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The Extended Vincentian Family — A Genealogical Perspective An Overview of the VSI Family Tree Project

BY
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The year 2000 marks the 400th Anniversary of the ordination of Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) to the priesthood. This serves to remind us once again about the outstanding legacy of charity and evangelization he bequeathed to his spiritual descendants. Over the years the extended Vincentian family has grown to several hundred diverse groups of women and men, laity and religious, Catholic and non-Catholic. This testifies to the ongoing impact of the extraordinary life of this single individual. The mission, spirit, and rule of Vincent de Paul have been adapted to many cultures since seventeenth-century France. This has generated a majestic family tree. Its largest branches bear communities with which Vincent de Paul himself was personally involved, those under his patronage, or those founded by members of his own communities. Another large limb supports the numerous congregations that follow the prototypical *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*. This rule evolved through Vincent's collaboration with Louise de Marillac for more than thirty years.¹ Other limbs on the family tree begot offshoots of communities sharing Vincent's mission of serving Jesus Christ in the poor in a spirit of humility, simplicity, and charity.

¹John Rybolt, C.M., "From Life to the Rules: The Genesis of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity," *Vincentian Heritage* 12, no.2 (Fall 1991: 173-199). Also see Miguel Pérez-Flores, "The Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity," trans. Stafford Poole, C.M., *Vincentian Heritage* 8, no.1 (Winter 1987):1-26.

General Description

Genesis and Goal

The idea for this investigation emerged when members of the Vincentian Studies Institute (VSI) were reviewing facts about the Vincentian family in a leaflet designed for lay collaborators. The VSI recognized the value that a comprehensive presentation could provide and recommended that a detailed study be conducted. This resulted in a plan to document the historical development of the extended Vincentian family and trace its expansion around the globe in today's world. This ground-breaking effort will result in a detailed final report that can serve as a resource for information and further research.

Scope

The VSI appointed Sister Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., to develop and coordinate the Family Tree Project as a genealogical study of the extended Vincentian family. This project proposes to identify entities which might claim kinship to Vincent de Paul by studying Catholic and non-Catholic groups including religious congregations, societies of apostolic life, and lay associations for men and women.

Criteria

The preliminary draft of the project uses numerous criteria to distinguish groups within the extended Vincentian Family. The following multi-level approach categorizes each criterion in order to illustrate the degree of relationship to the historical Vincent de Paul and the prototypical foundations he made.

- 1.1 Communities instituted by Vincent de Paul, or whose founders/foundresses consulted Vincent himself about their establishments.
- 1.2 Communities that adopted the *Common Rules* of Vincent de Paul, or adapted its major principles and incorporated these into their rule of life.
- 2.1 Communities established by priests or brothers of the Congregation of the Mission.
- 2.2 Communities established by Daughters of Charity.
- 3.1 Communities for whom Daughters of Charity or Priests of the Mission were mentors while being established.
- 3.2 Communities that have had more or less steady influence by Vincentians or Daughters of Charity.

- 4.1 Communities that have Vincent de Paul as congregational patron.
- 5.1 Communities that claim to be bound to the same spirit as the Daughters of Charity.
- 5.2 Communities that have adapted the Vincentian charism of evangelization and service but with a unique emphasis.
- 6.1 Lay associations meeting a criterion.
- 6.2 Non-Catholic associations meeting a criterion.
- 7.1 Communities related but in another manner.
- 7.2 Communities that have since amalgamated with one of the above.

The classification groupings used by Raymond Chalumeau, C.M., furnished the initial framework for criteria development for this project.² However, more criteria were required, as well as factors to delineate the degree of affinity of the relationship. From a genealogical perspective, affiliation with establishments made by Vincent de Paul himself and his *Common Rules* represent the closest relationship, whereas foundations made by members of his communities are related to a lesser degree.

Review of Literature

Researchers on the Family Tree Project have approached this study by simply going from the known to the unknown. Initially, existing information was located, organized and recorded by reviewing the few national listings of Vincentian communities that have been published in Europe, most notably for France, Spain and Italy.³ However, no single comprehensive list has ever been compiled from an international perspective.

Methodology

Research methodology included an international survey, as well as extensive consultation with Vincentian scholars, individual religious, and conferences of major superiors. A survey instrument collected basic identifying data and historical details about specific criteria. Respondents were also invited to provide reference information about other prospective communities that should be contacted.

²Raymond Chalumeau, C.M., "La Descendance Spirituelle de Saint Vincent de Paul," *Bulletin des Lazaristes de France* 69 (1979); Chalumeau used seven criteria.

