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## Overview of The Vincentian Family Tree

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**Overview**  
**of**  
*The Vincentian Family Tree:*  
 “Whoever does God’s will is mother, father,  
 brother, and sister to me.”  
**Presented in Tucson and Chicago**

BY  
 BETTY ANN McNEIL, D.C.

Have you ever been fascinated by looking into a kaleidoscope? If so, did you notice how twisting the kaleidoscope enhances the beauty of its colors? As the gems realign, the new structure reflects creative dimensions. Similarly, the spirit continually transforms the Vincentian family into a mosaic of charity constantly changing to meet the needs of the poor for different eras. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac gave birth to a great international family. Learning about one’s family tree is all about tapping potential. Its about digging deeper to discover one’s roots: “The seeds of our destiny—are nurtured by the roots of our past.” Recent international research on the Vincentian Family identified untapped potential for our mission in our kinship network which could foster creative collaboration (regionally, nationally, and internationally).

*Authentic Witness.* The greatness of a missionary or religious person is not so much that the individual speaks beautiful words of wisdom but that he or she lives a life that is striking and worth emulating.<sup>1</sup> Vincent de Paul (1581- 1660) and Louise de Marillac (1591-1660) were two such charismatic individuals whose spiritual legacy inspired others to continue the mission they began. People like Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), Elizabeth Seton (1774-1821), and Thomas Augustine Judge (1868-1933), became their disciples and transmitted the tradition to us.

*The Vincentian Family*

The Master Artisan created a kaleidoscope of charity and added

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<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Maloney, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995), 125.

new gems until its design became the extended Vincentian Family of today which includes more than two million members.

The Confraternity of Charity (1617) was *the* first group established by Saint Vincent. He organized parishioners to distribute food and remedies to the sick poor in their homes at Châtillon-les-Dombes. Originally only for women, Vincent soon established confraternities for men and others for both men and women. In Paris, it developed as the Ladies of Charity (1634). Now worldwide, this group is called the International Association of Charities.

A laywoman, Françoise Marguerite de Silly, Madame de Gondi (1580-1625) provided the financial support for Vincent to evangelize the poor of the countryside by establishing the Congregation of the Mission (1625), also called the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers.

Through Louise de Marillac's collaboration with Vincent in training volunteer village girls for the Confraternities of Charity, the Daughters of Charity evolved (1633). Louise taught them how to serve the sick and poor for love of God.

A layman, Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), with the support of Sister Rosalie Rendu (1786-1856), a Daughter of Charity, founded the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (1833) for holistic person-to-person service by the laity. Sister Rosalie, who had a deep respect for the human dignity of persons who were poor, often advised her volunteers that a servant of the poor "should always have one hand open to give, to receive much in the other."<sup>2</sup>

### Genealogy of the Vincentian Family

The Vincentian Studies Institute has recently conducted an international study to identify members of the extended family of Vincent de Paul.<sup>3</sup> The study included 268 Anglican and Roman Catholic religious institutes and lay associations related to Vincent de Paul throughout the world since the seventeenth-century. Lay members, affiliates or associates who were partners in the Vincentian mission founded some of these. For example,

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<sup>2</sup> Céline Lhotte and Elizabeth Dupeyrat, S.C., trans., *White Wings and Barricades* (New York: Benzigar Brothers, 1939), 105.

<sup>3</sup> *The Vincentian Family Tree*, Monograph I is available from DePaul University Bookstore, Vincentian Heritage Department, 2419 North Sheffield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60614. Telephone 1-800-700-8086.

- In Vincent's day, a Lady of Charity, Madame Villeneuve, (1597-1650), founded the Daughters of the Cross of Paris (1640) for education of young girls.

- Marie Poussepin, a laywoman active with the Confraternity of Charity in her parish founded the Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation (1696) to serve poor, young girls and women, in the diocese of Chartres in France.

- Reverend John Gowan, C.M. (1817-1897), and Margaret Aylward, (1810-1889), a Lady of Charity, in Ireland (1867) founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Faith to deal with poverty from the potato famine.

- Clemente Myionnet, (1812-1886), Maurizion Maignen, (1822-1890), and Jean Léon Le Prevost (1803-1874), all laymen active in the Vincent de Paul Society in France, began the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul (1845) in order to consecrate themselves entirely to serving the poor. Le Prevost is credited with suggesting to Frédéric Ozanam that he name his Conferences of Charity the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

Vincent's *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*, which brought religious women out of the cloister *into the streets of the city* became the leaven for a worldwide web of charity.

The study includes many other institutes founded in Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. For example:

- Vincentian priests, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian laity have founded approximately sixty institutes and lay associations in at least nine countries.

- Seventeen institutes are post-Vatican II foundations in Indonesia, Korea, Phillipines, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nigeria, the United States, and elsewhere.

- More than one hundred religious and lay institutes have Vincent de Paul as patron and driving inspiration of their mission and ministry.

