comes, however, it is normal for him to be in opposition to his parents. In a regular family, the adolescent tests his or her father and mother and this opposition is constructive for the child. But in this first case, when this young boy, who has had enough of two fathers and dreams of having the mother he does not have, reaches adolescence, he will reject his two fathers. It's in his unconscious. His friends who have a father and mother will say: *"You have two fathers, you don't have any mother."* When you have a father, you reject him, but when you have two, it's a double rejection! That's why he will go after the feminine element he has been missing since his childhood and will do anything he wants with girls. We shouldn't deceive ourselves, it will be disastrous.

Now let's look at the reverse situation: two fathers adopt a young girl. At the beginning, she is cute. She grows up very nicely. When she reaches adolescence, however, she comes into conflict with these two fathers who are beginning to be afraid because she is starting to look at other men, to have boyfriends. And what is going to happen? This young woman who has no mother will be attracted to the feminine because she has had an overdose of the masculine. Lacking any significant affection on the female side, she perhaps will be attracted to a nice woman who would be about her mother's age, and she will try to compensate by using this woman as a substitute mother.

For a boy, the image he has of woman comes from his image of his mother. For a girl, the masculine image comes from the image she has of her father. Whether it is good or bad, this image is completely imprinted in our psyche: for men, the feminine image comes via their image of their mother and the opposite is true for women. What is important for young people is for them to understand what influences them along the way and what will help them in their future life. The influences of the father and the mother are absolutely fundamental.

Let us now imagine two mothers who adopt a child. If it's a young boy who is raised by two mothers, everything will be fine at first. But when adolescence arrives he will have had enough of two mothers and will begin to insult them. The mothers don't understand this rebellion at all. What is behind all this? By insulting his mother, he is unconsciously crying out that he misses having a father to create a balance and to hear him say: *"Son, respect your mother, because your mother is the woman I love!"* With this overdose of two mothers, the child reaching adolescence will be attracted by what is missing, that is the father he has never had, and will seek a paternal figure to substitute and compensate for this.

Developing feelings and emotions

These problem situations that we have just been describing help to illustrate the difficulties that exist in building up our affective side (feelings and emotions). Affectivity is not something innate; it is developed little by little during our life. In order for it to develop in a balanced way, it is necessary to have a healthy supply of affection from our mother at the time of birth and the presence of our father. That is why a mother who gives birth to a baby must also give the father the opportunity to take care of the baby from time to time. I wish there was a "public health licensing exam" to teach young people, as they develop and mature, the things that are so important for their lives.

Too little or too much protection can cause damage to all affectivity and whatever relates to it. Take for example, a family of 5 children; they are very good Christians, the mother is a musician, the father a physics professor and watercolour artist. The parents are overprotective of their children and decide that they shouldn't go to primary school. They are taught at home: the mother provides the education and the father does the rest and in this way they are not subjected to the bad influences of school. Once the children encounter the real world, the difficulties begin. When the children start middle school, they compare themselves with others and discover the real world. At the age of 13, their daughter becomes seriously ill with anorexia and requires hospitalisation, obviously too hurt by her peers. At the age of 22, their 3rd son develops serious emotional problems. Naturally, we cannot blame the parents because they always did their best, but they made mistakes without realising it. In order to protect children, we need to help them discern what is good and what is not.

In our world today, there are inconsistencies related to a serious lack of understanding of how human beings function: our bodies, our urges and impulses, the function of our mind, our emotions, all the spiritual aspects of our being that provide balance for all the other areas of our life. This means we have to be attentive to the whole person and understand how the various elements that make up the human person relate to one another.

We should not try to deny or eradicate the differences that exist between the feminine and masculine. Women, because of motherhood as well as their spiritual dimensions, have a more significant emotional capacity. The masculine make up is somewhat different: the head and reasoning often play a more important role. Young people need to learn this complementarity of feelings and the ability to reason.

My wife lost her father when she was 2 years old. She speaks about him, though, as if she had known him, because her grandmother often spoke about him as if he were alive. The images that we can provide for children in the case of absence have a role in their development. Some children who have experienced the worst difficulties overcome them very well. But if they have been able to, it is because there have been others to help them.

We need to be aware that in today's world, the speed at which it functions, the images we receive, the advertisements we see, all influence us unconsciously and have a strong effect on children. Today's world is not the world of the past. Children have television on their mobile phones. When children listen to their walkman, don't think they are listening to classical music. They are listening to bad advice about sexuality because their parents don't talk to them about it.

If we deprive children of food for 4 days, they will get hungry and will go looking for food in the rubbish bin. If we don't give our children what is absolutely essential for them to develop their emotional and sexual orientations, they will look for it in "rubbish bins". And in the rubbish bins of society today, we have DVDs, video cassettes, glossy magazines in full colour... Our society is set up so as to nourish the people of today with this kind of filth. Forty years ago none of this existed. These are the changes in society that we must adapt ourselves to, not to accept it all but to seek ways of avoiding major problems.

In the past, our parents did not talk to us about sexuality and we managed to make our way through it, but it was not the same world. Today, parents must inform their children. Each parent has a particular role in relationship with their daughter or son. The most important time for a child is puberty. For young girls, it begins at about

8 years of age, for boys, about 10 years. Since the previous generation did not receive formation about feelings and sexuality, parents today are not sufficiently aware of the necessity to teach their children about it. For children, adolescents and young adults, specialised teaching methods exist and allow dialogue between the parents and their children. If we do not talk to children and young people, we let television and the streets teach them.

A mother wrote to me that the day that she discovered her little 4 year old daughter playing with two of her dolls, having them make love to each other, she didn't scold her. Instead, she said to her: *"Come here, my little one, I'm going to tell you a beautiful story, I'm going to whisper in your ear the most beautiful secret. I'm going to tell you about when you were inside of me. You spent 290 days in my tummy, in a water-cradle with a little cord attached, moving, turning cartwheels, etc. You had a wonderful time in my tummy."* And so her mother told her about her life. It is essential that mothers explain these truths to their children. A little girl aged 4 isn't going to ask how it is done, but how she got out. When she is 5 or 6 she'll ask how she got there. We have to adapt our teaching to the age at which it is necessary to start giving this information. When a child asks a question that does not correspond to his or her age, it means that he or she is repeating what adults have said. It is not necessary in this case to answer the question because the child is not capable of understanding. Instead, it is important to respond with what is appropriate for the child's age. It is even better to anticipate their questions by explaining to children the fundamental ideas about life, in language that is right for them.

Automatic responses to anxiety

It seems important to reflect with you on ways that people respond to crises. Faced with suffering, how does a person react?

When I am anxious, what am I afraid of? I am afraid of dying. When you just miss a collision with a vehicle on the road, you say: *"Death was staring me in the face but I managed to escape it."* What is a reflex? It is something over which I have no control. The doctor taps my knee, the knee immediately flexes: that's the patellar reflex. If I want to prevent this reflex, I contract my muscle and prevent its functioning. That means that if I understand the process, I can block it.

There are three types of reflex action with regard to anxiety: one that relates to food, one is connected with money and another is related to love.

1 – Food

The food reflex involves turning to any form of food as soon as one experiences anxiety. This can lead to bulimia (for example, a chocolate bar that lasts 5 minutes and provides compensation) and can end up in excess weight and obesity. On the other hand, anorexia is a reflex process that expresses one's pain to family and friends by telling them: *"love me, pay attention to me, I exist."* If we are aware of this food reflex and decide to control it, it can be transferred elsewhere: into the domain of money or affectivity.

2 – Money

We see people who spend their money foolishly: for example, they accumulate things in an exaggerated manner to the point that this behaviour becomes a drug. Others make extravagant purchases: one day, one of my colleagues, in a senior university position, saw a beautiful car worth 40 million francs (former currency) and decided to buy it on the spot. Since he didn't have enough money in his account, and

his wife had a different account, he took his wife's credit card and bought the car. Every Sunday, he takes his car out as if he's walking his dog. It's his toy! This man is clearly responding to anxiety by reflex action and has not been able to manage his situation.

Credit is very well organised today. There are many games of chance in which people expect to win the jackpot. It makes people dream. A jockey was telling me that people who bet on horses generally lose, over the course of their lifetime, the price of their house. These are well known statistics. That shows that in our world there are experts who know how to take advantage of our reflexes. The marketing industry knows very well how to trick us.

3 – The domain of love

An abuse of love leads to unrestrained sexuality. In today's cultural setting, we have films, magazines, etc. that endlessly represent love under this abusive, excessive form. What excites people is not love that goes well, but love that does not go well. Those who have multiple encounters are also seeking love. These people pass from one romantic partner to another and never find a stable relationship. It involves a fear of commitment and in the end it leads to comparison of partners.

Understanding these reflexes allows us to better take hold of our lives and master our reflexes. There is no single remedy to overcome them, it requires making personal decisions: don't buy any more chocolate, don't carry your credit card around, etc.

Understanding these reflexes allows us to have a better understanding of the people we welcome with all the problems they have to face with regard to the way they function as human beings. Knowing ourselves better gives us a better understanding of our unconscious its role in our reflex processes

A fragile and vulnerable world

I would also say that our world today is, at the same time, quite mature and very fragile. What makes it fragile is that knowledge is evolving at a phenomenal speed. Human intelligence has invented planes, the media, etc. For example, I can take a plane from Paris to Mayotte. After an 11 hour flight, we arrive and there is a time change. I suddenly find myself in a setting that is not my own, in a different culture. If I stay there a week, I have to quickly adapt myself in order to understand what is going on around me. Then I return home. Everything happens very quickly and that makes me vulnerable.