³Ibid. Also see: Nicolás Mas, C.M., "Fundación de las Hilas de la Caridad in España," *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión*, 85-86 (1978):106-140; Luigi Mezzadri, C.M. "Quando la Legge libera il Dono," *La Regola Delle Figlie Della Carita di Vincenzo de' Paoli*. (Milan: Jaca Book, 1986), 28-31; Miguel Pérez-Flores, C.M., "The Common Rules" 23-25.

A tiered approach to data collection was employed that involved both historical and collateral research. Communities that might have potential kinship were identified in resource publications (such as the *National Catholic Directory* or *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*) based on congregational title (for example, inclusion of the words Vincent de Paul or Charity), place of origin, similarity of mission and/or spirit, and by using referral information provided by survey respondents.

Contacts for collateral research were also made through the gracious cooperation of the archivists of both the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and other individuals within general administration, especially Sister Pauline Lawlor, D.C., Visitatrixes of provinces within the Daughters of Charity and regional superiors also received inquiries.

The survey package, written in English, contained a two page questionnaire, cover letter, return self-addressed envelope, and referral form for identifying prospective communities. The entire package was translated into French, Spanish, Italian and German.

Procedures

Data management allowed for analysis by key variables. The working draft organized the data first by country of origin, then by a coded identification number reflecting affinity, criteria, country of origin, and year of foundation. A secondary sorting by each criterion also allowed for alphabetization of the official congregational title. An identification code illustrates whether the community remains essentially unchanged since its foundation, has separated from a parent community, or has generated branches that later became autonomous. The code also shows whether the original community has combined with another community in any manner. Another coding factor identifies those communities currently belonging to a federation, such as the Vincentian Federation in Austria and Germany or the Elizabeth Seton Federation in the United States. In order to manage and retrieve data effectively, each community is cross-referenced.

Status of Project

Data will be accepted through March 1994 when analysis begins. Since that has not concluded, this discussion addresses only the trends that have emerged to date.

Through collateral research, the project consulted with approximately fifty individuals (foreign missionaries, Vincentian scholars, past or present congregational leaders). Fifty-two visitatrixes (provincial superiors) of the Daughters of Charity were contacted. Sixty-five of the approximately 170 conferences of major superiors throughout the world were contacted to request assistance in identifying diocesan communities.

In January 1993 the English survey was piloted within North America. In July 1993 a linguistically appropriate survey package was sent internationally to prospective communities as they were identified, based on both historical and collateral research. Approximately 117 surveys were sent to communities in Africa, America (Central, North and South), Asia, Australia, and Oceania, as well as throughout Europe. Ninety-five communities (81%) have responded to the survey as of 1 November 1993. Respondents have been overwhelmingly positive. In one instance, the foundress herself completed the questionnaire!

Foreign conferences of major superiors have also been most cooperative. The Conference of Major Superiors for Women Religious in Germany volunteered to translate the survey into German and included it in their routine mailing. Likewise, their counterpart in England copied the survey for distribution with their newsletter.

Preliminary Findings

Over 300 societies of apostolic life, religious congregations, and lay associations have already been identified that meet at least one criterion of the Family Tree Project. Of these, approximately one dozen are non-Catholic communities and approximately twenty are lay associations.

Many interesting comments were received. These included: "I met a confrere when I was in Africa, and he told me about some sisters in Tanzania who followed Vincent de Paul's rule." "When I visited Mexico, I met a group of sisters called 'Daughters of Charity,' yet I don't think they belonged to the community at rue du Bac. But I can't recall the details."

Numerous factors have influenced the leaven of charity that forms the extended Vincentian family in today's world. Among these, the *Common Rules* of Vincent de Paul have played the most prominent role. The experience of the Confraternities of Charity, and Mademoiselle's "Little Schools"⁴ motivated many bishops and others to replicate this model, infusing it also with their own unique charism for the poor. Such was the case of Marie Poussepin who established the Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation (France, 1696) after she had served for years as treasurer in the Confraternity of Charity in Sainville.

Confronted with cultural and linguistic challenges of evangelization, missionaries frequently gathered indigenous young women to assist them on foreign missions, usually forming them based on Vincent's model. Vincentian missionaries in China established several diocesan congregations in this way.

