

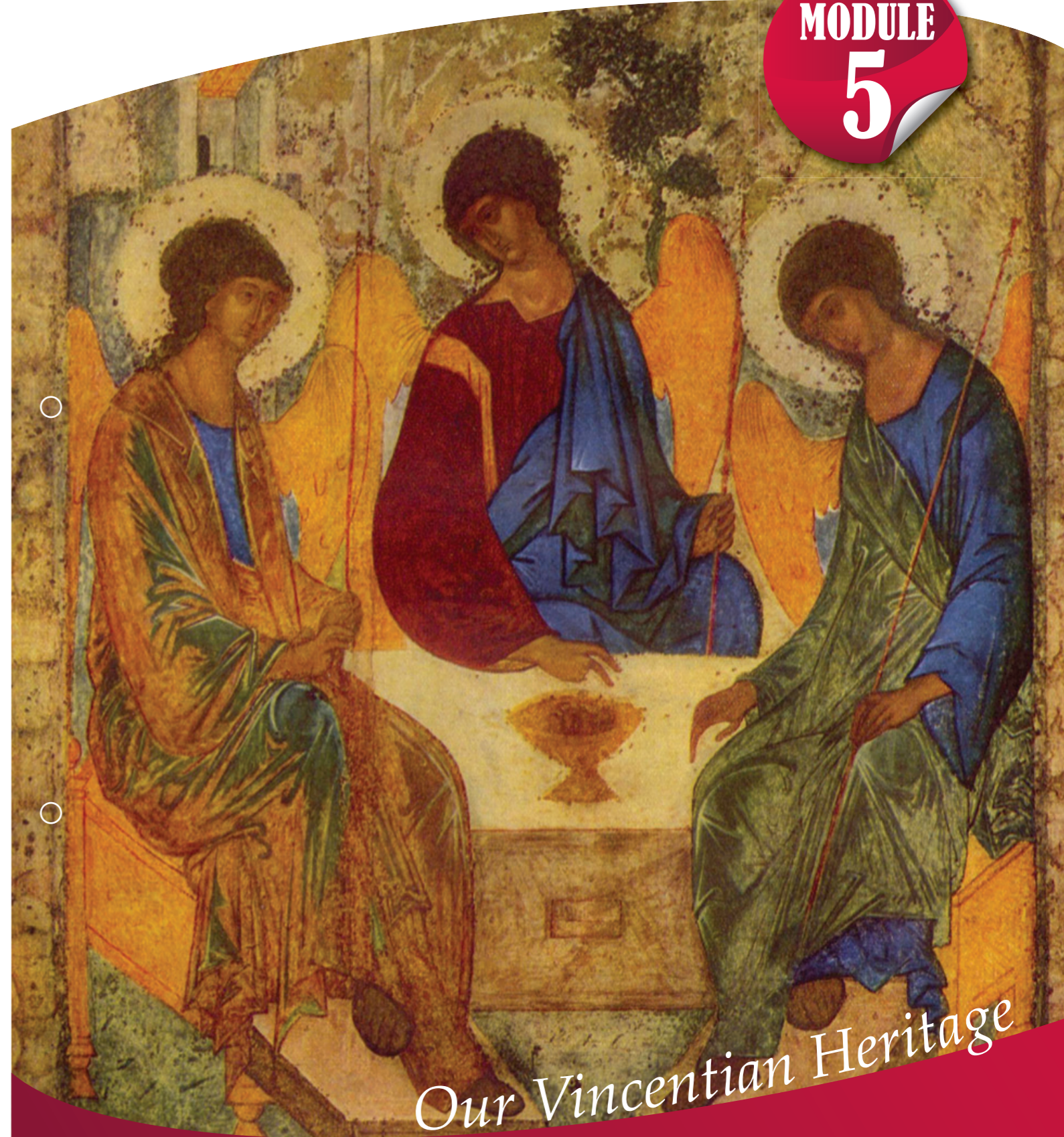


St Vincent de Paul Society

CANBERRA/GOULBURN

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MODULE
5



Our Vincentian Heritage



Called To Love And Serve
A Formation Programme for Vincentians

Published 2015
Society of St Vincent De Paul
Canberra/Goulburn

PO Box 51
Deakin West 2600

Called to Love and Serve
A Formation Programme for Vincentians

A FORMATION PROGRAMME FOR VINCENTIANS

BACKGROUND and INSTRUCTIONS for *Called to Love and Serve*

The Modules in *Called to Love and Serve* have been developed from “Serving in Hope” the spiritual formation programme developed by Sr Keiran Kneaves and the St Vincent de Paul Society in the USA. The *Called to Love and Serve* programme is being developed so as to fit our Australian culture and experiences. It is designed for use by conference members, staff and volunteers to deepen our experience and understanding of our Vincentian heritage. The programme consists of six modules:

Module 1: Our Vincentian Call

Module 2: Our Vincentian Spirituality

Module 3: Our Vincentian Heritage

Module 4: Our Vincentian Mission

Module 5: Our Vincentian Rule

Module 6: Our Vincentian Conference

When we are reading the writings of St Vincent, Blessed Frederic and other Vincentians we need to remember that they were people of their time. As we read their writings we need to make a “horizon shift” which enables us to translate what we read into our times and to let go of the things which are time bound. This is a similar process to that used when we read scripture.

The programme has readings to share at meetings and questions for reflection. It would be good to set up a prayerful environment, perhaps with a candle, in order to facilitate reflection. You may also like to start each session with the song *Will You Come and Follow Me*, which is provided. The readings are meant to be shared reflectively and it could be helpful to share the reading among the Conference members a paragraph at a time. A good process to use in meetings is to listen to the reading and then share a word or phrase which struck you. After each person has shared then discuss the questions. Conference members may also find it helpful to reflect on the session before the meeting so that they are more ready to contribute in the meeting.

The further reading is there for your personal reflection and provides an opportunity to explore the topics more deeply.

We hope you find this programme both informative and enjoyable.

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WILL YOU COME AND FOLLOW ME – The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

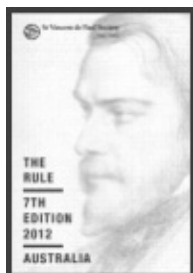
Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoner free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name?
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll live and move and grow in you and you in me.