Other factors that make us vulnerable are linked to insecure employment, health difficulties, a certain contempt for those involved in politics or religion: people with a certain level of power or authority and those who have responsibilities are ridiculed, and as a result, they no longer represent anything and are no longer role models. On this level, our world is psychologically fragile.

Even though we Christians are fragile, we have a duty not to be so. Saint Paul said: "*my strength is in my weakness.*" I don't think that is a good translation, I would rather translate it as: "*my strength is in the knowledge of my weakness.*" When we know we are weak, that we risk falling, then we pay attention. That is what makes us strong. We have a duty to know that we are weak and a duty to train ourselves.

In 1905, a very learned Spanish man was awarded a Nobel Prize because he demonstrated that beginning at about the age of 20, human beings begin to lose brain cells. However, two years ago, another learned man demonstrated that humans are capable of increasing the number of brain cells all through life, which means that he demonstrated the opposite of the Nobel prize winner of 1905. So we can multiply our brain cells all through our lives if we put them to work; but if we don't use them, we lose them. At the end of each day, it is good to ask ourselves: what did I learn today?

CONCLUSION

I would like to end by saying that in our mission of welcoming others, we do not have infused knowledge about how to welcome. We can find ourselves with individuals whose circumstances are extremely difficult. The essential dispositions for practising hospitality are attitudes of the heart:

- An observant attitude to see what the other person is like, how he or she is dressed... not in order to judge but to have a general idea about them.

- A listening attitude, being attentive in such a way that the other feels listened to and can express his or her difficulty. This means showing that we are ready to listen and that we understand clearly what is being said. Sometimes people will "confess" to us, that is, they trust us and confide in us because they know we will maintain confidentiality, and that in a certain sense, we represent God for them.

- An attitude of understanding in the face of all suffering. We need to be able to take on board the anguish of those who are suffering or unhappy and help them to bear the burdens in their life. We also need to always maintain a sense of hope for every person. Our compassion doesn't need to make us cry with those who suffer but to try to help them make the most of a situation and to open for them a pathway of hope. Be careful not to be too quick to say that suffering is redemptive. Naturally, the passion of Christ is an element of human suffering explainable by the theology of the Redemption, but we must be careful about speaking of co-redemptive suffering. Before his death, Cardinal Veillot said to the priests: *"Never speak about suffering."*

You who welcome people from all parts of the world should also avoid speaking about Christ's suffering, about this Jesus whom they perhaps do not know or have very little idea.

To the question: *"How can we make Jesus known?"* Zundel replied: *"We need to accept people where they are, and at the point where they are, we need to journey with them just as Christ does, and demonstrate his love for them...It is not a matter of practising charity, it is about being charity."*

I often meet sick people who say to me: *"I am not able to pray."* I say to them: *"The very fact that you are in hospital, that you are in bed, that you accept being here and do not rebel too much, that is prayer."* And when a sick person prays with us, we can gently say to him or her: *"What would you like to ask the Lord?"* and then afterwards, say together the Hail Mary or the Our Father.

Your mission of hospitality is an important one: it is a difficult mission that presupposes a living spirituality that needs to be nourished every day.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments

PROVINCE OF EMMITSBURG: Sister Claire DEBES was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Elyse STAAB, March 7th, 2007.

PROVINCE OF GIJON: Sister Julia del BARRIO GONZALEZ was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, March 7th, 2007.

PROVINCE OF BOLIVIA: Sister Carmen TOLEDO VELARDE was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Teresa FEELEY, April 2nd, 2007.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SANTA LUISA: Sister Maria Cruz GUTIERREZ MARTIN was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, April 2nd, 2007.

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Sister Concepcion VICUNA BIURRUN was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Maria Angeles MESAS MORALES, April 26th 2007.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA: Sister Sabina IRAGUI was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, June 6th 2007.

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Sister Francesca EDET was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, June 6th 2007.

PROVINCE OF THAILAND: Sister Josefina ESTREMER was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, June 6th 2007.

REGION OF ALBANIA: Sister Tonja TUSHI was designated Regional Superior, replacing Sister Mira BERISHA, June 6th 2007.

CHINESE PROVINCE: Sister Marie WU was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Emma LEE, June 27th 2007.

PROVINCE OF FRANCE NORTH: Sister Françoise PETIT was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Elisabeth LACAU, June 27th 2007.

PROVINCE OF FRANCE SOUTH: Sister Alice PONS was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Christiane GALDI, June 27th 2007.

PROVINCE OF CRACOW: Sister Anna BRZEK was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Christina JAROSZ, July 25th 2007.

PROVINCE OF AMAZONIA: Sister Maria Cristina CARDOSO da SILVA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Josefa ELENI BEZERRA, August 14th 2007.

PROVINCE OF THE CANARY ISLANDS: Sister Nieves LOPEZ LOPEZ was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, August 14th 2007.

PROVINCE OF PORTUGAL: Sister Berta dos Anjos CARRICO was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Domicilia Maria GUIOMAR, August 14th 2007.

PROVINCE OF ERITREA: Sister Letteghrbriel TEFAGABUR was designated Visitatrice replacing Sister Neghesti MICHAEL, August 22nd 2007.

PROVINCE OF NETHERLANDS: Sister Remigia KENIS was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, September 26th 2007.

PROVINCE OF ECUADOR: Sister Elbieta Piedad ROJAS ENCALADA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Zolia GUEVARA TENESACA, October 10th 2007.

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PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Father Michael EDEM was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, May 14th 2007.

PROVINCE OF NETHERLANDS: Father Jan Van BROEKHOVEN was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, May 15th 2007.

PROVINCE OF GRANADA: Father Teodoro MARTIN ESTEBAN was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, May 18th 2007.

PROVINCE OF FRANCE NORTH: Father Yves DANJOU was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, May 19th 2007.

PROVINCE OF SWITZERLAND: Father Alain PEREZ was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, May 19th 2007.

PROVINCE OF MEXICO: Father Aaron GUTIERREZ NAVA was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, July 11th 2007.

PROVINCE OF ROME: Father Giancarlo PASSERINI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, July 24th 2007.

PROVINCE OF SIENNA: Father Alberto VERNASCHI was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, July 24th 2007.

PROVINCE OF THE NEAR EAST: Father Antoine NAKAD was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity until the end of 2008, August 8th 2007.

PROVINCE OF PAMPLONA: Father Tomas PERIBANEZ PERIBANEZ was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, August 25th 2007.

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
Sister Marlene Terezinha Rosa, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Portugal
13th -15th April 2007

On **April 13th 2007**, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Marlene Rosa, General Councillor, arrived at the Provincial House in Lisbon and were welcomed by the Visitatrice, Sister Domicilia Maria Guiomar, the Provincial Director and the Sisters, most of whom had previously met Sister Evelyne. Afterwards, the teachers and students in the school welcomed the visitors with flowers, dances and the singing of Gounod's Ave Maria.

During the first gathering, the Visitatrice spoke about the Province: its statistics (145 Sisters, 22 local communities), the Church's appeals, new forms of poverty, the Province's confidence in the timeliness of the Vincentian spirit despite the lack of vocations, and the importance of collaboration with the laity. After saying a few words of thanks, Sister Evelyne spoke of her joy at being able to make this visit and her desire to get to know the Province. Then she visited the nursery, the dining room for migrants and the residence for elderly Sisters. The latter were touched by Sister Evelyne's smile and her simplicity. The following day, Sister Evelyne left for Fatima (120 km north of Lisbon) to meet the Sisters and visit the sanctuary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin.

During the various sharing sessions she had with the Sister Servants and the Sisters, Sister Evelyne emphasised most particularly:

Confidence in Divine Providence. The first Portuguese Sisters scattered seeds, which have been continually germinating for two centuries. God will continue to take care of the Province so that it will maintain its life despite all the difficulties it faces.

Steadfast union with the Lord in order to listen to his will and witness in every circumstance to his charity towards those who are poor.

The Constitutions and Statutes, which express the spirit and charism of the Company, provide a spiritual, apostolic, missionary and community pathway. The apostolic activity of the Daughters of Charity gathers its strength from prayer and the Eucharist. As Saint Vincent said, "a Daughter of Charity who has made a good Communion will do everything else well."

The charity of Christ urges us to serve persons who are poor with joy, generosity and creativity. Wholeheartedly living our response to the Lord will help us to awaken other vocations. The evangelical witness of community life and service of poor persons makes the face of Christ visible and can challenge young people to follow him. Mother Guillemin used to say that the world needs our witness which can communicate the tenderness of God.

The desire to move forward together towards the Lord and to grow in the spirit of servanthood that is humble and loving in order to be better servants of those who are poor. *"May Mary give us the grace to become who we are called to be"* as Sister Evelyne said in her prayer.

At Fatima, Sister Evelyne visited:

- **The Sanctuary and the Chapel of the Apparitions** that recalled the 3 apparitions of the Angel who appeared in 1916 before the other apparitions to help prepare the children for the 6 apparitions of the Blessed Virgin that occurred in the following year, between May 13th and October 13th 1917.
- **The houses of the visionaries**, three shepherd children (Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia).
- The place called **Loça do Cabeco** where the angel appeared the first and third time. In the spring of 1916, while World War I was in full force, the Angel appeared as the “angel of peace”. During the third vision, it appeared as the “angel of the Eucharist” and gave Holy Communion to the three children.
- **The well at Lucia’s house** where the second apparition took place; this time the angel was called the “angel of Portugal.”
- The **Cova da Iria** (located 3 km from Fatima) where on May 13th, 1917 the three children saw the Blessed Virgin who asked them to come six times, on the 13th of each month at noon.
- **The Valinhos path** (near Cova da Iria) where the Blessed Virgin appeared for the fourth time (instead of August 13th since the children had been arrested on that August 13th by the civil authorities and had spent the day and night in prison at Ville Nove d’Ourem).
- **The Hungaro Calvary** – Chapel for celebrations and containing a monument in remembrance of the crucifixion.