Seventeenth Century

Vincent de Paul first organized the laity into parish based Conferences of Charity (1617), then established the Congregation of the Mission (1625), and co-founded the Daughters of Charity (1633) along with Louise de Marillac (1581-1660). In addition, Vincent de Paul was a consultant to other founders (including Jean Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians), as well as to religious orders, such as the Daughters of the Cross of Paris (1640) and the Daughters of Providence (1641). He also drafted the rule for the Daughters of the Holy Family (1662), directed (1622-1660) the nuns of the first Visitation Monastery in Paris, and served as mediator in resolving internal problems of other orders. Among the first to replicate his model were the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Evron (France, 1682) who adopted the mission, spirit and rule of Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity.

⁴Margaret Flinton, D.C., *Louise de Marillac--The Social Aspect of her Work*. (New York: 1992), 85-99.

Eighteenth Century

The success of Vincent de Paul's parochial charities and the viability of his non-cloistered apostolic communities provided timely models for responding to pressing social needs. Many bishops throughout Europe reproduced this model in their dioceses. Among these are the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Tracate (Italy, 1733); the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg (France, 1734); the Chinese Daughters of Charity of Tonkin (China, c. 1750); the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul of Rumbek (Belgium, 1756); the Hospitaller Sisterhood of the Holy Cross (Spain, 1790) and the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Mallorca (Spain, 1798).

Nineteenth Century

The French Revolution, which began in 1789, caused communities to disperse; members migrated elsewhere. Many carried the Vincentian tradition with them and embodied it in new congregations and lay groups. Examples include the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida (Besançon, 1799), plus diocesan communities in Austria and Germany known as Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul founded at Munich (1832), Innsbruck (1835), Mainz (1839), Graz (1841), Paderborn (1841), and Freiburg (1846).

Mentored by Sister Rosalie Rendu, D.C., Frederick Ozanam founded the International Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (France, 1833) that effectively involved the laity in parish outreach to the poor.

European immigration brought an appreciation of the Vincentian mission to the Americas. This, together with the impact of exploration in the New World, were factors influencing Bishop Louis William Dubourg, S.S. to invite Mrs. Elizabeth Seton to Baltimore (1808) to establish a school and later a sisterhood. Later Dubourg also invited Felix de Andreis, C.M., and Joseph Rosati, C.M., to establish the first Vincentian mission in North America (1815).⁵

The French Sulpicians befriended Elizabeth Ann Seton and were instrumental in obtaining the rule of Vincent de Paul for the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's, the first religious community of women founded in the USA (Emmitsburg, 1809). That foundation gave birth

⁵John Rybolt, C.M., "Three Pioneer Vincentians." *Vincentian Heritage* 14, no.1 (Fall 1993):153-68.

to several other communities also called Sisters of Charity which began at New York (1817); Cincinnati (1829); Convent Station (1859); Greensburg (1870); and at Halifax (1849) the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception (Canada, 1854) which begot the Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur (Canada, 1924). These now form the Elizabeth Seton Federation that began in 1947 as a concerted effort to promote the Seton cause for canonization. Today these communities, and others sharing the Vincentian tradition of charity are united in ongoing collaboration.

Trends toward exploration and colonization also had an impact on the development of Vincentian communities such as the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Zagreb (Croatia, 1856) and the Sisters of the Eucharist (Macedonia, 1889).

The ecumenical appeal of Vincentian service inspired Florence Nightingale and also led to the initiation of lay Deaconesses of the Protestant Church (Germany, 1836), in addition to the Society of the Holy Cross (England, 1855) for Anglican clergy. After his conversion to Christianity through the Miraculous Medal, Alphonse Ratisbonne founded two communities to promote understanding between Christians and Jews: the Notre Dame of Sion (Paris, 1843) and the Fathers of Sion (Paris, 1852).

Twentieth Century

Among the newest branches of Vincentian charity are the Sons of Charity (France, 1914) dedicated to serving the poor; the Missionary Catechists (Panama, 1950) who do pastoral ministry and catechesis in Panama; the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, Servants of Workers (Spain, 1952) who evangelize working youth.

Family Groups

Several family groups are especially noteworthy within the extended Vincentian Family. Among the oldest, is the Strasbourg line emanating from the Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg (France, 1734) whose spiritual descendants (dispersed during the French Revolution) now comprise nine communities known as the Vincentian Federation of Austria and Germany, united under the patronage of Vincent de Paul. The Sisters of Charity of Graz (Austria, 1841) sprang from the Strasbourg root through a branch at Munich and later united to the

French Daughters of Charity in 1850. Sister Brandis became their first visitatrix and in 1878 founded a lay group of visiting nurses to assist the sick that developed into the *Mariaschwestern*, a community of women religious (also known as Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal). In 1979 Mother Suzanne Guillemin, D.C., received seventy-nine sisters from the Austrian province of the *Mariaschwestern* community into the Daughters of Charity of Paris.