John L Bell and Graham Maule God Never Sleeps CD
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OUR VINCENTIAN RULE



SESSION 5.1: THE RULE DEFINES OUR VOCATION

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

2 Tim 1:6-9

As Vincentians we have the responsibility to be faithful to the spirit of the Society which was founded over 180 years ago. The way we do this is by following The Rule. The Rule is the document that carries the essence of the spirit and shows us the way that we should live and act as Vincentians.

For Christians, the main source of inspiration is the person of Jesus and the Scriptures. The stories of Jesus that we have in the Gospels give us an understanding of who Jesus is, but each of us has our own personal relationship with Jesus. We all have an individual answer to the question “Who do you say I am?” (Mt 16:15) We all respond in an individual way to our relationship with Jesus. However, as members of the Society, our mission is part of our response to who Jesus is for us.

The Church has a history of rules followed by religious communities, such as those written by St Benedict, St Ignatius and St Dominic. St Vincent de Paul wrote a Rule for the Congregation of the Mission and one for the Daughters of Charity. These Rules guided the behaviour of the members of these congregations. The Rule plays a similar role for Society members.

As the Society grew the founders recognised that they needed to define the mission of the organisation. It was only two years after the foundation of the Society that Emmanuel Bailly requested that Francois Lallier capture the Society’s structure, spirituality and identity in a written Rule.

The Rule has been revised over the years so that it continues to reflect the lives and experiences of Vincentians throughout the world. Our current version of the Rule was issued in 2012 and is the seventh edition of The Rule in Australia.

Part 1 Section 1 of The Rule is about our origins. As we reflect on this part of The Rule let the following words penetrate our hearts:

As Vincentians, we are called to be members of an International Catholic voluntary organisation of lay people, dedicated “to the poor and to the Church”.¹ The vocation of Society members is “to follow Christ through service to those in need and so bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love.”² Vincentians are called to “show their commitment through person to person contact” and to “serve in hope”.³

As Vincentians “No work of charity is foreign”. We are called to give personal help to people in need in a way that promotes their dignity.⁴

As Vincentians, we need to be faithful to the spirit of our founders, while adapting to the changing world in which we live.

As we pray with The Rule we ask ...

Are we channels for the peace and joy of Christ?

Are we conscious of our own frailty and weakness?

Do we reflect God’s love, generosity, reconciliation and inner peace?

Are we grateful for what we receive from the people that we visit?

Do we pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance during our visits?

Do we serve poor people willingly and with an open mind?

Does our visit help the poor person acknowledge their dignity?

How often do you reflect on The Rule? What are these reflections calling you to?

1 The rule, 15.

2 The rule, 15.

3 The Rule, 16.

4 The Rule, 16.

Further Reading

OUR FOUNDERS⁵

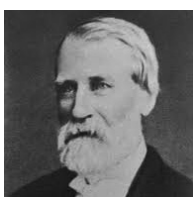
The Rule reminds us that we follow in the footsteps of all our founders, Frederic Ozanam, Auguste Le Taillandier, Paul Lamache, Francois Lallier, Jules Devaux, Felix Clave and Emmanuel Bailly. We owe gratitude to all of them for the part they played in starting the Society as it would not have become what it was without each one.



Emmanuel Bailly (1794 – 1861): *The first President-General and Spiritual Advisor*

Emmanuel Bailly was born in the Pas de Calais Department in the north of France. He soon settled in Paris and worked there as a journalist, editor and publisher. He and his wife, Sidonie, had six children two of whom entered religious life. Throughout his life he acted as a mentor and spiritual guide to young people whom he met during the course of his work. He founded the Conference of History where students could meet to discuss and debate a wide range of issues. It was here that Frederic and his companions were challenged: “What is your Church doing now? Show us your works and we will believe you.”

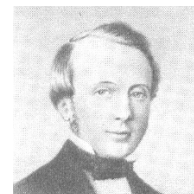
It was therefore quite natural that Ozanam and his friends should go to Bailly in order to talk about their plans for doing charitable work. Bailly provided them with a meeting place, he encouraged them to define their ideas and agreed to guide their efforts by becoming their Spiritual Advisor. Having a great love for St Vincent de Paul, and being familiar with his writings, he linked the Conference of Charity to the great Vincentian spiritual family by sending the young men to Sr Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity for guidance. In 1844 Bailly retired as the Society’s President General but he remained a member of the Council until the end of his life in 1861.



Auguste Le Taillandier (1811 – 1886): *The one who received the first inspiration.*

Auguste Le Taillandier was born in Rouen (Normandy). He belonged to a family of tradespeople, who had been living in that region since the 17th century. He and his family moved to Paris so that he could continue his legal studies. He there met Ozanam, becoming one of his friends. He joined the Conference of History, however, he was not as animated in the discussions as his companions. In 1833 he told Frederic that he thought that the discussions were leading nowhere and that it would be better to join together in some charitable work, instead of discussions about history literature and philosophy. So, he was the one who received the first inspiration. Le Taillandier was actively involved in the Conference of Charity, in addition to other charitable works, such as giving religious instruction to apprentices and making visits to prisoners and former prisoners. He then returned to his home town of Rouen, married and had five children. He became regional director of one of France’s oldest and

⁵ This Material is taken from the book *Origines et Fondateurs de La Societe de Saint Vincent de Paul* and at http://famvin.org/wiki/SVDP_-_Founders



most distinguished insurance companies. He founded a Conference in Rouen and became its president.

Paul Lamache (1810 – 1892): *The passionate defender of justice.*

Paul Lamache was born at Saint-Pierre-Eglise in Normandy. He belonged to an ancient family of landowners and administrators, on the fringe of Norman nobility. He settled in Paris to study law. In 1832 he met Ozanam and joined him in the Conference of History where he took an active part in debates. He became one of the founders of the Charity Conference. After completing his studies he married. He wrote many articles for various reviews, in which he participated in the great debates of that age. He was strongly against slavery and wrote and distributed a brochure outlining these principles, including those promulgated by Pope Gregory XVI. He became equally involved in the support of the freedom of education. He was successively appointed Rector of the Departmental Academy in the Cotes-du-Nord (Brittany); Professor of Roman Law at the University of Strasbourg; Professor of Administrative Law in Bordeaux and then in Grenoble.