#### *Sent to Announce the Good News to the Poor*

All associated with the Company of Charity are sent to announce the good news to the poor of our generation. Like the Body of Christ, the Vincentian family is one family with many members. A common vision unites us in our mission of serving the poor imitating Vincent, whose untiring zeal was "made up of a genuine desire to please God

and to be useful to others.”<sup>4</sup> The charity of Christ impels the Vincentian Family to preach the Good News to the poor in ways that are understandable for today.

Ministry for the next millennium calls for renewed ways of *being and serving*. By collaborating on joint projects, we can serve the poor more effectively. For example:

- In Canada the Daughters of Charity and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society are ministering together to immigrants from many countries.

- In Italy Vincentians, Daughters and laity are collaborating to offer a therapeutic community for young people addicted to drugs.

- In Nigeria men and women of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society collaborate with the daughters and Vincentian priests to provide a variety of needed services to prisoners.

- In Slovakia where the Church is rising from the ashes after Communism, the Daughters and Vincentians have committed themselves to the formation of youth who wish to live and work in the spirit of Vincent and Louise whether in roles of lay or church ministries. What an exciting springboard of evangelization for a new generation of religious vocations and parish ministers!

### *The Vincentian Way Today*

The Vincentian way today requires speaking and acting to promote social justice. “New evangelization [today]... must include... proclamation of the Church’s social doctrine.”<sup>5</sup> “Action on behalf of justice, ...one of the fundamental responsibilities of the Church today,” remains central to the Vincentian model of evangelization and charity. Today, more than ever, works for social justice also must mark the road of charity and can be facilitated through collaboration.

Our common heritage challenges us to express Vincentian values in all that we do. As he lived these values, Frédéric Ozanam gave an insight into the complexity of poverty. Social responsibility is the key

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents, 14 vols.* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabalda, 1920-26), 12:307-08. Hereinafter cited as *CED*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Centissimus Annus*, #5. Quoted in Robert P. Maloney, C.M., *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 1995), 115.

to deal with the violent clash between wealth and poverty in society.<sup>6</sup> The gospel calls us today, more than ever before, to build a more just society as one family—working together to accomplish our mission—the same mission that Vincent de Paul pursued.

We—the Sisters of Charity, Trinitarian Family, the Ladies of Charity, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Priests and Brothers and Daughters of Charity—continue to build the Vincentian tradition on a foundation of mutual respect, humility, simplicity, zeal, and sharing of ourselves, our resources, and the responsibilities of stewardship. Communication and teamwork are the steppingstones which pave the way of the Gospel, the way of Vincent de Paul, and *our* way. Collaboration *with* and *for* the poor are trademarks of the Vincentian mission.

In their day, Louise and Vincent found that the “poor suffer[ed] less from a lack of generosity than from a lack of organization.”<sup>7</sup> I would add, also from a lack of collaboration. How can we move from individualistic views toward working together rooted in our common ground of faith in Jesus whom we serve in the person of the poor?

### *The Vincentian Family Tree*

The primary branches of the Vincentian Family tree bear institutes with which Vincent de Paul himself was personally involved: the Confraternity of Charity (1617), the Congregation of the Mission (1625), the Daughters of Charity (1633), and the Ladies of Charity (1634).

Today’s Daughters of Charity evolved from the first sisters working in the confraternities in the parishes and with the Ladies of Charity at the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris.<sup>8</sup> When Parisians saw the respect, the compassionate care, and competent service given to the sick poor by the first servants of the poor, they began calling these sisters, the Daugh-

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Edward R. Udovic C.M., ed., *Like a Great Fire* (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 1995), 53. “The question which is agitating the world today is neither one of the form of government nor of persons; it is a social question. It is a struggle between those who have too much; it is the violent clash of opulence and poverty, which is shaking the ground under our feet. Our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between those two camps, in order to help to accomplish through Charity what Justice alone cannot do.” For complete text see Letter #137, Frédéric Ozanam to Louis Janmot, Lyon, 1836, Joseph Dirvin, C.M., trans. & ed., *Frédéric Ozanam. A Life in Letters* (Saint Louis: Saint Vincent de Paul Society, 1986), 96.

<sup>7</sup> *Like a Great Fire*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> The official title of these confraternities was the “Confraternities of Charity of the Servants of the Sick Poor in the Parishes.”

ters of Charity.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, there are those institutes under Saint Vincent's patronage or those begun by members of institutes that he himself founded plus the numerous congregations that follow the foundational *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*. This rule evolved through Saint Vincent's thirty years of collaboration with Louise de Marillac.<sup>10</sup>

### *Significant Family Groups*

*The Seton Family.* Elizabeth Seton and a Sulpician priest, John Dubois, used the *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity* as the basis for the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph's at Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1809, the first indigenous religious institute of apostolic women founded in the United States. From it several other communities later developed in North America, also called Sisters of Charity.<sup>11</sup> A collaborative venture of these communities, the Sisters of Charity Federation (formerly the Elizabeth Seton Federation), which began in 1947 to promote the cause of Elizabeth Ann Seton for canonization, now includes thirteen institutes based on the rule of Vincent de Paul. These represent 7,000 religious women plus an extensive network of laity involved in mission, known as the Charity Associates. Its membership has made significant contributions to the North American Church during its first fifty years of collaboration. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton became the first native-born citizen of the United States to be declared a saint by the Roman Catholic Church.