After reading a biography of Vincent de Paul, Bishop Clemens Droste zu Viscering was so inspired that he founded the Sisters of Mercy of Munster (Germany, 1808) to serve the poor, sick, and needy. The bishop incorporated Vincentian concepts in the rule he compiled. That rule became the model for other founders, especially Bishop Joannes Zwijsen who instituted several communities in Holland from this root. Peter Joseph Triest wanted to replicate the spirit of Vincent de Paul, so he initiated three congregations in Belgium to serve the poor.

Seeking to preserve the faith among Catholic peoples by engendering a missionary spirit within the faithful, the family of Trinitarians (USA) established by Thomas A. Judge, C.M., includes: the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate (New York, 1909); the Missionary Sisters of the Most Blessed Trinity (Philadelphia, 1912); the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (Mobile, 1929); and a recent lay branch, the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute (New York, 1964).

The Vincentian Tradition Continues to Grow

At least one hundred communities have been identified that have Vincent de Paul as congregational patron. Belgium has had more than fifty diocesan communities known as the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. Sons and Daughters of Vincent de Paul's own foundations have established approximately sixty distinct communities in at least nine countries throughout the globe, with one-third of these located in China.

Approximately forty founders/foundresses have either adapted the *Common Rules* of Vincent de Paul, or adopted them as the way of life for their community. These include the Daughters of Charity of the Most Holy Annunciation of Ivrea (Italy, 1744); the Anglican Community of Saint Mary, Peeksville NY (USA, 1865); the Sisters of Charity of Cardinal Sancha (Cuba, 1869); the Sisters of Providence of Holyoke, MA (USA, 1892); and the Institute of Charity (Brazil, 1928).

Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul themselves sent their sons and daughters as missionaries into Poland, Ireland, and Madagascar where native communities were subsequently established. These include the Sisters of the Holy Faith (Ireland, 1867); the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of the Uniate Rite (Poland, 1926); and the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate (Madagascar, 1934) who united with the Daughters of Charity of Paris in 1963.

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Satu-Mare (Romania, 1842) established a mission in the United States that became two diocesan congregations: the Vincentian Sisters of Charity (Pittsburgh, 1902; Bedford, 1928). José Vilaseca, C.M., founded the Hermanos Josefinos (1872) and the Hermanas Josefinas (1877), in order to fill the gap left by foreign clergy and religious expelled from Mexico. Vincent Lebbe, C.M., created the Congregation of Saint John the Baptist (China, 1928) and the Little Sisters of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus (China, 1929). These congregations provided indigenous clergy that preserved the faith in China despite Communism.

Other establishments according to the Vincentian charism in missionary areas include the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (China, 1901); Daughters of the Sacred Heart (China, 1914); Daughters of Saint Anne of Kanchow (China, 1920); the Vincentian Congregation (India, 1927); the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy (Nigeria, 1961); the Missionary Sisters of the Poor of Christ (Philippines, 1978); and the Missionary Sisters of the Presentation (El Salvador, 1987) plus others now serving courageously in the Church of Silence.

Final Report

Implications

When completed, the report of The Family Tree Project will become a point of reference for community leaders, members, and scholars. As the only international compilation to date of all the communities currently known to belong to the extended Vincentian family, it will be a unique resource for additional research.

Dissemination

This report, although not presumed to be exhaustive, will contain a concise summary of each community describing its foundation (date, place, and by whom), its mission, and current location of generalate (if extant). To facilitate further research, bibliographic data will be provided for each entry, plus an index. Appendices will include listings of communities chronologically by criterion and addresses of international resource groups dedicated to Vincentian studies.

The VSI plans to disseminate the report of the Family Tree Project as the first volume in its new monograph series, projected for publication in 1995. *The Vincentian Heritage* will announce its publication and information about ordering it.

Conclusion

The VSI earnestly hopes that *The Vincentian Family Tree* monograph may nurture our appreciation of the timeless vision of Vincent de Paul. May we be inspired to keep the flame of his zeal alive by continuing his dynamic legacy of evangelization and charity—ever adapting it to changing social needs!

And so my daughters, it is not our state in life, it is not our title which renders us pleasing to God and which will save us, but the manner in which we acquit ourselves of the titles we possess.

*(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity,
15 October 1641)*

Ask God for the spirit of his son, that you may be able to perform all your actions as he did his.

*(Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity,
22 October 1650)*