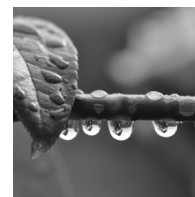
Francois Lallier (1814 – 1886): *The one who formulated the first version of The Rule.*

Francois Lallier was born in Burgundy. He made Ozanam's acquaintance at the Law Faculty and was to remain until Ozanam's death, one of his closest friends. Ozanam chose him as the godfather of his daughter, Marie. He was one of the keenest participants in the Conference of History's debates. He was actively involved in all of the steps taken to found the Society: with Bailly first of all, and then with the Archbishop of Paris. In 1835 he was entrusted by Bailly with the formulation of the first Rule of the Society. He was an excellent lawyer, renowned for his precise use of language and he applied himself avidly to such work. In 1837 he was appointed the Society's Secretary-General and signed circulars which form an important part of our Vincentian tradition. In 1839, after stepping down from Council-General, he married and returned to live in his native town, and there he worked as a magistrate.

Jules Devaux (1811 – 1880): *The first Conference Treasurer.*

Jules Devaux was born in Normandy, and he was the son of a doctor, probably from peasant stock. In about 1830 he settled in Paris to complete his medical studies. It was here that he met Ozanam and his friends, who participated in the Conference of History. He took part in the Conference of History but does not appear to have been very active in debates. He attended early meetings of the Conference of Charity and was the first Conference Treasurer, taking up a collection of funds by walking around with his hat behind his back. He left Paris in 1839, after submitting his medical thesis, and settled in Normandy. After his mother's death, he temporarily abandoned medical practice and travelled especially in Germany. He tried to found the Society there but was not successful. The remainder of his life is not well known. He died in Paris in 1880.





The Rule Captures our Spirituality

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Rom 5:1-5

The Holy Spirit gave Blessed Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent de Paul the gift of a clear vision of how they were to follow Jesus. We follow in their footsteps and it is The Rule which helps us to do so. It is a blessing and a grace which has guided and guarded the Society since 1833. The Rule has been lived by ordinary men and women who have carried in their hearts and minds and extraordinary mission.

St Vincent told the Daughters of Charity

love your Rules, dear Sisters; keep them as the path by which God wants to lead you to himself, and rest assured that as long as you follow them, God, who has prescribed them for you, given them to you, and placed you on the road to practice them—rest assured, I repeat, that He won't allow you to go astray.⁶

St Vincent knew that a Rule is the spiritual path to holiness. Therefore, The Rule is not just a written document, for indeed, The Rule embodies our heart and soul. Therefore, we don't just read The Rule so that we can know it in our minds; we must meditate and pray with The Rule, so that the words and spirit of our Founders can penetrate our hearts.

The Rule Part 1 Section 2: Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation

In this section of The Rule we are reminded of the passage from Romans (5:1-5) which is shown above. It reminds us that through faith we have access to grace which helps us to live out our faith and to endure the challenges that we meet on our journey. We can say with St Paul that

...and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Gal 2:20

⁶ CCD, Vol IX, 283.

As Vincentians we are “called to journey together to holiness”⁷. We see Christ in the poor and in each other. Our Conference is to be a community in which we can share our journey with each other and help each other in the Christian life. By sharing and reflecting on our experiences of service to people living in poverty we see God’s presence in our work and find renewed energy to continue our service.

Praying with The Rule and inspired by the example of Blessed Frederic we ask:

- Do we envision the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world?
- Do we share the joys of faith in God with others?
- Do we work towards our wholeness as lay people living out the Gospel?
- Do we have a passion for the truth?

Praying with The Rule and inspired by the example of St Vincent we ask:

- Do we love God with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms?
- Do we see Christ in poor people and poor people in Christ?
- Do we share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ?
- Do we heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

Praying with The Rule we ask...do we practice our essential virtues:

Simplicity by:

- Our frankness, integrity, genuineness?

Humility by:

- Accepting the truth about our gifts, talents and frailties?
- Knowing that all God gives us is for others?
- Knowing that we can achieve nothing without God’s grace?

⁷ The Rule, 18.

FURTHER READING

CHRISTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP⁸

The Christ that set Vincent on fire for the poor was Christ the evangeliser of the poor; the Christ announcing his public ministry in the words of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord." (Luke 4:18)

Saint Vincent's spirituality and mission flow from his contemplation of this "ChriSaint." In Christ the evangelizer, Vincent sees a loving, trusting relationship with the Father, compassion for the poor, love for the sinner, and particular interior qualities that speak to his own heart. It is Christ the evangelizer who came to liberate people from sin, from bondage of every type and to heal them spiritually and corporally that Vincent takes unto himself. The incarnate Jesus Christ of Vincent continues to live and to suffer in the poor. Vincent tells the daughters:

In serving the poor, you serve Jesus Christ, O my Daughters, how true that is!⁹

and

... the poor represent for you the person of Our Lord, who said: 'Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my brethren, I will consider it as done to me.'¹⁰

...In entering into the life and mission of Christ through prayer and lived experience, Vincent interiorized and held out to his followers certain qualities, interior attitudes or virtues of Christ the evangelizer that were to be hallmarks of their spirituality-the lived reality of their faith.

Five of these virtues were to characterize the Congregation of the Mission and three the Daughters of Charity.

In Christ, Vincent saw the virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal as inherent in the spirituality of the missionary. In the Daughters of Charity he saw the principal virtues of simplicity, humility and charity as the essence of their spirit.

Simplicity: For Vincent, simplicity was his gospel. It was the virtue that Christ lived in word and deed. "I am the way, the truth...." In the Vincentian tradition it calls us to dedication to truth and to an avoidance of any duplicity, hence to singleness or purity of intention.

Humility: In his incarnation, and in his mission, Jesus exemplified the virtue of humility. Being God, he became like us in all things but sin. For us, humility calls us to recognize the gifts and talents that we have as coming from God, to acknowledge our weakness and to have a deep trust

⁸ Extracts from Kathryn LaFleur, *Christological Aspects of Vincentian Leadership*, *Vincentian Heritage*, 19(1998)29-44.