We are grateful to Sister Evelyne for her visit. Thank you for all you shared with us. May this time of reflection that we all experienced, be an opportunity to revitalise our lives. May Mary, the only Mother of the Company, Our Lady of Fatima, help us to continue along the path of our vocation.

Sister Isabel Silva ALVES
Correspondent for the Echoes

VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Mariarosa Camminati, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Naples

April 18th-24th, 2007

April 18th-24th, 2007 was a special time for the Province of Naples as Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, accompanied by Sister Mariarosa Camminati, General Councillor, visited the Province. Sister Vittoria Camiolo, the Visitatrice, and some of the Councillors welcomed the visitors at the airport. An atmosphere of true cordiality marked the visit from the start.

On April 19th Sister Evelyne met the Sister Servants of the Province at the Provincial House. She stressed several important aspects of the role of the Sister Servant in the local community: taking Christ the Servant as a model, becoming the “mediator” of God for her companions, promoting co-responsibility and subsidiarity, encouraging joyful community life in which diversity is accepted as enriching and something that encourages participation, and dialogue carried out with kindness, discretion and prudence.

Afterward Sister Evelyne and Sister Mariarosa went to visit the local communities of Sicily. Sister Evelyne invited the Sisters to:

- Continually renew themselves in the love of Christ and persons who are poor,
- Discern the will of God with a spirit of detachment and “holy indifference,”
- Contemplate Mary, the woman of the Eucharist, always open to the will of God,
- Revise their life style and manner of service as a Daughter of Charity,
- Be servants who give without seeking anything in return, with the commitment to defend the vulnerable without reducing our vocation to simple social work.

During the first two days, Sister Evelyne met members of the Vincentian family and the staff of our works (schools, welcome centres, etc.)

In **Naples**, Sister Evelyne had the opportunity to share with:

- The young Sisters of the Province. She invited them to realise that the enthusiasm, fears and desires of youth need to be carefully examined in a deep spirit of faith, which is indispensable for living our vocation of servants of the poor.
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- The Sisters in the Infirmary. Sister Evelyne was very touched by their tokens of affection, their loyalty to the Company and their sense of peace despite their failing health.

Sister Evelyne expressed her gratitude for the wonderful collaboration that takes place between the laity, Sisters, religious and civil authorities, etc. She congratulated in a special way:

- The teachers and all who collaborate in the formation of children, especially in difficult neighbourhoods,
- The social services and the volunteers who are involved in home visiting of persons with AIDS, elderly persons and those who are poor.

The following day Sister Evelyne visited the *Casa Santa Luisa* in Molfetta and *the Institute San Giuseppe* in Giovinazzo. At *the Institute San Vincenzo* in Brindisi, she participated in a celebration full of colour and music, which brought together the children of the nursery school, the young people from the Welcome Centre, teachers, parents, members of Marian Youth Organisations, Vincentian volunteers, and even the bishop, the mayor and other civic leaders.

Sister Evelyn went to the “*Trullo*” of *Mary Immaculate* at Selva di Fasano where she met the Sisters from the various houses of Pouilles. In her talk, she made several requests. She asked us:

- To deepen our particular spirit of Daughters of Charity, especially the virtue of simplicity, expressing our thoughts clearly and in charity,
- To avoid being unduly influenced by today’s secularism and to undertake counter-cultural Gospel-based actions.

The closing Eucharistic celebration on the fifth day was presided over by the Most Reverend Beniamino De Palma, Archbishop of Nola and concelebrated with the Provincial Director, the Visitor and other Vincentian priests.

To the Sisters from the region of Campania, Sister Evelyne stressed the value of seeing the Constitutions as an expression of God's will for us. She emphasised the imminence of the *Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies*...and stressed that we should experience these with joy and discernment. They are an opportunity to revitalise the life of each Sister, each local community and each Province. She encouraged us to love deeply, with a sense of impartiality and freely-given love, paying particular attention to young people who need to be accompanied in their search for their vocation in life.

At the end, Sister Evelyne met all the lay members of the Vincentian family who had gathered in the auditorium of the Provincial House.

The final evening together can be summed up in the following words: "Let us try to live the essence of the charism of Saint Vincent: to announce the Gospel to those who are poor and alleviate their suffering by our witness."

We extend our sincere thanks to Sister Evelyne, whose availability, serenity and simple presence challenged each of us to renew ourselves inwardly in order to become true Daughters of Charity according to the heart of God and the Founders.

Sister Cecilia Di GIUSEPPE
Correspondent for the Echo

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Belo Horizonte

Sent on mission to Cabaça (State of Minas Gerais)

Introduction

Cumad'Idinha, Madinha Zila, Tiãna, Quelé Moio, Dão, Deguinho, Mazinho ... these are some of the faces and names we met in Cabaça, a town located in the north eastern part of the State of Minas Gerais, 36 km from Ninheira, in the Jequitinhonha valley, one of the poorest regions of Brazil due to the lack of water there.

Quelé Moio is the real surname of Mr. Clemente because when he was a child, he would not eat anything unless he had a bowl of sauce next to him. In the same way, each created name has a story behind it. That is why it isn't enough to simply learn the name of each person: on its own, the name is impersonal; it doesn't come to life until it reveals something about that person's history.

The town of Cabaça

Situated on the Pardo de Minas River along the border of Bahia, the town of Cabaça has a total of 86 families. There is no information available about Cabaça on the internet, only about Ninheira, which is located 36 km from Cabaça and 700 km

from Belo Horizonte, the state capital. Nonetheless, Cabaça really exists, because I was there with a Sister from the missionary Congregation of Mary Immaculate during Holy Week this year. In fact, in response to an appeal sent out by the Organisation for Popular Missions in the diocese of Janauba, 97 priests and religious from 37 different congregations made themselves available. All of us were sent out, two by two, to the most abandoned villages to share with the people an intensive period of evangelisation.

In Cabaça, there are no televisions, telephones or computers. Even though I was a foreigner, I immediately felt close to the life and faith of the families in Cabaça.

In 1989, a large corporation decided to build a dam on the Pardo de Minas River without consulting the inhabitants who cultivated the land along the river banks. The dam destroyed the river and flooded the surrounding land. The villagers were driven out and lost all their farm land. Now, the biggest problem for the villagers is that they have to go in search of water, using ox-driven carts to transport it back to their houses. Procuring water has become a major difficulty since it is now such a great distance away.

The only ones who don't want to change the situation are people involved in fishing. I met Fernando and Ana who are some of the professional people in this region. Recognised by the Special Secretariat for aquaculture and fishing, they receive a salary, and the women who are employed there have the right to maternity leave. In the course of our conversation, however, I discovered that they are ecologically minded: they advocate only fishing for large fish, cleaning up the rubbish and empty bottles in the water, and encouraging the people to preserve the part of the forest located near the dam in order to protect the water.

The villagers cultivate cassava and beans according to the seasons. "Cassava is our beef" they say. Unfortunately, cassava is not a very profitable crop and farmers cannot support large families on it. They are obliged to go to Sao Paulo to find work in the construction business, which means leaving their wife, children and other relatives behind. It means finding a place to live and learning to survive in a large city, implying a sort of initiation rite in order to face this new life style. The changes they experience are a shock for them and there is a risk of alcoholism.

Religious celebrations in the town of Cabaça

The people, who were very welcoming, practise popular forms of piety. They accepted our visits and participated in ever increasing numbers in the various celebrations we arranged for them:

Monday of Holy Week: Eucharistic celebration, with very few in attendance.

Tuesday of Holy Week: procession in honour of the Blessed Virgin. Seeing the small number of participants, we decided to change the route of the procession in order to reach those who were not taking part.

Wednesday: meditation on Jesus' encounters with people. We went as far as the edge of the dam. The people we visited that day came with lots of children!

Holy Thursday: celebration of Jesus' Last Supper, in the Chapel. This time, more people were present. They had their own way of participating but they were touched by the gestures and symbols. I went to wash the feet of people seated farther away in the chapel. I noticed the looks of surprise on some of their faces, and

even a refusal from one of them who said, as Peter had done: *“You will not wash my feet!”*

Good Friday: a powerful experience. We went out to visit the families in order to organise the Stations of the Cross. At 5:00 p.m. the Way of the Cross began. Each station was marked by a cross and a symbol of the region (straw mats, water cart, palm, cassava tree, etc.) The station of Jesus on the Cross was presented by the villagers. Many people took part.

Holy Saturday! In the morning there was a celebration with the children to present the Resurrection story. During the Easter Vigil that evening, each participant came to light his or her candle from the Paschal candle. As we saw each face illuminated by the light, we reflected on what a grace it had been to experience the gatherings that had taken place that week. At the end of the celebration, there was a joyful sharing of all that each one had brought: cassava, sweet potatoes, bean flour, tortillas, etc.

Conclusion

Before we left, everyone wanted to embrace us. *“Thank you!...Don’t forget us...Pray for my child who is in Sao Paulo...Write to us...Have a biscuit yourself...Take these sacks of dried fish with you...”* As we left the little chapel, it was a beautiful starry night!

This popular mission, carried out with another religious, helped me discover the richness of our diverse charisms and the importance of bringing them together for a better form of evangelisation.