In addition, several other family groups are especially noteworthy within the international extended Vincentian family. A similar federation exists in Europe, includes membership in Germany, Austria and India.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The official title of the community in the Church is the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul.

<sup>10</sup> John Rybolt, C.M., "From Life to the Rules: The Genesis of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity." *Vincentian Heritage* 12: 2 (Fall 1991: 173-99).

<sup>11</sup> These became independent institutes at New York (1846), Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Ohio (1852), Sisters of Charity of Convent Station, New Jersey (1859), Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania (1870), and Sisters of Charity of Halifax, in Canada (1856). In Canada the Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur, (1924) evolved from the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception (1854).

<sup>12</sup> The Föderation Vincentinischer Gemeinschaften (Vincentian Federation) is based in Germany.

*The Trinitarian Family.* The Cenacle or Trinitarian family of priests, sisters and laity was founded in the United States to serve the abandoned poor and help Catholic peoples preserve the faith by engendering a missionary spirit among the faithful. Established by Reverend Thomas A. Judge, C.M. (1868-1933), this branch of the Vincentian family includes: the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate (1909); the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (1912); the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (1929); and a recent lay branch, the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute (1964).

Numerous other founders either had a relationship with the Vincentian family when establishing their own congregations or adapted various elements of the Vincentian mission and charism for their new institutes. Among the examples is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who based her philosophy of service of the poor on Vincent de Paul, and told several daughters about how Vincent's teachings greatly influenced her life.<sup>13</sup>

### *Charism of Charity and Evangelization*

Saint Vincent's vision of service was collaborative—requiring teamwork and networking to accomplish his mission. Confronted with urgency and driven by necessity, innovation shaped his model of evangelization and charity. Saint Vincent simply, but clearly, shared with the first members his vision for the Company of Charity:

We should assist the poor in every way and do it both by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others.... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works.<sup>14</sup>

### *Goal*

The Vincentian Studies Institute (V.S.I.) commissioned the Family Tree Project in 1992 to gather information about the extended Vincentian family from a genealogical perspective.<sup>15</sup> The project un-

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<sup>13</sup> Also influenced were: Saint Charles Joseph Eugène Mazenod, Saint Gaspare de Bufalo, Saint John Bosco, Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort, and Blessed Marie Louise Trichet, and Saint Paul of the Cross.

<sup>14</sup> Coste, Conference #195, to the Priests of the Mission, 6 December 1658, *CED* 12: 87.

<sup>15</sup> The Vincentian Studies Institute (V.S.I.), cosponsored by the provinces of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission in the United States, is based at DePaul University and promotes a living interest in the Vincentian heritage.



covered links and relationships that could become seed beds for collective reflection, discernment, and action.<sup>16</sup>

Rooted in relationships based on the gospel of Jesus: "Whoever does God's will is mother, father, brother, and sister to me," this effort provokes timely questions about developing a common vision of mission.<sup>17</sup>

- What types of mission-oriented forums could institutes rooted in the charism of Vincent de Paul create for dialogue, reflection, and action?

- How could collaboration among related Vincentian institutions help realize the ageless vision of Saint Vincent in new ways for today's society?

- What joint projects could Vincentian institutions sponsor together for addressing issues of urban poverty and social injustice that would provide more effective services to poor persons in this era of welfare reform?

### *Project Criteria*

The Family Tree Project traced the genealogical development of both Catholic and other Christian religious congregations, societies of apostolic life, or lay associations for men and women according to fourteen criteria. These illustrated the degree of affinity or closeness of the relationship to the historical Vincent de Paul, members of his own foundations, the Vincentian rule, or his patronage.

### *Methodology*

*International Survey.* The research proceeded from the known to the unknown, using primarily an international survey to obtain basic identifying data and historical details related to the criteria. Additional data was collected via both historical and collateral research. We also identified prospective entities in resource publications and contacts with community archivists, historians, missionaries, former leaders, and Conferences of Major Superiors throughout the world.

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<sup>16</sup> The Vincentian Studies Institute may be contacted through Reverend Edward Udovic, C.M., Presiding Officer, DePaul University, 2233 North Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614-3594 USA (TEL 773-325-7348, FAX 773-325-7279, E-Mail: eudovic@wppost.depaul.edu).

<sup>17</sup> Betty Ann McNeil, D.C., *Monograph 1. The Vincentian Family Tree* (Vincentian Studies Institute: 1996).

*Instrument.* The survey contained a two-page questionnaire which we tested within North America (1993) before translating it into French, Spanish, Italian, and German. A linguistically appropriate survey package was sent internationally to approximately one hundred thirty-seven communities in Africa, America (Central, North, and South), Asia, Australasia, and Europe. The response rate was 90%.