⁹ CCD IX, 199.

¹⁰ CCD X, 268.

in God's providence. Vincent lived this reality of humility and exhorted his followers to do the same. On the topic of motivations for humility, Vincent, in 1659 said to his missionaries:

But to honor the words and sentiments of our Lord, we shall merely say that it has been recommended to us by himself, 'Learn of me who am humble.'¹¹

Meekness: For Vincent this virtue according to Father Maloney is the ability to handle anger either by suppressing it or by expressing it in a manner governed by love. It is approachability and affability. It combines gentleness and firmness.

In Vincent's words:

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the meek master of human beings and of angels. By the practice of this same virtue of meekness you will go to him and bring others to him as well.¹²

Mortification: Jesus is the example of mortification. To follow Jesus, Vincent reminds us that we are called to take up our cross daily. We are called to die to ourselves, to empty ourselves as did Christ in service to others. We die to ourselves in whatever ways call us to leave everything to follow Jesus, to put on Christ. Vincent wrote to Antoine Durand:

It is essential for you father, to empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ.¹³

Zeal: is the virtue of missionary action. Vincent said, "If the love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray."¹⁴ Zeal is love in practice. Vincent writes:

Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows. So very often many acts of love of God, of resting in his presence, of benevolence, and such interior affections and practices, although very good and very desirable, are nonetheless to be suspected if they do not reach the practice of effective love.¹⁵

For Vincent affective love of God must find expression in effective love of neighbour. The virtue of charity for Vincent was primary and essential to all other virtues and the works of both the members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity were to be rooted in the virtue of love.

How do these virtues form you for leadership in the Society?

¹¹ CCD XII, 162.

¹² Abelly, III, 168.

¹³ CCD XI, 311.

¹⁴ CCD XII, 262.

¹⁵ CCD XI, 32.



The Rule Encourages Our Community of Faith

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in* the Lord.'

1 Cor 1:27-31

Part 1 Section 3 of The Rule is about Members, Conferences, and Councils. We are reminded that the Society "is open to all who seek to live their faith loving and committing themselves to their neighbour in need."¹⁶

The Rule also tells us that in Conferences "members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action."¹⁷

So we ask ourselves:

- Do we always treat our fellow members as our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Do we help to build community in our Conference?
- Do we share our faith together in a way that is sustaining of each member and supportive of our work?
- Do we foster the "spirit of youth, which is characterised by enthusiasm, adaptability and creative imagination"?

St Vincent wrote that "love is inventive to infinity"¹⁸ which means that if we are inspired by love then we will continually look for new ways to serve others.

The Rule calls us to be open to younger members. How open is our Conference to new members, particularly younger ones?

The Rule reminds us of the importance of communication to promoting and maintaining community in our Conferences as well as between Conferences and Councils. Communication is the responsibility of all and involves a two way process of sharing information.

¹⁶ The Rule, 20.

¹⁷ The Rule, 20.

¹⁸ CCD Vol 11, 131.

Further Reading

Community Living in the Vincentian Family¹⁹

Be united with one another, and God will bless you. But let it be by the charity of Jesus Christ, for any union which is not sealed by the blood of our saviour cannot endure. It is therefore in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ that you ought to be united with one another.²⁰

We should not be surprised that community is very imperfect as times. If community really is something we must work toward, then it can never be captured once and for all. We must always be striving to create it. Sometimes there will be high points sometimes lows. ...as Bernard Lonergan points out, community demands union on many levels, some of which may be better realized than others. Lonergan speaks of four levels at which the bonds of community are forged.²¹

Common experience

Common experience lays the groundwork for community. ...it involves imbibing a common heritage, sharing in common traditions, learning a body of common knowledge...participating in common symbolic acts.

Common understanding

Common understanding means that when we say the same things we mean the same things.

Common judgement

This means that we come to agree, as a community, on certain ideas. ... Reaching common judgements demands meetings, a decision-making process, a willingness to compromise, and a respect for differing opinions. ...The body of foundational common judgements will not be excessively detailed, nor very large; moreover, while the basic truths will remain stable, their interpretation will never be static.

Common action

A community must act together on the judgements which it has made. The members must work with one another in such a way that they feel co-responsibility.

Fr Maloney also describes five moments that help build community:
Shared meals, prayer together, fun, meetings and apostolate

How can your Conference incorporate these elements into your life together?

¹⁹ Adapted from Robert Maloney, *Community Living in The Vincentian Family*, *Seasons in Spirituality*, 143-153.

²⁰ Abelly, *Book 11*, chap 1, 145.

²¹ Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1985) 5-6.

The Rule Encourages Servant Leadership

The Rule tells us

3.11 Presidents as servant leaders

Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor and of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The President of the Conference or Council will have special responsibility for promoting Vincentian spirituality.

Fr Maloney describes 10 foundation stones of servant leadership.

1. Listening

Traditionally, leaders have been valued for their decision making and communication skills. Servant leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Servant leaders seek to identify and clarify the will of a group. They seek to listen receptively to what is being and said (and not said). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating.

Do people believe that you want to hear their ideas and will value them? Servant leaders are very good listeners. They are receptive and genuinely interested in the views and input of others. People instinctively understand that servant leaders want them to share their ideas and that these ideas will be valued.

Listening is a skill that can be learnt and is essential for those who desire to be a servant leader. Without good listening skills, many of the other characteristics that I will list cannot be achieved.

2. Empathy

Servant leaders strive to understand others and empathise with them. People need to be accepted and recognised for their special gifts. One must assume the good intentions of co-workers and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject their behaviour or performance.

Do people believe that you will understand what is happening in their lives and how it affects them? Servant leaders can "walk in others' shoes". They empathise with others' circumstances and problems. Leaders who are empathic have earned confidence from others by understanding what difficulties they face. This characteristic is a skill that comes more naturally to some people than others, but it is pertinent for all who aspire to be a servant leader.

3. Healing

Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation within a group. One of the great strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others.

Do people come to you when the chips are down or when something traumatic has happened in their lives? Servant leaders are people who others want to approach when something traumatic has occurred. They are good at facilitating the healing process, and others gravitate toward them when emotional needs arise. The ability to create an environment that encourages emotional mending is crucial for those who want to become great servant leaders.