Sister Heloisa HELENA
Daughter of Charity

SISTERS’ TESTIMONIES

Province of Curitiba

The Seminary in Curitiba celebrates its 80th anniversary
1927 to 2007

Introduction

In 1904, Polish immigrant families living in the south of Brazil asked for Daughters of Charity to come to that area to provide human and Christian education for their children. In response to this request, Superiors sent several Polish Sisters from the Province of Chelmno to Curitiba. The first three Sisters opened Saint Joseph’s School. Little by little, trust in the Sisters increased and several schools opened their doors to the Polish children. Seeing the value of this missionary work, the Province of Chelmno sent 50 other Sisters between the years 1904 and 1933. to

serve poor persons in schools and hospitals, to visit people in their homes and to care for elderly people.

A significant number of young women expressed an interest in becoming Daughters of Charity and serving the poor. Between 1915 and 1927, 12 young women were welcomed into the Seminary in Rio de Janeiro. During this period, the great distances involved, separation from family, realities of different life styles, and the need to learn the French language prompted the Regional Superior of the Vice-Province of Curitiba to review the formation plan and to update it.

The Seminary of the Province of Curitiba (1927 – 2007)

In 1927, the Seminary began with 4 postulants in the first house of the Daughters of Charity, at Saint Joseph's School in Abranches, near Curitiba. After some works had been established there, the Sisters opened the Seminary in the Provincial House of Curitiba.

On this occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Seminary, let us review its history in 4 broad stages.

From 1927 to 1947 with Sister Helena Bruska as Directress. Sister Helena, who was Polish, was prepared for her mission in the Seminary of Rio de Janeiro. For 20 years, she competently directed the Seminary, placing special emphasis on faith life, the presence of God, relationship with God and union in community. All formation was given in Polish. The young Sisters therefore studied Polish as well as music, since after taking the habit they would be required to direct the choirs in the churches. In these early years, the young women were from Polish families. Beginning in 1938, the Nationalisation of Education Law was adopted in Brazil. The Seminary began to welcome young women of other nationalities: Portuguese, Italian, German, Ukrainian, etc. Formation continued to be given in the Polish language with simultaneous translation provided for those who did not know Polish. 178 Sisters passed through the Seminary during these 20 years.

From 1948 to 1967: with two Directresses: Sister Salomé Detz (1948-1956) and Sister Anna Maria Sawczuk (1957-1967). This period was marked by nationalisation of schools and use of the Portuguese language. Curitiba, a Vice-Province of Poland (which became a Province in 1947) already had several local communities made up of different nationalities: in the states of Parana, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul.

The two Directresses, who were of Polish origin, were first trained in the Seminary of the Motherhouse in Paris. The number of candidates grew significantly, many coming from immigrant families. Formation was based on study of the Common Rules, the conferences of Saint Vincent, the lives of the saints and the writings of Superiors. Emphasis was placed on the practice of the virtues, fidelity to spiritual exercises, poverty, mortification and community customs. 486 Sisters passed through the Seminary. The formation team became too small for this large number of Sisters.

From 1968 to 1988: 4 Seminary Directresses: Sister Ferreira, Sister Rosa, Sister Remonatto and Sister Folador. This period, marked by the Second Vatican Council, saw great changes take place in the stages of formation. Mother Guillemin, Superioress General, gave guidelines for adaptations in formation according to the Council directives (dialogue, responsible obedience, co-responsibility, return to the origins, etc.) In view of these goals, a Seminarium was

organised at the Motherhouse for the Seminary Directresses. This time was also marked by the change of habit for the Seminary Sisters. The changes in the Church and in the world called for additional efforts to provide appropriate formation for the Daughters of Charity: priority being given to learning about the lives of the founders and the history and spirit of the Company. Periods of apostolic work were incorporated into the formation programme. The Seminary Sisters also participated in inter-congregational formation courses for novices (men and women). Formation plans were adapted to the needs of the times and the appeals of the Church, the Company and poor persons. 202 Sisters went through the Seminary during this time.

From 1988 to 2007, 3 Directresses: Sister Pereira, Sister Machowski and Sister Remonato. During this time, the goal of formation was to form young women according to the charism of Saint Vincent and to face the challenges of today's world. Of special note during this time was the study of the Constitutions and Statutes of 1983, the Word of God and the guidelines of the Church. Periods of apostolic work permitted the Sisters to address ways of serving poor persons in line with the Constitutions. More intensive human, spiritual and Vincentian formation was given. 124 Sisters passed through the Seminary. The formation journey is perhaps more difficult to experience now, given the context of our society today. Nevertheless, there are currently 12 Seminary Sisters in our Seminary.

Conclusion

Looking back over all that has taken place over these 80 years, we are aware of the efforts made over the course of time with regard to inculturation. We give thanks to God for the formation generously provided for 990 Daughters of Charity to become humble servants of those who are poor. We also ask forgiveness for our inconsistencies in our formation of Seminary Sisters and ask God's help in continuing the journey of love of the Company, showing trust for what the future may bring.

Seminary Formation Team

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Fortaleza

17th Inter-Provincial Gathering of the Councils of Brazil and the closing of the Jubilee Year for the Province of Fortaleza February 7th-15th, 2007

Introduction

The Jubilee year that had begun on January 31st, 2006 to celebrate the foundation of the Province of Fortaleza, came to a close on February 11th, 2007 with a time for giving thanks and making commitments for the future.

Gathering of Inter-Provincial Councils

During the course of the year 2007, the 17th Inter-Provincial Gathering of the 6 Provinces of Brazil had also taken place in Fortaleza. This 17th Gathering began on February 8th 2007, with words of welcome from Sister Corina Bastos, the Visitatrice of Fortaleza: *"Enlarge the site of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be*

stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.” (Isaiah 54:2) Each Province is a “tent” and the six Provincial Councils of Brazil have, as their mission, to strengthen the stakes and lengthen the cords of community and sharing.

The evaluation of the 16th Inter-Provincial Gathering, represented by 6 tents set up in various places in the Provincial House to symbolise the 6 Provinces, emphasised what had been experienced in common by the Provinces of Brazil from 2004 to 2006, in relation to these two themes:

- Revitalise our passion for Jesus Christ
- Live charity in creative ways.
-

Striking and attractive visual displays representing current situations were placed along the corridors to introduce the theme of this 17th Gathering: **“Charity transforms the life and service of the Daughter of Charity.”**

The opening celebration of the Gathering included a dramatisation featuring a young girl opening the gates of Heaven where poor people welcomed the Sisters: this was a symbolic representation of the situation of the excluded peoples of Latin America who are at the heart of our service.

The conferences of February 9th and 10th presented the conditions necessary for service to be more freely given and for commitment to serving poor persons.

In the first presentation, Father Joao Batista Libanio spoke on the following topic: “The power to transform social, economic, political and religious dimension,s taking into account the person of the poor.” He explained the impact of these 4 dimensions on those who are poor and the solutions that these people can discover. Too often, solutions are sought without taking into account people who are being excluded. Wanting to change other people’s situation without allowing them to participate in decision making is a form of paternalism.

The following day, Father Javier Alvarez, Director General, presented: “Daughters of Charity as Prophets in Post-Modern Times.” The two aspects of prophecy are: a profound experience of God and a commitment in the heart of the world to make the world more in conformity with God’s plan. The Company is prophetic by nature in so far as it is faithful to its charism. Vincentian mysticism is based on recognising the sacramentality of poor persons. That is why the place of contemplation for the Daughter of Charity is the world, action and service. In contemplating the mystery of God, the Sisters learn to recognise who is behind the face of the poor person. This way of seeing is prophetic. Vincentian mysticism does not happen by chance, it is prepared for in prayer. The response of the Company is simply to witness to Christ the Servant. The option for those who are poor, an inherent part of following Christ, involves defending the rights of poor persons and denouncing systems of oppression. The challenges are many. The process of responding to these challenges calls for personal and community conversion. The future of the Company depends on its decision to continue the prophecy of Christ in today’s society and its ability to do so. The Daughter of Charity who goes to those who are poor is a living Gospel parable.

Closing of the Golden Jubilee of the Province of Fortaleza, February 11th 2007

The closing of the Jubilee year of the Province of Fortaleza took place on Sunday, February 11th at the Immaculate Conception School. This was a very moving and inspiring experience for everyone.

During the Eucharistic celebration, we expressed our gratitude to the Lord for having accompanied and led us during these 50 years serving poor people. The presider, Archbishop José Antônio Aparecido Torsi, Archbishop of Fortaleza, ended his homily by saying: *“The celebration of a jubilee is truly an annunciation event: blessed are the Daughters of Charity, because through their acts of kindness, they bear much fruit in every season.”*

When the time came to offer thanks, Sister Corina Bastos sent us forth using the very words spoken by Father Etienne when the first missionary Sisters sent to Brazil set off on their journey: *“Go forth, Sisters, go forth! Carry in one hand the torch of faith and in the other the flame of Charity.”* The commitments made by the Province will be the luggage each Sister carries as we journey back to our respective regions of the Province.

That afternoon, Sister Evelyne arrived. She spoke to us with great conviction as she addressed the theme “The charism, a transforming force in the service of the Daughter of Charity.” *“The charism is a gift of the Spirit at work in the Church. It has the power to transform the Daughter of Charity, when it is lived out in simple and humble charity, the basis of evangelisation.”*

Sister Evelyne also met the six Provincial Councils, Sister Servants, young Sisters and Vincentian Marian Youth members, as well as visiting the Marguerite Naseau Community that provides care for poor people.

On the day we left, we carried with us these two commitments:

- To go to those who are poor with the prophetic vitality of our charism: making sure that poor persons participate in their own promotion.
- To read and meditate on the place of the poor person in Scripture, as the basis of our gift of self to God, our community life and our service.

All that remains is to thank the Lord for the wonders he has worked during these days together. Our gratitude goes out to all those who participated: “The power of the Kingdom is alive in the world, the Church, the Company and in us. I pray that it will continue to be so.”