*Variables.* Each institute was assigned an identification code based on critical factors regarding its establishment. Data management was set up to allow for analysis by key variables through a coding system which included the the congregation's official name, its primary criterion, country of origin, year of foundation, and any membership in a federation. Each entity is listed by its identification code in the report, *The Vincentian Family Tree. Monograph 1.*

Where applicable additional numbers were added at the end of the code to describe how the institute had developed over the years: whether the original community combined with another community in any manner, (merger, union, etc.) or whether it currently belongs to a federation, such as the Vincentian Federation (Föderation Vincentinischer Gemeinschaften) in Germany or the Sisters of Charity Federation (formerly the Elizabeth Seton Federation) in the United States.

The format and uniformity of coding became very important because of the numerous communities with similar congregational titles. In Belgium alone, there have been at least fifty different diocesan communities with the same title, Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul.

### *Findings*

I will focus primarily on institutes founded by Vincentian priests, Daughters of Charity or Vincentian laity, and those based on the *Common Rules*.

*By Criteria.* Fifty Catholic institutes and seven non-Catholic congregations are based on the *Common Rules*. Thirty-nine institutes and five lay associations were founded by Vincentian priests. Nineteen institutes were founded by Daughters of Charity. Ninety-nine institutes have Vincent as their patron.

*By Type of Institute.* Of the 268 institutes, 239 (89%) are Roman Catholic institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, 21 (8%) are lay associations, and eight (3%) are Anglican congregations.

Approximately 165 (70%) of the Catholic institutes studied are extant.

*By Region of Foundation.* The majority (201) were founded in Europe (75%) with 193 in western Europe. Thirty-six institutes were in the Americas (22 in North America and 10 in Central America). Twenty-five were founded in Asia, a majority of these in China.

*By members of the Vincentian Family.* Fifty-eight institutes and seven lay associations were founded by thirty- six Vincentian priests, sixteen Daughters of Charity and four lay members of the Vincentian family.

The mission and commitment to the poor is one of the primary defining characteristics of the Vincentian charism. Seventy institutes identified their mission as service of the poor. Members of four institutes make a fourth vow of service of the poor, so this is not unique to the Daughters of Charity. Numerous others claim the same community virtues as common to the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity: humility, simplicity, and charity.

### *Geographic Origin*

Although many bishops requested Daughters of Charity for their dioceses, at the time of the request the company was frequently unable to provide personnel. Therefore, some bishops began their own foundations using the Vincentian model and rule of Vincent in order to address urgent needs in their dioceses.

This development coincides with the revolutionary era at the dawn of the eighteenth-century and in new lands. That migration transplanted cultures, and created new needs for ministry throughout the globe. Subsequently, European missionaries realized how essential native vocations were for their mission. Therefore, many native diocesan communities arose to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps.

*Missionary Evangelization.* Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul themselves sent missionaries into Poland, Ireland, and Madagascar where native communities were subsequently established.

### *Rule of Vincent*

Vincent, together with Louise de Marillac, developed a prototype for apostolic institutes of women. On the basis of available information, a total of eighty Roman Catholic institutes throughout the world substantially follow the *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity*. The *Common Rules* became the main conduit for transmitting the charism

and extending its impact for the Church because of their originality. What Vincent told his Daughters also applies to the Vincentian Family as a whole: "The Little Company is not now what it was in the beginning, [and] there is reason to believe that it is still not what it will be when God has perfected it."<sup>18</sup>

*Lineage from Strasbourg.* Founded 1734 in France under the title of *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul*, the name was later changed to *Sisters of Charity of Strasbourg*. Dispersed because of the French Revolution, its members fled to other countries via the Rhine River to Germany, Austria, and Hungary. Nine independent institutes developed: *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul*. Members of the Szatmar community immigrated to the United States and became the Vincentian Sisters of Charity.

*Vincentian Federation.* Communities united by the rule of Vincent, their patron, formed the *Vincentian Federation* in Germany in 1970, naming Reverend William Slattery, C.M., honorary president. In 1994 Reverend Maloney affiliated all members of the *Vincentian Federation* to the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity.

*Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Kerala.* A collaborative foundation, (established 1973) in India, as a new branch of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Freiburg (Germany), Fulda (Germany), Heppenheim and Paderborn (Germany), members of the Vincentian Federation. This institute became fully independent in 1994.

Many other communities throughout the world have adopted or adapted the rule of Vincent. Some examples throughout the world include:

Canada *Sisters of Providence of Saint Vincent de Paul*

India *Vincentian Congregation*

*Preshitarem Congregation*

Korea *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Suwon*

Mexico *Sisters of the Poor, Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Spain *Teresian Institute*

Sumatra *Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, Mother of Good Succor*

United States *Sisters of Charity Federation in the Vincentian & Setonian*

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<sup>18</sup> CED 9: 245.