4. Awareness

Awareness of what is going on in a group, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary – one never knows that one may discover! Awareness does not always bring solace – just the opposite. It may disturb. But servant leaders are not seekers of solace. They have their own inner security.

Do others believe you have a strong awareness for what is going on? Servant leaders have a keen sense for what is happening around them. They are always looking for cues from the environment to inform their opinions and decisions. They know what's really happening within a group and will rarely be fooled by appearances. This skill is crucial to the development of servant leaders.

5. Persuasion

Servant leaders rely on persuasion, rather than the authority of their position in making decisions. They seek to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant leadership. The servant leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

Do others follow your requests because they want to or because they believe they "have to"? Servant leaders seek to persuade others to do things rather than relying on formal authority. They have the ability to convince and offer compelling reasons when they make requests. This ability is important for servant leaders to develop.

6. Vision

Servant leaders seek to nurture the ability to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organisation) with creativity means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant leaders must seek a delicate balance between long-range vision and day-to-day focus.

Do others communicate their ideas and vision for the organisation when you are around? Servant leaders nurture the ability to think creatively about the world, events, and possibilities. They encourage others to dream great dreams and avoid getting bogged down by day-to-day problems. They foster an environment that encourages thinking big and valuing the creative process. Those who want to be great servant leaders must develop an environment that fosters conceptualisation.

7. Planning for Future

Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind.

Do others have confidence in your ability to anticipate the future and its consequences? Servant leaders have the ability to anticipate future events. This is not to say they are psychic or always right, but they are adept at picking up patterns in the environment and seeing what the future will bring. They usually anticipate consequences of decisions with great accuracy. Those who want to be effective servant leaders need to have and develop this foresight.

8. Stewardship

Servant leaders recognize that trustees, CEO's, directors, and staff members all play significance roles in holding their institutions in trust for the great good of the community (the poor, the church, etc.).

Do others believe you are preparing the organisation to make a positive difference in the world? Servant leaders are often characterized by a strong sense of stewardship.

Stewardship stems from medieval times when a 'steward' would be assigned to hone the skills and development of a young prince — to prepare him for his reign. The kingdom relied on the steward to teach and hold the prince in trust so that he would be a successful king. Today the term stewardship involves many of the same things. A steward in an organisation is responsible for preparing it for its destiny, usually for the betterment of society. When we describe a leader as having a strong sense of stewardship, we refer to a desire to prepare the organisation to contribute to the greater good of society — not unlike preparing the prince to serve the greater good of the kingdom. Making a positive difference in the future is characteristic of the stewardship mentality. Those who desire to be servant leaders need to have a sense of stewardship.

9. Commitment to the Growth of Individuals

Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, servant leaders are deeply committed to a personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the organisation.

Further Reading

Being Creative in Vincentian Leadership: the Case of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul²²

By Eduardo Marques (Eduardo Marques Ahneida has been a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul for 27 years, having belonged to conferences in Brazil, the United States and France)

A Model for Vincentian Leadership

Leadership can be defined in different ways, and there are many different kinds. However, the following definition expresses the essence of leadership:

The skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being of common good.²³

This definition incorporates a key element of the type of leadership to be discussed, Service/Vincentian Leadership. A leader can influence people to work enthusiastically to accomplish his/her own goals, which may not always correspond to the common good. Here we are stating explicitly that the leader is a servant, a servant of the common good.

The first question to ask is “what are the necessary ingredients for someone to be considered a servant leader?” This question assumes that the leader can acquire the skills - or ingredients - to be perceived as a real servant leader. The subsequent question is “how to acquire these skills?” The initial answer to this second question is that these skills cannot be acquired only through training, but must be accompanied by the leader’s true desire to serve.

“Servant leadership forces us to think of others before ourselves: in fact, the first element of service leadership is the desire to serve.”²⁴

In fact, there are many ways to cultivate various traits of Service/Vincentian Leadership, but there is only one which makes them an intrinsic part of one’s life: the genuine desire to serve, that is, to put others ahead of oneself, to make a difference by helping others for the better.

Saint Vincent de Paul is an example of just such a person with the desire and ability not only to exhibit Service/Vincentian Leadership traits, but also to teach them.

The first Service/Vincentian Leadership trait we should address, taught by Saint Vincent de Paul, is the ability to learn. We must learn about the needs of others and ascertain the best way to serve them. Vincent was able to identify others’ needs better than they could express them. This is possible only when we live as others live and we evaluate how their lives could be better when compared to our own standards. De Paul was able

²² Article reproduced from Vincentian Heritage Volume 26 number 1.

²³ James C. Hunter, *The Servant: a Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership* (Rocklin, Calif.: Prima Pub., 1998), 187pp.; James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: When Leaders are at Their Best* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 12pp.

²⁴ This idea has been taught by Marvin Bower, the consultant who transformed the values of McKinsey & Co. into what became the essence of the firm’s decades-long sustainability.

to read each event as if it was a message to him personally. This ability gave him the skill to constantly analyze any situation, to see what could be an improvement to those he was serving, and to ultimately identify an innovative solution.

Love is inventive to infinity.²⁵

The second noteworthy trait of Service / Vincentian Leadership is related to style, or influence based on authority not on power. Many times Saint Vincent de Paul referred to himself as the least important member of the Congregation of the Mission, despite having founded it. Even though he suffered melancholic moods - self-admittedly very difficult - Vincent was able to exercise his influence based on knowledge, experience and infinite faith in Divine Providence. There is no better way of encouraging people than in demonstrating that it is not only our competence at stake, but also a matter of one's personal relationship with God. Being the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, Saint Vincent de Paul could have used the Common Rules as a concrete way of forcing his confreres to do what they should do. But he refused to rely upon this source of power.

Our Lord has lived for 33 years and has never set a written rule.²⁶

Example by behaviour forms the third trait. The will to serve must be constantly expressed in decisions, actions, and presentation.