Sister Dijesu PINTO
Echoes Correspondent

SISTERS’ TESTIMONIES

Provinces of Italy

Young Sisters’ Formation Session

Motherhouse, August 2007

At the end of their formation session at the Motherhouse, the young Sisters of the Italian Provinces shared their experiences in the form of a letter to the Founders.

Dear Vincent and Louise,

At the end of this session, we wish to express our gratitude for the welcome we received in your country.

First of all, we would like to thank you for inviting us. The journey that brought us here was a very long one. Some of us came by plane, others by train. We were able to notice the difference that exists even today between the wide expanse of countryside with little houses scattered about and the magnificence of Paris. Who knows if this existed in your lifetime? Perhaps that is why, Vincent, you felt the weight of the walls of the city on your shoulders when you entered the city!

We also wish to give you special thanks, Louise, for your welcome when we arrived at the Motherhouse. It was very moving to enter the Chapel where you are present, and to be accompanied by you as we met the Lord in the very same place that marked the special meeting between Mary and Sister Catherine.

Dear Vincent and Louise, we thank you also for the Brothers and Sisters who are your voice today: Sister Evelyne, Sister Mariarosa Camminati, Sister Claire Herrmann, Sister Elizabeth Charpy, Sister Palmarita, Father Javier and Father Julian... Each one of us was offered a key to enable us to reflect upon our experience of the charism in our lives. We also recognised your attentive presence in the availability of our untiring translators.

When each General Councillor spoke to us about the Province confided to her, we seemed to feel your holy joy and your gratitude to the Lord of Charity for his goodness toward the Company, which throughout the world, reaches out to serve and love those who are poor...In our gathering with the Sisters of the 15 Provinces of Latin America, we also experienced the various expressions of our charism: through their songs and dances we overcame language differences to find ourselves in a unique celebration of the charism.

Another very moving moment for us, dear Vincent, was the visit to your birthplace. The lengthy train ride along the many kilometres that separate Paris from Pouy (today called Saint Vincent de Paul) gave us the opportunity to contemplate your native region of Landes, your fields, your woods, your pine trees...Then at the Berceau, a splendid, sunny sky, much warmer and stronger than that of Paris, welcomed us. It seemed to us that it matched your temperament, dear Father! We entered the house where we knew you awaited us. The "cradle" of your early years and your works of charity is also our home. The Communities of the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission prepared a festive welcome for us: the spaghetti dinner showed us, more than anything, the hospitality of your people! Then recreation with a group of young people from the Landes region allowed us to express, through songs and games, the joy of being your guests.

After a visit to your region, we met you in Paris in your chapel where you rest near Francis Regis Clet and Jean-Gabriel Perboyre.

The streets of the beautiful city of Paris, its museums and its churches spoke to us of the thriving cultural and spiritual circles that you knew and to which you contributed by bringing the charity of Christ.

The Paris streets still have the memory of your living heritage. We walked on the street where Frederic Ozanam lived, where he discussed with his fellow students his projects for serving the most needy. We visited the house of Saint Catherine at Reuilly and the Mouffetard district of Sister Rosalie. We don't want to hide the pride that we felt in being part of this family of saints, recognising also the responsibility that this entails for us.

Dear Vincent and Louise, there are still many things to say, but we do not want to take your time away from intercessory prayer for the Vincentian family. On the other hand it is difficult to summarise in a few sentences the graces we experienced throughout these very intensive two weeks.

We ask you to join us in thanking the Lord who made this session possible. We ask you now to visit us and be ever more present in our local Communities and in our Provinces, as we remain committed to the inter-provincial journey that we know pleases you. Look with kindness, too, on all those we meet and with whom we strive day after day to build the kingdom of God. We send you our loving greetings.

Sister Annamaria CORALLO
Daughter of Charity

THE POOR SPEAK TO US

Province of Japan

Hiyo's Wink

Hiyo is a little girl who was born with a harelip. In our care centre for babies, people tended to avoid her because it was difficult to feed her with a bottle. What's more, her crying was extremely loud and her penetrating look seemed to observe everything.

Thanks to Motoko, an excellent carer, Hiyo grew to be healthy. She was a very intelligent and lively baby. However, I was worried because I never saw her smile. One day, Motoko and I repeatedly tried to call her by her name. Finally, we saw her smile very weakly. At that moment I understood that the tape that was on her lip to secure it kept her from smiling. After that, I changed my way of communicating with her: each time that I saw her, I winked. Hiyo, too, began to wink at me.

Hiyo was able to walk even before her first birthday. Just after her birthday, Motoko took her to the hospital for a surgical procedure that, fortunately, went very well.

The day after the operation, I hurried to the hospital to see her because she was on her own. As soon as I arrived, I recognised the way she cried. I ran to her room and called out, "Hiyo," when I saw her in a wheelchair with perfusions and a tube in her nose. Immediately, Hiyo turned her head and gave me a wink in spite of her swollen cheek.

Sister Mary Louise Ose
Daughter of Charity

BEATIFICATION OF SISTER LINDALVA , 2ND DECEMBER 2007

HER EARLY YEARS

Lindalva was born on October 20th 1953 in the town of Acu in North Rio Grande State, Brazil and was the 6th child in a family of 14 children. Her parents, devout Catholics, had a simple and deep faith.

HAPPINESS COMES FROM LOVING

Lindalva received an ordinary Christian education. A generous child, she often helped her mother in the home. Whenever arguments broke out among her childhood companions, she always tried to settle them with gentleness. Attentive to the suffering of others, she would visit people who were lonely or poor in the town; at times she even gave them her own clothes, in a sensitive and discreet way. Over time, she understood that she was being called to follow Christ by reaching out to poor persons to witness to the Father's love for them. After completing her studies as an administrative assistant, she took care of her elderly and ill father. After his death, she asked to be admitted to the Company of the Daughters of Charity: *"I'm 33 years old; I come from a simple, honest family. I have felt God's call for a long time but have not been available to serve Christ until now. I am in good health and feel I have endless energy to do good works"*

HER VOCATION AS A DAUGHTER OF CHARITY

On 16th July 1989, Lindalva entered the Daughters of Charity in the Province of Recife. Sent on mission in 1991 to the Dom Pedro II Residence in Salvador, Bahia State, she was appointed coordinator for the care of men who were elderly or ill.

A JOYFUL AND GENEROUS HEART

Sister Lindalva loved the elderly people in her care with a gentle and humble heart: in a spirit of faith, she saw them as her lords and masters: *"I ask God to give us his wisdom and gentleness to serve well our masters, those who are poor."* She understood her vocation as a response to God's will: *"When God calls, no one can hide from this call. Sooner or later, God's will is accomplished."* Her faith was a simple and complete adherence to life's events, which she welcomed as a gift and call from God: *"Each day of our life should be a day of renewal and thanksgiving to God for the gift of life and the call to follow his Son, Jesus Christ, in serving Him in persons who are poor."* Her generosity of heart enabled her to overcome all difficulties: *"In my prayer, I continually feel so great a desire to love our good God that I am sure I will reach that point even if it takes me to the last day of my life to do it."* She knew how to share her faith with other young people and to support her companions when difficulties overwhelmed them: *"When our hearts are troubled by doubts about our vocation, we should give ourselves entirely to God."*

HER MARTYRDOM ON GOOD FRIDAY

PHOTO

"We will come to know God's love by carrying the Cross." These words spoken by Sister Lindalva herself have taken on a prophetic meaning.

SERVANT AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Energetic, always smiling and available, Sister Lindalva radiated the presence of God; she lived her vocation as a servant of the poor in a spirit of justice inspired by love: she loved each person without favouritism or discrimination.

On Good Friday, April 9th, 1993, Sister Lindalva made the Way of the Cross together with the Sisters of her local community, at a dawn service with the parishioners. The Cross is the ultimate sign of love given for the other person: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Lk. 23:34)

When she came back to the house, Sister Lindalva prepared breakfast for the residents, as she did each day. As she began her work, she was brutally murdered by a sick, 46 years old man who was in a violent rage: he could not accept that she had repulsed his advances.

This Daughter of Charity certainly did not expect to die at such a young age. Having offered her life, she gave witness by her death that *“No one has greater love than this than to lay down their life for their friends.”* (Jn. 15:13)

SPECIAL CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemain
1906 – 1968

Daughter of God – Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

V – MOTHER GUILLEMIN AND VATICAN COUNCIL II (continued)

The Third Session of the Second Vatican Council opened on September 14th 1964 with a concelebrated Mass: 24 bishops, together with Pope Paul VI, celebrated in accordance with the Constitution on the Liturgy passed in 1963. Nearly 2000 bishops filled the nave. The Observers were present in the St. Helen tribune but not the Auditrices! Their nomination had been announced, but those who would be elected had not yet been named.