*Extant Institutes.* Fourteen institutes are extant that Daughters or Vincentians founded in eight countries based on the *Common Rules*. Each has its unique founding story. These are: Institute of Daughters of Mary, Servants of Charity, Brazil; Sisters of the Eucharist, Bulgaria; Sons of Charity of Vicenza, Institute of Nazarene Sisters, Italy; Hermanas Josefinas, Mexico; Congregación de Misioneros de San José, Mexico; Missionary Catechists, Panama; Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Mataró, Spain; Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, U.S.A.; Marienschwestern, Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida, France; Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary of Good Counsel, Italy; Daughters of the Divine Will of God, Italy; Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Daughters of Charity of Mary Immaculate, Mexico; Missionary Sisters of the Poor in Christ, Nursing Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal, Slovenia; and the Hospitaller Sisterhood of the Holy Cross, Spain.

*United with Paris.* Additional foundations, based on the rule of Vincent and founded by daughters or Vincentian priests, united with Paris:

- Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Madagascar (1964)
- Missionary Sisters of the Poor in Christ, Philippines (1895)
- Corporation of the Daughters of Charity, Spain (1882)
- Marienschwestern, Austria (1850)

*Inculturation of Faith and Charism.* To be Vincentian is to be mission minded—to be focused on realizing a mission. One's ministerial style and message must be inculturated through adaptation to the particular cultural context.<sup>19</sup> Examples of how Vincentian men and women have inculturated the charism in foreign lands include:

- *Chinese Daughters of Charity of Tonkin.* c. 1750, China, by Reverend Paul Sou, C.M., one of the first two Chinese Vincentians. This is the oldest institute (in the study) founded by a Vincentian and is modeled on the Daughters of Charity of Paris. This institute became the first Vincentian community founded outside of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Missionaries "will succeed in inculturating religious life . . . only by assuming . . . the profound values . . . of . . . [the] culture" like Christ who came *not* to destroy but to fulfill. Cf. Maloney, *Cry of the Poor*, 130.

<sup>20</sup> For a full discussion of indigenous communities in China see Fernand Combaluzier, C.M., "Congrégations chinoises indigènes dans les vicariats lazaristes," *Le clergé indigène dans les missions de Chine confiées aux congrégations français* (Paris: Oeuvre de Saint-Pierre-Apôtre, 1945), 15-25.

- *Brothers of Saint Paul*. 1895, China, Reverend Alfonso Morelli, C.M., with the approval of Reverend Jules Bruguière, C.M., vicar apostolic. Reverend Vincent Tcheng, C.M., also helped to organize this institute. Their mission was to collaborate with the Vincentian missionaries.

- *Little Sisters of the Mother of God*. 1877, Philippines, by Reverend Fernando de la Canal, C.M., for native vocations to do charitable works, including education and care of the sick.

- *Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate*. 1934, Madagascar, by Bishop Antoine Sévat, C.M., with Sister Jeanne Lagleize, D.C., to serve the rural poor and those in the bush by native vocations.

- *Congregation of Saint John the Baptist* and the *Little Sisters of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus*. Reverend Vincent Lebbe, C.M., a Belgian missionary in China, assumed a Chinese identity and name (“Thunder in the Distance”). Lebbe lobbied successfully for the consecration of native Chinese bishops. Lebbe influenced the writing of *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), a papal encyclical on Missiology, in which Pius XI advocated establishing communities of indigenous vocations. His two congregations provided native clergy that later preserved the faith in China despite Communism: *Congregation of Saint John the Baptist* (1928) and the *Little Sisters of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus* (1929).

*Missionary Activity in the Americas*. Archbishop Francis Beckmann, C.M., founded the Missionary Catechists of the Miraculous Medal in 1950 for catechetics and pastoral work in Panama and Central America. The Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Satu-Mare founded in Romania (1842) established a mission among Slovak immigrants in the United States that became two diocesan congregations: the Vincentian Sisters of Charity (1902, Pittsburgh; 1928, Bedford).

### The Vincentian Mission over the Centuries

As a prototype for apostolic women and societies of apostolic life, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise’s servants of the poor (called daughters of charity by the people they served) not only represented a revolutionary change from the status quo but were inspired by the Spirit to a mission driven by gospel values. Although not *the* first to try such an initiative, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise were the first to succeed on a large scale.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For a complete discussion of women in the Church France during this period and their response to social needs see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes Women & Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993).

*Eighteenth Century.* A combination of factors, including revolutions, higher birth rates, internal migration, and urbanization contributed to massive immigration to new lands on foreign shores, and also urgent social needs. Many bishops throughout Europe sought to reproduce the Vincentian model in their dioceses.

Tracing their roots to a Vincentian foundation, the *Sisters of Charity of Graz*, Austria (1841) sprang from the a root at Strasbourg through a branch at Munich. Sister Leopoldine de Brandis, D.C., previously founded the *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Graz*, which united in 1850 with the Daughters of Charity, Paris (the same year Mother Seton's sisters), also established:

- *Association of Visiting Nurses.* 1878, Slovenia, as lay nurses to render charitable services in the homes of the sick poor *at night* because Vincent had forbidden the early Daughters of Charity to do so. The Daughters of Charity trained these women in home health care known as *Krankenjungfrauen*.