Saint Vincent de Paul was an example of a person who would make any sacrifice for his cause. He wrote some 30,000 letters, expressing his ideas and care for individuals, the Missionaries of the Congregation, the Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of Charity, his friends, and the members of his parishes. In any situation, but particularly in crisis, a leader's faith, values, and long-term vision are tested. The consistency of example and principle is the key element in building credibility of leadership. Daily actions have the power to express two dimensions of Service / Vincentian Leadership: first, the consistency between the will to serve and the intrinsic values of the leader; and, second, the real importance of short-term actions when compared with long-term vision. As a service leader Saint Vincent de Paul was very practical and he knew that all of his decisions, oral presentations, and actions would be taken as symbols by those he would influence. By constantly trying to be what God wanted him to be to others he was a personal expression of the essence of service.

Lastly, as mentioned previously, having long-term vision is a key trait of the Service / Vincentian leader. Saint Vincent de Paul may well have known that some of the works he created would last for centuries and be spread throughout the world. He may have dreamed that the Congregation of the Mission would have thousands of missionaries in every country. Two centuries later, following his example, Antoine Frederick Ozanam, the principal founder of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, had a long-term dream: spread a small band of members, grouped in a unit called

²⁵ Quote attributed to Vincent de Paul, found in Pierre Coste's biography of the saint.

²⁶ Ibid.

“Conference” to every place in the world. In his own words, Frederick Ozanam introduced the concept of global networking to the nineteenth century:

I would like to embrace the whole world in a network of charity.²⁷

Long-term vision encompasses at least two values relevant for Service/Vincentian Leadership. First, it creates a common purpose to serve. Second, it provides fundamental criteria to evaluate short-term happenings and actions, as stated above.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul: a Case of Success

The SVdP Society was founded in 1833 by a group of young students from the best university in France, the Sorbonne. As many projects launched by young students, it could have failed some months after it was founded. However, it grew so successfully that today it has more than 600,000 active members in over 130 countries, operating in the same manner it was founded, with the same vision and the same mission.

This phenomenon is a case for analysis. Why has the Society been so successful?

- The SVdP Society learns from the past.

From its very beginnings the Society developed a strong desire to learn from previous leaders and entrepreneurs. Initially, Ozanam learned the importance of serving the poor from Saint Vincent de

Paul. As mentioned before, the Society was founded by students from a prestigious university who had a deep desire to learn and study.

In addition, the Society learned from taking risks. Ozanam wanted the Society to develop outside France, covering every part of the world and following the model of the first Conference, which was used as a pilot for growth. His strategy was based on the concept of “thinking big, starting small and growing fast.”

Finally, the Society developed a very conservative approach to dealing with change, making decisions based on tradition and the International Rule in a centralized manner.

- The members of the SVdP Society have an intrinsic will to serve.

Direct volunteer service, listening to the needs of the poor and sharing their sufferings, is only sustainable if the server has the means to serve. Direct contact with poverty leads the membership of the Society to create innovative ways to reduce it, either through the formation of new

²⁷ This Quote is traditionally attributed to Frederick Ozanam, although it is not found in his writings.

Conferences or the launching of social works. Growth is a response to the exposure to poverty.

- The members of the Society strive to accomplish their own holiness.

The first objective of the Society is to provide a means to be holy through service to the poor. As this holiness is a relationship between the person and God, there is no need to pretend to serve. In other words, genuine service is a fundamental behavioural trait of the Society's membership.

- The Society has a distinctive mission and vision.

The operational model of the Society is based on three components: first, direct service to the poor (through frequent home visits); second, the grouping of members in small faith communities (Conferences); and third, the laicity of its members. This differentiation had repercussions on the Society's growth - its adequacy in the world, and the positive reinforcement of being a member of a Society with a clear and complete set of values.

In addition, the leaders of the Society have clear performance measures, including quantitative and qualitative growth and the maintenance of the initial spirit of the Society.

The SVdP Society also Highlights some Concerns in the Implementation of Service/Vincentian Leadership

Despite being a case of success, the SVdP Society, as many large volunteer-based organizations, inhibits fully implementing the model of Service/Vincentian Leadership presented in this paper.

- Learning is constrained by the avoidance of risk-taking, evaluation, and change.

The essence of Service/Vincentian Leadership is to risk, to learn from mistakes and to review practices according to these opportunities without losing the initial spirit which differentiates an institution from others. To risk means to better serve, as the needs of the people served change over time. To learn from mistakes means to better serve, as the leader must accept that mistakes are sometimes made with the good intention of improving service. To review practices means to better serve, as a good leader puts the mission before that of his/her own position.

As a large society, based on a Rule, the SVdP has a tendency to be conservative. Its leaders tend to make decisions based on past experiences and current rules. In addition, being a society formed in humble spirit, they do not naturally possess the attitude to explicitly evaluate and give feed-back to other members.

- Influence based on authority is constrained by the strong centralization of decision-making.

The essence of leadership based on authority and not on power is decentralization.

As a large Society, the SVdP has continuously enforced the centralization of power as a key element of its management style. Leaders tend to make decisions based on the core position of the SVdP and its Rule. In addition, being a Society formed by humble members, they do not question this management style.

- Long-term vision of the Society is constrained by humility and the nature of their operations.

The essence of creating a long-term vision is the ability to see beyond the immediate horizon.

Being a Society formed by humble members (in most cases, not trained to “see out of the box”), it is difficult for its leaders to build a long-term and challenging vision. Even when leaders of the Society are trained in their professional lives to use concepts of vision building and managing by results, an interesting phenomenon frequently takes place- they tend to forget these concepts in managing the Society. In addition the operations of the Society are based on “grass-root” and “small” actions performed individually to assist the poor, practices which do not necessarily motivate people to think globally.

- Lack of training constrains leaders in teaching by example.

A servant leader must be aware that each action or decision is a symbol of service.

Being a Society formed by humble volunteers unaccustomed to proclaiming the good they do, its leaders are not trained to evaluate the impact of their decisions and actions on the members’ perception. There is a common belief that the Society’s members have a vocation, which is a grace, and, as a result, does not need to be taught or reinforced by the examples of leadership.

Lessons Learned as Applied to the Vincentian Leadership Initiative Expansion

The following are characteristics of the SVdP Society defined as obstacles to the full implementation of Service/Vincentian Leadership concepts, as stated in our model: to be conservative; to be formed by humble members; to enforce the centralization of power; to be formed by humble volunteers unaccustomed to proclaiming the good they do; and to have a vocation, which is a grace.