After the Mass, the Pope read his discourse entitled “Exaltation of Collegiality”, as noted by a writer in the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. The Pope described what could and should be the work of the Council in this domain. The bishops became more attentive when they heard the Pope define their powers and their relationship with the Pontiff in terms of a partnership. Judging by their response, something specific and definitive had been said at that moment...As the Pope reached the end of his discourse, he spoke in even stronger terms as he deplored the absence of bishops who were deprived of their freedom. Then he greeted the observers and ended by calling to mind the Churches who were “the object of our desire and our tears.” Pastor Boegner would later declare: “I must say how moved I was by the words that the Pope addressed to the observers and those invited from the Secretariat for Unity. This very striking call to the Churches about his pain and his hopes must have been directed to all the ‘separated communities’... as they were usually called. This would be the first time that Paul VI would call the Churches that came into being at the Reformation **by the name they knew they must bear.** (*La Croix*, September 18th 1964)

This third Session, which developed in a very complex way, was preceded and punctuated by significant events that Mother Guillemain experienced with much joy in her heart and soul as she thought of her widespread Community. Before introducing the work planned for the session, several new developments in the history of the Council should be mentioned or recalled. We begin with these before going to the heart of the matter of questions that required responses, notwithstanding the difficulties that are still of concern to the Council Fathers. Many theological

questions would remain open to discussion even after the Council *“to open wider horizons and to have them return to the sources for an updating of all theology...”* These words in a commentary on collegiality, bear the simple signature, Joseph Ratzinger

SPECIAL EVENTS

1 – PILGRIMAGE OF PAUL VI IN THE HOLY LAND: 4TH -6TH JANUARY 1964

At the end of his Christmas message, the Holy Father had specified the purpose of his travel: “We announce openly that this pilgrimage will be exclusively religious in character and in its objectives.” It was a pilgrimage of prayer and penance after 20 centuries of history, to the places where Jesus brought about our Redemption. The *Osservatore Romano*, the principal newspaper, gave many details of the meeting between Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras.

Mother Guillemin entered into this pilgrimage account with enthusiasm, all the more so since the Sisters in Palestine sent her, from January 9th onwards, their reflections that showed how deeply they were affected by the event. Sister Dupont-Ferrier, the Visitatrice at the time, gave a brief description of the two joys they experienced from this visit: *“The Sisters of Bethany together with their children, and holding palms in their hands, gathered along the designated route, to welcome the Holy Father and receive his blessings. That night in Gethsemane, we had the consolation of a prayer vigil with the Sovereign Pontiff; we truly listened to him and prayed with him. The holy hour ended with the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, an unforgettable moment when we heard the voice of the Vicar of Christ, recite, with deep emotion, the prayer of Christ.”* It is impossible to give full details of the extensive correspondence about the events they shared with such great joy with Mother Guillemin. It is fitting to conclude by quoting the words of a senior official, the Director of Services for Christian Worship, who captured the visit’s real significance: *“At this time we are not able to understand the significance of this event. Only future generations who speak of this page in history will be able to evaluate its importance.”* Mother Guillemin did not keep for herself this long letter from the Sisters in Palestine; the Echoes of the Mother House printed it in its entirety in February 1964.

On January 16th, she received a letter from Bishop dell’Aqua thanking her for her Christmas greetings to the Holy Father. A few words recalled the event in Jerusalem: “Be assured that you and the esteemed Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul were present in the Holy Father’s prayer along the roads of Palestine and that he asked our Lord for the graces for you to continue to give to the world a living witness of Gospel charity...”

2 – THE FORMULA “CORPUS CHRISTI”

In April 1964, a document from the Sacred Congregation of Rites was issued as a decree. In this document, the Sovereign Pontiff had modified the formula used for the distribution of Holy Communion. Instead of saying in Latin: “May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ guard your soul for life eternal. So be it.”, the priest would simply say to each one: **“Corpus Christi”** (the Body of Christ) and the communicant would respond: **“Amen”**.

In fact, the other formula was too long and impractical for the days when Mass attendance was high. It is important to situate the motives for new practices within the whole framework of liturgical reform undertaken by the Second Vatican Council.

Mother Guillemin, after discussing the matter with Father Jamet, the Director General of the Company at that time and with her Council, had the decree included in the Echoes of the Mother House for the month of May so that the entire Company could deepen its understanding of the new formula with the Amen that signified: "Yes, I believe in the reality of the living Christ."

3 – OTHER DATES THAT REPRESENT SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 23RD

The Pope had presided at the Council Mass during which **the relic of Saint Andrew** was venerated by the Council Assembly before being returned to the metropolis of Patras in Greece several days later.

The relic of Saint Andrew's skull had been brought to Rome on April 21st 1462 and solemnly received by Pope Pius II, who carried it himself to Rome where it was placed in the Basilica of Saint Peter. This same Pope said on that occasion, with reference to this precious relic: *"You will return gloriously to your homeland when God wills it. It will be said on that day: 'O happy exile that brings such assistance back with you.'"*

On September 26th, His Eminence Cardinal Bea, delivered a short speech about the relic's return, speaking in the main square and in the presence of Bishop Constantine of the metropolis of Patras, Crown Princess Irene, the president of the Council as well as a large group of Orthodox Christians. The day that the relic of Saint Andrew was restored to them, was declared **a religious feast day for Greece**.

SEPTEMBER 30TH

Mother Guillemin had been at the Council since September 28th and the following event was very important for her. The Assembly had decided to devote **a special chapter to religious life in the Constitution on the Church**, following the chapter on holiness in general.

NOVEMBER 13TH

The Mass was exceptionally solemn on this day. The Patriarch Maximos celebrated the Mass of the feast of Saint John Chrysostom. The Pope presided. Instead of a discourse, he made a symbolic gesture: **he gave his tiara for the poor**. An explanation for this was given by Bishop Felici at the end of the Mass: *"We have heard during these days, as we discussed schema XIII, the cries of poverty reaching up to heaven. To respond to this urgent call, the Pope has decided to offer his tiara for those who are poor."* The gesture was a simple one; the Pope, without saying a word, placed it on the altar of con-celebration. After having blessed an icon of Saints Cyril and Methodius, he left the church amidst the acclamations of the crowd.

NOVEMBER 21ST

This third session of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council came solemnly to a close with holy Mass concelebrated by Pope Paul VI and 24 Council Fathers who had very important Marian sanctuaries in their dioceses. The significance of the celebration was clear: The Eucharist celebrated by several priests around the same altar, communion with the same bread and same chalice, clearly manifested the unity

of the priesthood with the Church. The Constitution “**De Ecclesia**” was approved. In his closing discourse, the Pope proclaimed Mary “**Mother of the Church**”.

MOTHER GUILLEMIN ... AUDITRICE

Photo

Photo During a session

Photo Mother Guillemin and Mother de Vallon (Congregation of the Sacred Heart)

MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH

Mother Guillemin was no stranger to all these developments even before she became auditrice at the Council. She easily joined the flow of events. The press, radio and television held the world spellbound. Of note were the official press communications from the Council that were always of high quality.

The issue of Mary’s place and role in the Church created significant concern for the Church. From the beginning of the first session’s work, this topic was introduced. Two questions were being debated: should Mary’s role be treated in a separate schema or should it be placed within the context of the teaching on the Church? Half of the Assembly was in favour of the second proposition: “*Reason and even the honour of the Blessed Virgin require that this schema provide for her place to be at the heart of the Church and not on the fringes.*” The goal they had in mind was to avoid giving the impression that Mary constituted an isolated element apart from everything else in the plan of creation and grace. In fact, Pope Paul VI said at the end of the second session: “*We hope that the Council will produce the best possible solution to the question of a schema on the Blessed Virgin.*” And so it happened. Mary would have a place in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, chapter eight, entitled: “ **The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church**”.

MARY MÉDIATRIX

The title of Mediatrix created problems. Difficulties and differences of opinion were not based on Marian devotion but on how the Marian doctrine was to be expressed. Two perspectives animated the debate: one describing the maternal role of Mary with regard to the faithful, without undermining the unique mediation of Christ; the second specifying that in accordance with her maternal role, the Virgin Mary **naturally** has this role of mediatrix, with the understanding that it in no way diminishes the efficacy of the unique mediation of Christ.

From the beginning of the debate, one Cardinal did not hesitate to express his joy: “*This title of mediatrix gives me endless satisfaction; we could perhaps add ‘mediatrix after the Mediator’.*”

Another Cardinal called to mind ecumenical concerns by mentioning the difficulties that were created by using the term mediatrix.

A group of 90 bishops did not hesitate to express their reservations: “*It’s better to remain silent about the term mediatrix.*”

Cardinal Bea, after a long intervention, made a distinction between personal devotion and the ecumenical demands of our day, concluding with a powerful argument: “*There is a danger that Marian mediation will not be properly understood; if it is proclaimed in a conciliar text, we will be faced with serious difficulties.*”

The arguments for and against mediation were clearly stated and a third perspective was presented by those who wished to retain the title of “mediatrix” but to place it outside all theological systemisation.

After the interventions, the Commission reviewed the content and decided that the objections made over the title of mediatrix were based more on a fear that the title would be misunderstood than on any opposition to the role of the Blessed Virgin in the work of salvation. In addition, **the Commission preferred to retain the title and explain it.**

The Council Fathers thus approved the following text that appears in chapter VIII, no. 62:

*“By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and perils, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.” (Lumen Gentium) **The term Mary Mediatrix was therefore retained.***

MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Originally, the conciliar text did not speak of Mary as Mother of the Church. The spokesperson for the text explained that the title of Mary, Mother of the Church, had not been retained because it was relatively recent. The Commission added that the Council Fathers were in favour of calling Mary “Mother of the faithful”, but in fact, from an ecumenical point of view, it was not advisable to introduce this title.

For a long time, the Pope had dreamed of proclaiming Mary Mother of the Church. From his first intervention at the Council, Cardinal Montini, speaking of Christ as the heart and centre of the Church, had evoked the singular place of Mary in the Church, using from that time on, the term “**Mother of the Church.**” On other occasions the Pope returned to this theme in order to better situate Mary within the whole body of the Church’s teaching. *“We are pleased to announce that it is with a sense of joy that we are ending this session of the Ecumenical Council defining the doctrine of the Church as we recognise Our Lady under the title that is very fitting for her: **“Mother of the Church, Mater Ecclesiae.”***

The Constitution on the Church was promulgated on November 21st in a public session telecast by Eurovision, during which the Holy Father concelebrated Mass with 24 bishops whose dioceses have important Marian sanctuaries. By way of conclusion, Pope Paul VI announced with great emotion that the Council recognised the privileged place of the Blessed Virgin in the holy Church.