- This foundation developed into the *Marienschwestern*, a community of women religious with several provinces (also known as Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal) now serving in North America: *Nursing Sisters of Mary of the Miraculous Medal*, Slovenia (1878), *Marienschwestern*, Austria (1880), and the *Sisters of the Visitation of Mary*, Hungary (1905).

*Beyond France.* Confronted with the challenges of evangelization in foreign cultures, missionaries frequently gathered indigenous young women to assist them in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. As early as 1727 in Sicily, the *Daughters of Charity under the Patronage of Reverend Nicholas Placid Filippone* may have been the first outside of France to claim Saint Vincent as patron for their institute at Palermo which cared for the sick, orphans and widows.

*Nineteenth Century.* The French Revolution, which began in 1789, ultimately caused the dispersal and migration of community membership because of the suppression of religious. Many individuals continued the Vincentian tradition and embodied it in new institutes and lay groups.

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 among the poor and the emerging middle class. The practical charity of Frédéric Ozanam involved the laity in effective parish outreach to the poor through the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

*North America.* European immigration brought an appreciation of the Vincentian mission across the Atlantic Ocean. This, with the impact of exploration and colonization in the Americas, were factors influencing Reverend Louis William Dubourg, S.S., (1766-1833), to invite Reverend Felix de Andreis, C.M., (1778-1820), and Reverend Joseph Rosati, C.M., (1789-1843), to initiate the first Vincentian mission in North America in 1816.<sup>22</sup> Rosati later became the first bishop of Saint Louis in 1825. Individually, God calls each of us to respond to circumstances that reveal our mission in life. For example, the Dubourg who encouraged Mrs. Elizabeth Seton, a widow and recent convert, to come to Baltimore (1808) became the first bishop of Saint Louis where both the Saint Vincent de Paul Society (1845) and the Ladies of Charity (1857) began in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

*Twentieth Century.* Two world wars, economic crises, communism, nazism and fascism have brought the global village to a new level of complexity. Since Vatican II (1962-1965) seventeen new branches of Vincentian charity have emerged throughout the world. The Church's thrust of mission *ad gentes* has given additional emphasis to evangelization, and thereby new seeds of religious life have budded in different lands, including Nigeria, El Salvador, and the Church of silence. Twenty-two percent of the institutes studied were established in the twentieth-century, with 39 prior to 1950.

### **Laity—Promotion and Collaboration.**

Vatican II redefined the laity's role in the Church. Vincentians are called to empower them to participate fully in the evangelization of the poor as partners in mission.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the previously cited example of the International Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, some examples of empowerment of the laity include the Daughters of Charity National Health System, institutions of higher education in the Vincentian and Setonian tradition, Marian Youth Groups, and others:

*Vincentian Service Corps.* A national collaborative project begun in

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<sup>22</sup>John E. Rybolt, C.M., "Three Pioneer Vincentians," *Vincentian Heritage*, no. 1(Fall 1993): 153-68.

<sup>23</sup>Annabelle Melville, *Louis William Dubourg*, 2 vols, (Chicago, 1986), 177. After translation, the text reads: "It is a matter of buying a plantation near Emmitsburg to found there a community of daughters, similar to those of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, who join to the care of the sick, the instruction of young girls in all branches of Christian education."

<sup>24</sup>Maloney, *Cry of the Poor*, 121.



1983 at New York by the Eastern province of the Congregation of the Mission for young adults to live in community, experience a simple lifestyle and serve the poor.

*Missionary Sisters of the Presentation*. 1987, El Salvador, by Sister Jenny Nolvía Manaiza to collaborate with bishops in pastoral ministry where there is a high concentration of indigenous peoples struggling against poverty and hunger.

### Events—The Voice of Providence.

The pain of politics, civil war, illness, and even conflict with superiors can be prophetic. Vincent wrote to Jean Martin (1647): "Let us ask Our Lord that everything might be done in accordance with his providence."<sup>25</sup> Examples of how the Spirit creates new institutes include:

- *Mexico*. Foreign missionaries were expelled from the country because of anticlericalism. Indigenous religious were needed to fill the gap, to assume the apostolates of the Daughters of Charity and the *Congregación de Misioneros de San José*, and for priestly formation of native clergy to evangelize and educate youth leading to the formation of *Hermanas Josefinas* in 1872.

- *French Revolution*. The suppression of the Company and dispersal of the Daughters of Charity created a vacuum of care of the poor and sick in many areas. Bishops identified lay leadership to meet local needs. *Sisters of Charity of Saint Joan Antida*, 1799 by Joan Antida, a Daughter of Charity in Paris (1787-1792), forced to return to Besançon because of the French Revolution. She wrote her rule, based on the *Common Rules* of Saint Vincent, which she had memorized.