An analysis of these characteristics leads us to two key questions: (1) are these characteristics real obstacles or key factors in the success of the SVdP; and (2) are they sustainable in a “globalized” world where flexibility, networking, and innovation are critical?



There are no easy answers to these questions. Answers depend on the sociological environment in which each Conference of the Society is located. As a key principle, the Society is based on “unity in diversity,” and should, as a result, keep principles and the primitive spirit alive yet attuned to each particular social environment.

However, our analysis warrants the proposal of some recommendations for the implementation of the Service/Vincentian Leadership Initiative:

- Recommendation 1: Respect diversity

An institution where Service/Vincentian Leadership will be implemented should be adapted to reflect the local sociological environment. The key questions for implementation are: why, when and how to change?

- Recommendation 2: Invest in education

As leadership is a skill, current and future leaders should be trained to understand the meaning of

Service/Vincentian Leadership, adapt it to local circumstances, and apply and develop it over time.

- Recommendation 3: Think big, start small and grow fast

Any initiative generated by the Service/Vincentian Leadership program will produce a sizeable impact only in the long run. As a result, it is necessary to create a vision, start with a pilot program, research, and plan how to adapt and expand.

What do you think of Marques analysis of the Society? How many of these traits are present in your Conference, Region or in the wider Society? What would make Vincentian leadership more effective in your Conference?

MY REFLECTIONS

The Rule Creates Our Relationships

...lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Eph 4:1-6

The very founding of our organisation was created in an environment of collaboration with other institutions, beginning with the daughters of Charity through the mentoring of Sr Rosalie. The founders also knew, respected and collaborated with the hierarchy of the Church. They were active in their parishes and worked with their pastors. They respected the work of other religious and non-religious charities and many of them, including Frederic, were active in civil and Church politics.

The relationships between the St Vincent de Paul Society and other religious and civil organisation needed to be defined. Within the first ten years we find frequent references in the letters of Frederic Ozanam, Emmanuel Bailly and Francois Lallier clarifying activities that should be encouraged or discouraged by the young Society still working out its unique mission. Their vision of how this organisation of Catholic laity works with other institutions for the benefit of the poor is captured simply in our Rule.

As generations of Vincentians lived the Rule, there was from time to time need for clarification, re-interpretation or renewal. St Vincent and Blessed Frederic knew that because The Rule was rooted in faith, it would promote unity in diversity, discipline in flexibility and freedom in accountability. They knew that The Rule would not be static, and they trusted that at different times in history, the Holy Spirit would lead their followers to renew The Rule so that they would be adapted to meet the needs of the poor in each generation. Thus, in the providence of God, new life and hope would always be alive in the hearts and souls of Vincentians.

Our Rule challenges us to have new eyes to see and new ears to hear the cries of those who are poor today by providing guidance and clarity to all of our collaborative relationships.

Twinning – Does our Conference regularly correspond with our twins? Do we feel connected in “spirituality, deep friendship, solidarity and mutual help”?²⁸ What could we do to improve our relationship?

²⁸ The Rule, 23.

FURTHER READING

DEUS CARITAS EST

1. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us”.

We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John’s Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life” (3:16). In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel’s faith, while at the same time giving it new depth and breadth. The pious Jew prayed daily the words of the Book of Deuteronomy which expressed the heart of his existence: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4-5). Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbour found in the Book of Leviticus: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (19:18; cf. Mk 12:29-31). Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere “command”; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others.

25. Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections:

a) The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.²⁹

b) The Church is God’s family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas- agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards

29 Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores (22 February 2004), 194, Vatican City 2004, p. 213.

the needy whom we encounter “by chance” (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (6:10).

27. In today’s complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church’s social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

30. ... I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world of today.

a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This “togetherness” at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbours in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: “Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs.”³⁰

On the other hand—and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization—we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care. Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that “among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples.”³¹ State agencies and humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources. The solidarity shown by civil society thus significantly surpasses that shown by individuals.

b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.³²

³⁰ Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicum Actuotatem*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

³² Cf. Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 195, Vatican City 2004, pp. 214-216.



31. b) ...The Christian's programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is "a heart which sees". This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

34. Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

35. This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (Lk 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

How does the teaching of this encyclical influence the way that you treat people living in poverty?

How do you see yourself as being God's instrument?



The Rule Demands our Work for Justice

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Lk 4:16-21

In his encyclical letter of the 25th of December, 2005: *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love)³³ Pope Benedict XVI continues to challenge us by saying:

29. The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good." The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity".

31.(a) Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their

³³ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love.

40. The figures of saints such as ... Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac ... to name but a few—stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

In Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*³⁴ he builds on this teaching of Pope Benedict.

39. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others.

53. Just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality.

57. "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs". (Saint John Chrysostom)

While Pope Francis was not writing a social encyclical he made it clear that the mission of the Church involves working for justice and caring for people most in need in our world.

The Rule reminds us that:

7.1 The Society gives immediate help but also seeks mid-term and long-term solutions. The Society is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. The Society is, therefore, committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and to contributing to their elimination. In all its charitable actions there should be a search for justice; in its struggle for justice, the Society must keep in mind the demands of charity.

7.2 As citizens of one world, Vincentians listen to the voice of the Church which demands their participation in creating a more equitable and compassionate social order, promoting the culture of life and civilization of love.

³⁴ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html



Further Reading

An extract from *Vincent de Paul: the Social Commitment of a Man of Spirit* by Jaime Corera Andia CM³⁶

The social roots of the social action of Vincent de Paul

Every human being is my neighbour, including the stranger and the Samaritan (Lk 10:36-37). And so no Christian, who wants to nourish his spiritual life with the spiritual experience of Christ, needs to go very far to practice, as he did, compassion, true love and even the giving up of one's life, on behalf of the neighbour. Unless one lives a solitary life on an island, or in the desert, there will always be someone nearby in need of help. This has always been well known and practiced by men and women of all spiritual styles and in all stages of the spiritual life.