*“It is thus for the glory of the Blessed Virgin and for our consolation that we proclaim Mary the most holy **Mother of the Church**, that is, of all God’s people, the faithful as well as the pastors. We call her our most loving Mother, and wish that henceforth, with such a loving title, the Virgin Mary will be even more honoured and invoked by all Christian people.”*

Hardly had these words been pronounced than the Council Fathers stood up to demonstrate their assent and agreement with the Pope’s decision. Many Bishops lifted their mitre as a sign of devotion and agreement. The applause went on and on.

After this first experience as Auditrice at the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Mother Guillemin was filled with deep spiritual joy. The debates about Mary made a deep impression on her. Was not piety towards the Virgin Mary part of the spirituality of the Company? Was this not a tradition that came from the founders, and one which had been part of the life of the Company for the three centuries it has been in existence? Louise de Marillac had the remarkable audacity to consider the Daughters of Charity as children of the Blessed Virgin, a title very special to her: *"You have inspired us, Lord, to choose your holy Mother as the only Mother of our little Company, which has never had any other mother on earth..."* and not long afterwards, she addressed Mary again: *"I am not mistaken, Blessed Virgin, in thinking that you agree to be our only Mother. We can aspire to being your daughters, since you are the Mother of Jesus who is our brother, and we make special profession to conform ourselves to Him"*.

Louise de Marillac did not simply reflect in this way; with the authorisation of M. Vincent, she made a pilgrimage to Chartres. Her letter to M. Vincent on her return is clear: *"...I offered to God the designs of His Providence on the Company of the Daughters of Charity. I offered that said Company entirely to Him, asking Him to destroy it rather than let it be established contrary to His holy will. I asked for it, through the prayers of the Holy Virgin, Mother and Guardian of the said Company, the purity of which it stands in need...and the grace of fidelity for the Company..."* (SW p. 122)

Louise de Marillac had placed her children in Mary's hands. She would go even further, requesting in a letter to Saint Vincent dated December 1658: *"...how fortunate we would consider ourselves if tomorrow, at the holy altar, you placed us under the protection of the Holy Virgin...to obtain for us the grace to be able, henceforth, to look upon her as our only Mother..."*

This consecration was made and would be renewed each year. It was a custom begun by Mathurine Guerin, as witnessed by the following written in her own hand: *"In early December, the Superioress should remind the Director that the usual subject of the conference of the 8th of this month is chastity. On December 8th at the end of the conference, before the Director gives his blessing, the Superioress or another who has been named reads aloud the act of offering to the Blessed Virgin, while all the Sisters kneel and quietly repeat the words with great affection. At the end, the blessing is given and each one leaves."*

This act of offering by Saint Louise on December 8th, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, is one of the devotional practices of the Daughters of Charity today. Mary, Mother of the Church and Mary, Mother of the Company, is one and the same. We need to continually deepen our understanding of this.

The theme of Mary "mediatrix" elicited many interventions during the General Session. Mother Guillemin listened attentively to them. In her mind and heart was the response from heaven to Catherine Laboure, a Seminary Sister in 1830, praying before the relic of Saint Vincent in the chapel. Not only had Catherine seen the symbol of his heart but she also heard these words within her: *"The heart of Saint Vincent is somewhat consoled because he has obtained from God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that in the midst of these serious troubles, the two families will not perish and God will make use of them to reanimate faith."*

It seems fitting to end these family remembrances directly connected with Mary by continuing to reflect on this Marian devotion, placing it in its proper

perspective, to reveal the depth of this mystery that helps us to understand the designs of God.

THE CHURCH'S MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

On August 6th, 1964, the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* by Paul VI called attention to the range of problems marking today's world. His intention of promoting an encounter between the Church and the world, was not limited specifically to missionary activity, but to "Dialogue with humanity as it is". Mother Guillemin carefully read the text, talked about it and used it in conferences to the Sisters at retreats or sessions.

Her participation as Auditorice at the Council gave her a deep sense of joy. On November 6th, at the 116th General Session, the Holy Father, wishing to attend at least one of the General Sessions, chose the schema on **the missions**. By this gesture he wanted to demonstrate his high regard for the more than ten thousand religious and lay missionaries throughout the world.

One of the chroniclers described this surprise meeting tactfully and with great finesse:

"There was a sense of celebration at the basilica at 6 o'clock in the morning. At 9 o'clock, prolonged applause reverberated through the conciliar hall. Paul VI entered the nave on foot and practically without escort. He took a seat facing the conciliar altar, in the middle of the nave among the Council Fathers. The Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Tappouni, Bishop of Adigrat, in the Ethiopian rite. The Ethiopian seminarians living in Vatican City led the singing of traditional African melodies. At the end of Mass, the Pope took his place at the president's table. On his right was Cardinal Tisserant and on his left, Cardinal Tappouni. After the Gospel was enthroned, the Pope recited the prayer *Adsumus* to the Holy Spirit, as if for an ordinary work session. The general secretary announced the results of the vote on the pastoral role of bishops, and then the Pope gave a short speech:

"...We wanted to be present today while your attention was turned towards the schema on the missions. This decision was prompted by the serious and striking importance of the subject that occupies our minds and hearts today...as we re-echo, myself as successor of Saint Peter and you, successors of the apostles, the words of the divine command: 'Go out into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' The world's salvation is dependent on the accomplishment of this work. It is incumbent upon the Council to prepare new pathways, to envisage new means, to stimulate new vigour for a more effective and broader diffusion of the Gospel. In examining the schema I have found many praiseworthy aspects either as regards the contents, or for establishing the order in which these will be expressed. Therefore I believe that the text will easily meet with your approval, even after the necessary amendments."

Paul VI did not intend to restrict the freedom of expression that he so clearly emphasised was to be fostered in the Council.

After a discourse from the president of the Commission for the Missions, the Pope left the room amid warm applause. The discussion began. The Council Fathers were in agreement with the Pope on the importance of the schema, but wanted a revision despite excellent propositions as well as the important theme of *aggiornamento*. There were many robust criticisms and the number of these registered was exceptionally high. All those who spoke represented important

groups. There was lively discussion, full of vitality, nourished by doctrine, prompted by suggestions, and touched with humour.

One bishop quoted the words of Christ: *"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Our schema doesn't enkindle anything, it's only a pitiful candle."*

In the name of the bishops from Africa, Cardinal Bea emphasised that missionary activity *"must be counted as one of the most essential duties of the Church. The Council should not only establish certain new juridical norms, but give a new thrust to missionary activity, call forth new missionary vocations, with new fervour for this activity."*

After reading the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, Mother Guillemin was astonished to find no allusion made to missionary activity. A response to her unease was provided during the discussion "Mission and Poverty" by Bishop Fulton Sheen, the auxiliary bishop of New York: *"Why does Pope Paul VI use the word 'mission' so rarely in his encyclical Ecclesiam suam? What word is used in its place? 'Dialogue'. He uses this word 77 times. For him, dialogue is the manifestation of the love and charity of Christ to all people."*

The strongest attack made on the text came from Cardinal Frings. *"The missions,"* he said, *"are such an important matter that we cannot confine them only to the propositions submitted in the Council. They require a schema of their own that is both theological and practical."* The Cardinal specified that he was making this request in the name of missionary bishops and the superiors of religious institutes.

So it was a delicate situation. The Council Fathers would reject the first text during the voting process, replacing it with a schema which gave the world the decree *"Ad gentes"*. **The Missions are no longer the poor relatives in the Church; they are the very heart of the Church.**

During all these discussions taking place on a high theological and pastoral level, Mother Guillemin was able to feel at ease. Saint Vincent was in her mind. The countless "sendings on mission" in which she had the honour to participate or over which she presided during her generalate, prefigured the future with regard to the expanding missionary work in response to Christ's solemn commandment. Had she not already set up in the Centrale des Oeuvres, a secretariat for Missionary Cooperation for the laity? Evangelisation of peoples throughout the world was of great concern to the Council Fathers, but Mother Guillemin was thinking of Saint Vincent speaking to the confreres and the Sisters: *"Our vocation is to go out to all the earth; and for what purpose? To enkindle the hearts of all, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world ablaze in order to enflame it with his love."* (Coste XII, Conf. 207)

Saint Vincent, in a conference to the Daughters of Charity on "The Purpose of the Company" said: *"God is the one who has entrusted the care of His poor to you, and you must act in His Spirit, sympathising with them in their distress, and empathising with them as much as possible... That's how you must act in order to be good Daughters of Charity, and to go wherever God wants: if to Africa, then to Africa; to the army, to the Indies, wherever people may ask for you, it doesn't matter; you're Daughters of Charity, you must go."* (Coste X, 105)

All Daughters of Charity heard these words during their time of Seminary formation. The Council said "we must go there" and, as Saint Vincent would continue

to say “go there, my daughters, go there”, Mother Guillemin would continue her visits “corporally and spiritually” in order to discover the needs in terms of Vincentian charity, inform the Company of them and then form those who responded, in accordance with their new destination.

“Laudate Dominum omnes gentes!”

**FINAL SESSION OF THE COUNCIL
September 14th, 1965**

“In the course of the audience given on this day, His Holiness Pope Paul VI deemed it worthy to decide that the 4th Session of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican would begin on September 14th, 1965, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This session will mark the end of the Council.”

From the Vatican, January 4th 1965

The people responsible for the different groups came together to arrange matters, as the schemas were not all at the same stage of development. Among the schemas submitted for examination and amendment was that on the **renewal and adaptation of religious life**.