- *Conflict*. Arose regarding disposition of personal funds by bequest of a sister against the preference of superiors. *Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary of Good Counsel*, 1866, Italy, Sister Mary Clarac, D.C. She had established a "House of Mercy." Jean Baptiste Étienne, C.M., attempted to require that she change her last will and testament (already written with the Ladies of Charity as beneficiaries) in favor of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Fearing that Étienne's plan would impoverish her institute, Clarac consulted with John Bosco and (upon his recommendation) bought a villa and land for her work.

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<sup>25</sup> CED 3: 197.

- *Sickness and frail health.* Required some candidates to leave the Little Company during formation, but God had other plans. The *Daughters of Charity of Mary Immaculate*, 1915 by Inés Gasca in order to serve the poor and neglected in hospitals, schools, asylums, and missions. Gasca had entered the Daughters of Charity in Guatemala but had not remained for reasons of health. After leaving she dedicated herself to the assistance of the sick in hospitals. Twenty-one years later (after the foreign Daughters of Charity were expelled from Mexico), she gathered a group of women to establish an institute based on the *Common Rules* and spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. The *Daughters of the Divine Will of God*, 1926 by Elisa Mezzana to care for abandoned children and pray for priests. Mezzana had entered the Daughters of Charity twice (Turin, 1878; Siena, 1891) but left for reasons of health.

### Vincent de Paul as Patron

The study shows that founders of ninety-nine institutes designated Vincent de Paul as patron of their foundation. In addition to the proliferation of communities of Sisters of Charity in Belgium, selected examples include the following:

- *Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary*, 1803 by Pierre Joseph Triest, who also founded three other communities, including the *Brothers of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul*. Triest is known as the Vincent de Paul of Belgium.

- *Sons of Charity*, 1918, France
- *Auxiliaries of Charity*, 1926, France
- *Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Miyazaki*, 1937, Japan
- *Daughters of Mary, Mother of Mercy*, 1961, Nigeria
- *Sons of Mary, Mother of Mercy*, 1970, Nigeria

### Ecumenism

Concern for achieving unity “involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike.”<sup>26</sup> To serve the needs of the Church, Vincentians are challenged to be alert to ecumenical possibilities. The attraction of the Vincentian charism goes beyond the Roman Catholic Church and embraces Judaeo-Christian values.

The ecumenical appeal of Vincentian service also inspired others.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who learned the technique of caring for soldiers in war time from the Daughters of Charity in Paris, established her lay corps of nurses called the Anglican Association of Charity. One author reports that even the Quakers considered beginning a religious institute of nurses similar to the Sisters of Charity.<sup>27</sup>

Deaconesses of the Protestant Church were founded in 1836 in Germany near the Rhine River at Kaiserwerth by Theodore Fliedner (1800-1864), a Protestant Evangelical pastor, who had been inspired by Vincentian works of charity and the organization of the Daughters of Charity during his travels in Europe (especially The Netherlands and England). Their mission was to serve the poor.<sup>28</sup> Fliedner's deaconesses spread internationally and were the prototype of other similar Protestant groups.

The Oxford Movement in England spawned numerous religious institutes in the Anglican communion based on their Roman Catholic counterparts.<sup>29</sup> One of its leaders, Reverend Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), said, "[John Henry] Newman and I have separately come to think it necessary to have some *Soeurs de [la] charité* in the Anglo-Catholic [Church]."<sup>30</sup> Pusey obtained a copy of the *Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity* which he used when developing a rule for the Anglican Sisterhood of the Holy Cross.

The founders of the Anglican Community of Saint Mary (1865) in New York adopted a habit and headdress closely resembling the cornette of the French Daughters of Charity. Despite the canonical secular identity of Saint Vincent's daughters, their distinctive religious garb (and large white winged headdress) had quite an appeal. Other Anglican institutes rooted in the Vincentian tradition include: *The Society of the Holy Cross* (1855), the *Anglican Sisters of Charity* (1869), and the *Society of the Sacred Mission* (1894).

<sup>27</sup> Ralph W. Sockman, *The Revival of Conventual Life in the Church of England in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. D. Gray, 1917), 106.

<sup>28</sup> By their ordination vows the deaconesses devoted themselves to the care of the poor, sick and the young. They were to be dressed in a plain uniform without distinctive badge, and their engagements were not final—they might leave their work and return to ordinary life if they chose.

<sup>29</sup> Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister. Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1955), 1-28. See also Nicholas Groves, "Vincent de Paul in Nineteenth Century England," *Vincentian Heritage* no.1, (1988): 1-68. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age. Volume Two: The Nineteenth Century in Europe, The Protestant and Eastern Churches* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 276-78.

<sup>30</sup> Sockman, 107.

## Worldwide Web of Charity

The mission and vision of Vincent de Paul, the great apostle of charity, challenge his spiritual progeny to examine new ways to continue the mission of evangelization and charity. Tracing the Vincentian Family Tree has helped identify new partners for collaboration that could stimulate innovation in ministry and launch Saint Vincent's mission into the third millennium. In what ways would Saint Vincent demonstrate today that "love is inventive to infinity?"<sup>31</sup>

The human potential of lay and vowed members within the Vincentian tradition who have chosen a preferential option for the poor seems infinite. The international, extended Vincentian Family has more than two million members whose voices could be heard louder and more clearly. They could be advocates for today's social outcasts who lack voice because of injustice and poverty. The pool of personnel inspired by Vincent de Paul and committed to the poor seems poised for collaboration and collective action. *The Vincentian Family Tree* is the only international compilation of all communities known to belong to the extended Vincentian family of Saint Vincent de Paul.