However, neither in every age nor in every individual, is there a clear awareness about the social dimensions of human life. The modern society of today is, without a doubt, more conscious of these dimensions than the societies in past times. Its awareness includes the limits of humanity itself. Now the neighbour is not simply the individual who is near; rather, all human beings are neighbours. Human persons do not see themselves as mere members of closed institutions (small rural communities, feudal structures, guilds, parishes...), to which they owe all their loyalty. Rather they see themselves, more and more, as citizens of the world, members of one humanity.

Faced with this reality, Christian charity must clearly put into practice, without forgetting "close" relationships with those who are near, a vision and practice of "distant" relationships which take into account not only the needs of individuals in close proximity to us, but also the needs of social groupings, both near and far, and of the individuals who make up these groupings, in whatever part of the world they may be. Both Paul Ricoeur and Father Chenu opportunely warned us of this over half a century ago. This is also without a doubt the vision of what has been called the Social Doctrine of the Church since the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891.

But, as we have said, not every age has had a clear awareness of, nor do all Christians today understand, this new social and universal content of the word "neighbour" and consequently, the new obligations that flow from faith in Jesus Christ (although he certainly had this awareness: see, for example, Mt 28:19).

But Vincent de Paul also had this awareness: the conviction that, although it was necessary to continue feeding the hungry, it was also necessary to improve the spiritual and social conditions of the masses of peasants, war refugees, slaves, abandoned children, prisoners, and the masses of poor heathens. But in order to have this vision of charity as a social virtue, it was necessary to have a social vision of human reality which was not easy

³⁶ *Vincentiana* September-October 2008, 347-358.

to come by in earlier times, times of small “closed” social structures, that began to disintegrate with the discovery of new worlds and the creation of political structures much broader than the feudal structures (nation states), structures that were collapsing in all of Europe under Vincent de Paul’s own eyes.

A new vision: Christian spirit and social consciousness

In the long history of Christian charity, Vincent de Paul occupies a place which, although quite original, also drinks from the same source which gave rise to this history, the charity of Christ. The historian Henry Kamen correctly framed this idea as he observed that Vincent de Paul’s action, although new in its forms, was grounded in the medieval vision of charity. ‘Medieval means, in this case, Christian, based on the conviction that “God loves the poor, and He loves those who love the poor,” as Vincent de Paul himself would say. To sum up briefly: the theological suppositions of the work of Saint Vincent are grounded in the Gospel and in early Christian tradition.

What is new in Vincent de Paul is the conscious projection of these theological suppositions, now not only to alleviate individual cases, but rather to improve the social conditions for different groupings of the poor. The function of charity is not only to alleviate hunger and clothe the naked, but rather it is about trying to improve in a stable way the living conditions for all kinds of needy who are hungry and lack clothing, the uprooted (emigrants), personal difficulties (abandoned children), unemployment (elderly craftsmen, peasants expelled from their lands), the lack of freedom (slaves), lack of culture (rural schools), religious ignorance (the peasant world of his time). Traditional charity must be manifest now also in works with a social projection to try to build a more just society in all aspects, including the religious dimension, and not simply to alleviate the material or spiritual needs of some poor persons.

We say “must” because undoubtedly in Vincent de Paul’s vision, the exercise of the virtue of mercy is not (as it was in the traditional vision, and continues to be in the general Christian mentality) an optional practice that depends on the capacity for compassion and the generosity of the individual, but rather it is something which is demanded by justice: “God will grant you the grace, Monsieur, of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy.”” Vincent, by implication and by contrast, attributes not seeing the situation this way as “hardness of heart,” and so he asks God for the grace of softening or moving our hearts so that we can see and understand the situation in this way. This calls for a radical change of vision, a true conversion of mind and heart.

This new vision does not in any way suppose a rejection of the virtue of mercy, but rather the opposite; it supposes the radical consolidation of mercy (that mercy which is not optional, but which is demanded by justice) and at the same time places mercy in the social sphere, for justice is

the cardinal virtue which governs the social relations between individuals, groups and institutions.

For example: in the “spiritual” sphere, it was unjust that the institutions of the Church centre their activities primarily in the cities and neglect the rural world. Religious instruction and the pastoral activity of the institutions of the Church are owed to the peasants (or to the pagans) by strict justice, for they have the right to them. All this cannot be left, as though by fate, to the personal zeal or mercy of the pastoral agents of the moment. In the “material” sphere, it was also unjust that in French society there were those who lived with an abundance of economic and cultural goods, while the masses of peasants and workers were barely able to exist at subsistence level, or not even that, or that they were illiterate. And so there exists the obligation of justice to try to raise the economic and cultural level of the underprivileged masses. The heart filled with mercy (as Vincent de Paul’s certainly was) must dedicate itself to trying to alleviate these evils. And it must be convinced that it is acting strictly out of justice, a justice that calls for the reform or change of social or legal structures that produce injustice.

This vision seems new to us in social history and in the history of the Church. And we do not exaggerate when we attribute its originality and innovation to Vincent de Paul. Today this vision has begun to spread powerfully both within and outside the Church, thanks be to God. It is the action of the Spirit that promotes ideas that directly attack the powerful egotism of individuals, of certain social classes and of all nations.

We do not mean that Vincent de Paul was, by any means, the inventor of this vision. As was said above, all that is meaningful in the life, the work and the sayings of Vincent de Paul, has its roots in the Gospel and in the charity of Christ. But Vincent de Paul knows his Gospel well, and he knows that it is said of Christ (citing Isaiah 42:1-4) that, “he will announce righteousness to the nations.” However it is this righteousness which establishes the (new) justice, a justice which is above and beyond the concrete demands of Mosaic Law. Moreover this righteousness is proclaimed to all the nations, and not only to the chosen people. All the nations must govern themselves from now on by the righteousness that Jesus of Nazareth announces moved by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:18).

... If Vincent de Paul has understood it well, all human justice, as well as having its source in God, also finds in God’s justice the criteria for judging its authenticity. Not all that passes for being just in a given society is necessarily just in the eyes of God. There are social relationships based on human law (which in a positivist vision of law is the only source of justice) which would be clearly seen as unjust if viewed in the light of God’s justice. To give an example that seems evident to (almost) everyone: if slavery were permitted by the law of a given country, it would be unjust precisely because it is unjust in God’s eyes.

How do you participate in the social justice vision of St Vincent and Blessed Frederic?