This 4th session of the Ecumenical Vatican Council would be for Mother Guillemin a source of great joy as she participated in the various celebrations as a true Daughter of God and of the Church. The first of these was the **solemn opening ceremony** for the 4th session in Saint Peter’s Basilica on September 14th 1965. Mass was concelebrated by Pope Paul VI and 26 Council Fathers who were responsible for directing the work of the Council. This solemn service was preceded by a speech by His Holiness Pope Paul VI: “...to truly understand God’s hour that is ringing out for the Church and the world...may the five continents raise up a chorus of prayer and repentance.” After this development, the Pope invited “the Council Fathers, in the afternoon of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the opening day of the session, to go with him in a penitential procession, singing the praises of the Lord...For the same reason, in the Pauline Chapel of the Vatican Palace, during the entire 4th session, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed...Our hope is that all five continents will lift up a chorus of praise, that every parish, every church in the Catholic world will have a penitential celebration...We also look, with confidence and emotion, on the communities of men and women who readily and fervently welcome our words, directing their most earnest prayers to heaven.”

OCTOBER 28TH 1965

During the public session, the texts previously approved in the General Session were presented to the Council Fathers for their definitive vote, among them the text on **the renewal of religious life**. This was marked by the Mass concelebrated by the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, with 24 Council Fathers chosen from countries of the five continents. The solemn gathering was set for October 28th, the 7th anniversary of the election of John XXIII as Sovereign Pontiff, to honour the memory of the Pope who had convoked the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council and had promulgated *Pacem in terris*.

DECEMBER 7TH 1965

PHOTO: MOTHER GUILLEMIN AND A DOMINICAN WHO TRANSLATED FROM LATIN INTO FRENCH

The final public session was held, with voting and promulgation of the decrees on religious liberty, priests, the missions and the Church in the modern world. The promulgation of decrees was followed by the reading of the papal brief relating to the events of the 1054 East-West Schism. The declaration had been read at the same time in Phanar by the Secretary General of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the presence of the Patriarch Athenagoras and Cardinal Shehan, representative of His Holiness Pope Paul VI.

The removal of the anathema between Rome and Constantinople was promulgated in a text entitled "The Common Declaration of His Holiness Paul IV and His Holiness the Patriarch Athenagoras" and read in French by Cardinal Willebrands, secretary of the Secretariat for the Union of Christians, during the session of the Council.

The newspaper *La Croix* published the following on December 9th "*When Bishop Willebrands reached the ambo to read in French the Common Declaration of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, he was met with a veritable thunder of applause. Words cannot describe the greatness of this moment. The reconciliation between Rome and Constantinople was sealed in the liturgy by the kiss of peace.*" The journalist adds: "*When the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church, metropolitan Meliton, came down from the altar of confession to return to his place, he was met with such enthusiastic and prolonged applause by the entire crowd that the Pope waited several moments before continuing the ceremony.*"

A penitential ceremony then began, a tradition in the Church observed at the closing of the Councils, and after the promulgation of the final decrees approved by the Council Fathers. Each one asked God's forgiveness for any lack of charity that they might have committed in the course of the discussions. After a time of silent prayer as all the Council members remained kneeling, the Holy Father expressed the prayers of the Assembly, using a treasured text from the seventh century. All then recited the Lord's Prayer with the Holy Father. After the blessing and the peace greeting, the Council Fathers exchanged the kiss of peace and the ceremony concluded with the chanting of the Te Deum, a traditional expression of thanksgiving in the Church.

"*How good it is for us to be here*" (Mt. 17:4) said Mother Guillemin in the words of Saint Peter. These three solemn ceremonies had a profound impact on her: "*...the hour of God that is ringing out for the Church and the world...may the five continents raise up a chorus of prayer and repentance.*" This was the atmosphere that she had just experienced with enormous gratitude, as a priceless blessing for herself and for the great Community that God had confided to her by that vote at Pentecost 1962. From the time she returned, with the Lord's presence in the events and her love for the Church, she radiated God's presence silently and simply because she was alive with God. As Father Lebreton wrote, everything speaks of God, brings forth God and relates to God. These three celebrations that she had experienced reawakened in her this triple flame: faith, hope and charity, to live it and communicate it.

The aggiornamento that she prepared for the Daughters of Charity would be along these lines, having as its foundation the pure doctrine of the holy founders about imitating Christ, in accordance the teachings of the Council. "The main purpose for which God has called the Daughters of Charity and brought them together is to honour our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor..." (Common Rules, Chapter 1)

ADAPTATION AND RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Pope John XXIII had set up ten Conciliar Commissions including one for religious life, "*De religiosis*". Their history and development have been amply publicised in the public conferences that have given a commentary on them. The daily press was also permitted to follow the formation and development of the texts.

During the session of 1964, the Auditrices who were religious had also formulated their recommendations in a note sent to certain members of the Commission (in which they did not participate): "*The reason religious life exists is not based on any function even if this be the highest form of charity. Its only justification is in its very essence, that is, its relationship with God...The social, scientific and technical changes that have so greatly changed the world, together with the work of change that the Church is carrying out for itself, have an impact on the traditional positions of religious life. These changes force it to purify itself of secondary motives and to free it from a mentality of monopolies and privileges that distort the image it must give the Church and the world; this decree, however brief it may be, must be rooted in a new theological perspective.*"

Legalism is no longer appropriate when we have a more spiritual outlook. What then were the major principles in the renewal of religious life? From the beginning there was a question of vocabulary. The president of the Commission saw the need to clarify it: "When we refer to religious life and religious, we understand this to mean those who seek perfection through the profession of the evangelical counsels. In order to avoid the danger of confusion among Religious in the strict sense of the title, the Societies of Common Life and Secular Institutes, we included in the introduction the expression "**while guarding their proper nature**". It is important to find a common definition with which all forms of life consecrated to the service of the Lord feel at ease.

Photo

Renewal and adaptation in religious life call for a continual return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of the Institutes, as well as an adaptation of the latter to the new conditions of our day. It consists of a profound renewal **of religious institutes** a reform coming from a return to the **Gospel** and **listening to current appeals**. That is why, with authority, the conciliar document specifies: "*let Constitutions, Directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies and such like be suitably re-edited and, obsolete laws being suppressed, be adapted to the decrees of this sacred synod.*" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 3)

The supreme rule of spiritual and religious renewal and its adaptation to the new conditions of our times is the Gospel, and the following of Christ under the guidance of the Church. The president of the Commission affirmed: "**The principle norm is that this renewal be carried out in accordance with the Gospel, the imitation of Christ and the spirit of the founder, under the guidance and authority of the Church.**"

A second principle of renewal came from the interventions made by the Council Fathers: the return to the thinking of the founder, his or her spirit, and the

patrimony of the Institute. With regard to this principle, one member proposed “that we be more attentive to the intention and the spirit of the founders than to the forms in which this spirit has been expressed throughout history.”

Mother Guillemin was not afraid to give her personal opinion on the schema which was to be put forward for examination by the Council. This is noted in a summary report relating to the vote on *Perfectae Caritatis* in the final session:

“Mother Guillemin pointed out the positive aspects of this text as well as indicating its shortcomings:

Positive aspects: the place given to the gift of Christ in religious life: the sole justification for this foolishness, as religious life is seen to be in the eyes of the world, is to live for Christ. In our times when efficiency is specifically looked for and where the promotion of the laity is manifest, we can ask: is there still a need for religious? The schema gives the true response: no role or function can explain the total gift of religious consecration. One does not give one’s life for something; one gives one’s life for Someone. Another positive aspect: the schema integrates apostolic action into religious life for the Institutes of active life.

In other respects, however, this text is still too weak: it does not shed light on the duality of action-contemplation, although the key is given: action is part of the very nature of religious life. Action nourishes contemplation and contemplation becomes part of action.

Mother Guillemin was also pleased to see that the schema insisted on the fact that renewal of religious life is not achieved solely by the highest levels of government but it has to be a common effort. On the other hand, this text seemed to her to be too legalistic with regard to practical advice: the spirit of the first part did not seem to animate the second part. Religious perfection still seemed to be too closed in on itself and not open enough to ecclesial dimensions. It is true that the text has to be applied to so many different countries and so many different forms of religious life...She noted, however, that this schema ‘opened up new perspectives. It is a whole manner of living that is called into question,’ and with a smile she concluded, ‘there is enough in this text for a dozen Meetings of Major Superiors...’”

Photo: Mother Guillemin and Cardinal Suenens

The basis of the text was nothing new; for ten years Mother Guillemin had been meditating on the aggiornamento of the Community. She spoke about in other terms but she practised what she proposed to others.

“The Company of the twentieth century must be built on the rock of the Gospel and on our tradition, to bring forth a generation of Daughters of Charity according to the heart of God and Saint Vincent, ready to respond to the call of Christ in his poor ones.” (May 1965 to the Visitatrices)

(to be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Service

THE 16 DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE COUNCIL

1 CONSTITUTION 2 DECREE	The Sacred Liturgy The Means of Social Communication	1963
3 CONSTITUTION 4 DECREE 5 DECREE	The Church Ecumenism The Catholic Eastern Churches	1964
6 DECREE 7 DECREE 8 DECREE 9 DECLARATION 10 DECLARATION	Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life Training of Priests Christian Education Relationships between the Church and non-Christian religions	28 th Oct. 1965
11 CONSTITUTION 12 DECREE	Divine Revelation The Apostolate of the Laity	18 th Nov 1965
13 DECLARATION 14 DECREE 15 DECREE 16 CONSTITUTION	Religious Liberty The Church's Missionary Activity The Ministry and Life of Priests The Church in the Modern World	7 th Dec. 1965