### The Vincentian Mission

The Vincentian mission challenges us today! Rooted in Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor, source and model of all charity, love fills the sails of the Vincentian vessel continuing the mission of Jesus in our society. Vincent taught his friends to follow Divine Providence which leads us step by step to encounter poor persons and rejected groups who need help from us because of their poverty. This calls us to live the Gospel and our Vincentian values through works of charity, justice, and evangelization for the poor.

Vincent also learned from others. The grace of a woman's gentle persuasion made the genius of Vincent de Paul great. Louise de Marillac influenced his service and spirituality, which Elizabeth Seton later transplanted for the Church in America. Today we view our world with their eyes but do we respond zealously to unmet needs with their burning enthusiasm? Can we, like Vincent, measure our love of God

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<sup>31</sup> Coste, #102, "Exhortation to a Dying Brother," 1645, CED 11:146.

in relation to the intensity of its zeal in service of the poor?<sup>32</sup> Can we be more attuned to involvement with one another in organizing and forming others in the service of the poor?<sup>33</sup>

### **Burning Zeal for Mission**

*Today's World.* Contemporary needs summon zealous men and women who profess a preferential option for the poor and claim Vincentian identity. Like the Daughters of Charity National Health System, DePaul, Niagara, or Saint John's Universities, or other colleges in the Vincentian and Setonian tradition, Vincentian organizations everywhere foster a deep respect for the God-given dignity of all people, especially the materially, culturally and spiritually deprived and, therefore, seek to foster dedication to the service of others. Our ability to escape into cyberspace must not lull us into ignoring the realities of the poor—but impel us to harness new energy to accomplish our mission in innovative ways just as Vincent de Paul did for his generation.

Passion for the poor must inflame hearts and drive individuals to pick, ponder, and plant the seeds of possibilities if zeal for the mission is to ignite the missionary fire envisioned by Saint Vincent:

Zeal . . . consists of a pure desire to make oneself pleasing to God and useful to one's neighbor . . . Is there anything more perfect in the world? If love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame; if the love of God is a sun, then zeal is its rays. Zeal is what is most pure in the love of God.<sup>34</sup>

As Vincentian women and men who proclaim in word and works the values that drive our mission, may we be conscious of our role as prophets—for the poor in the Church and in the Church of the poor. May we work together to develop a deeply missionary spirituality within the Vincentian Family.<sup>35</sup> Let us have the zeal and daring of

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<sup>32</sup> In the words of Vincent de Paul: "If the love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame." Conférence No. 211 du 22 Aout 1659, "Sur Les Cinq Vertus Fondamentales," CED 12: 307-08.

<sup>33</sup> "The Vincentian Family as Missionary," *The Vincentian Family in the Year 2000*, (General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, 1998), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Coste, Conference #211, to the Priests of the Mission, 22 August 1659, CED 12: 307.

<sup>35</sup> "The Vincentian Family as Missionary," 2.



Saint Vincent de Paul.  
Period portrait of a man of charity.

Vincent to address timely questions of our day.

- What paradigm shifts and radical conversions of heart are needed to make the preferential option for the poor more real in words and works and deeds?
- What processes are needed to spark a burning zeal for mission? For greater solidarity with the poor in their struggles?
- What types of collaborative initiatives could make God's liberating Word and love more present in the lives of the persons oppressed by poverty today?



The Saturday evening banquet, marking the end of the event and offering a final chance to meet and reflect.

- Should we make time for prayer and reflection together on our Vincentian heritage and our concern for the poor?
- How can we join hands in our mission of serving the poor ?
- How can the Vincentian Family address injustice and the root causes of poverty through common projects? What opportunities do we have for teamwork?

The Family Tree Project has identified common elements of the Vincentian charism of evangelization and charity in hundreds of institutes worldwide. Inspired by the innovation of Vincent de Paul, their patriarch, how will his followers claim and own these commonalities and move towards more collaboration in the corporal and spiritual service of the poor? At this moment in history, how inventive can hearts given to God for the service of the poor become in a common search to improve both today and tomorrow for the poor? How can we promote creative fidelity to the Vincentian mission?

May Vincentian men and women value innovation as a birthright and exercise it as a value integral to mission. May Christ, Evangelizer of the poor, lead us closer to the poor and inflame our hearts with Saint Vincent's zeal to continue his dynamic legacy of evangelization and charity through education—ever adapting it to changing social needs!

**Prayer is a great book for a preacher: from it you will draw the divine truths of the Eternal Word, who is their source, and you in turn will pour them forth on the people.**

*(Saint Vincent de Paul,  
letter to Antoine Durand, May 1658)*