

FAITHFUL TO SAINT VINCENT AND FAITHFUL TO THE TIMES

CONSULTATION PAPER FOR SYNAXIS 2013

VINCENTIAN GENERALATE
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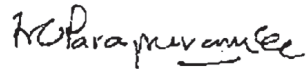
Dear Confreres,

It is time to begin the preparations for our General Synaxis 2013. “The General Synaxis, representing all the members of the Congregation, is the highest authority and legislative body of our Congregation. The main purpose of the General Synaxis is to protect and promote the spirituality and apostolic activities of the Congregation. The General Synaxis shall deal with such important matters as the practice of the evangelical counsels, religious discipline, apostolic activities, formation, administration, policy making and adaptation and renewal of life in the Congregation to modern needs and conditions.” (St. 180 & 181)

It is clear from the Statutes that the General Synaxis has the serious responsibility to provide clear and effective guidelines to the members for the appropriate renewal and timely adaptation of our life style and apostolic activities. To facilitate this aim, the theme “Faithful to St. Vincent, Faithful to the Times’ was chosen a few months ago. A core committee with Fr. James Chelapurath as convener and Frs. Michael Kareekunnel, Thomas Ambattukuzhy, and Jojo Marippatt as members, was appointed to study this theme and to prepare a text and a questionnaire to be read and discussed among our members. This committee, with a help of Shinto Mangalath, John Palapparambil, Charles Kurisseril, Sebastian Thundathikunnel, Antony Plackal, and Mathew Vattakuzhy, has done their work in an efficient manner.

Now, this text and questionnaire need to be studied and discussed in all our Houses and Centres. Let me request all our members to make a serious study and thorough discussion of this

theme. Please send your impressions, comments and suggestions to the committee before the 30th of November 2012. Those who are staying alone in parishes and other institutions also should study this text and send their suggestions. Thus let us contribute our share towards the renewal and adaptation of our Vincentian charism.



September 27, 2012
Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul

Fr Varghese Parappuram VC
Superior General

Abbreviations

CCD Correspondence Conferences Documents
ET Evangelica Testificatio
LG Lumen Gentium
PC Perfectae Caritatis
PDV Pastores Dabo Vobis
PN Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation
PO Presbyterorum Ordinis
St. Statutes of the Vincentian Congregation

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AND
FAITHFUL TO THE TIMES**

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FAITHFUL TO SAINT VINCENT AND FAITHFUL TO THE TIMES

INTRODUCTION

0.1. Synaxis

The General Synaxis, representing all the members of the Congregation is the highest authority and legislative body of our Congregation. Its main purpose is to protect and promote the spirituality and apostolic activities of the Congregation. It should be a true sign of unity and love of the members.¹ This unity is not merely that of good friends, but also unity of purpose. All the deliberations of the Synaxis must be based on the Statutes and its spirit.² It shall deal with such important matters as the practice of the evangelical counsels, religious discipline, apostolic activities, formation, administration, policy making and adaptation and renewal of the life in the Congregation to modern needs and conditions.³ The organization, evaluation and renewal of our life and activities are to be done in the light of our specific purpose and Charism. The deliberations of the Synaxis is a collective discernment of God's will in the light of the signs of the times and the urgent needs of the Church and of the contemporary world.⁴ In all these the original inspiration is to be kept in mind.⁵

Our community is established and endures, not because we are happy together due to an affinity in thought, character, or options, but because the Lord has brought us together and unites us by a common consecration and for a common mission within the Church.⁶ Second Vatican Council recommends a double fidelity for the renewal of the religious life: return to the sources and

attention to the signs of the times.⁷ In our case return to the sources means to the intuition and original inspiration of Vincent de Paul, to his spiritual experience, to his particular way of discovering and following Christ, to the heart of Vincentian Spirituality and the spirit which should animate the members of the Congregation.⁸ Signs of the times mean the challenges in which the present culture confronts us.

In short we have come together not merely as good friends to live happily, but we are brought together and remain united by a common consecration and mission within the church. The duty of the General Synaxis is to protect and promote the charism of the Congregation. This is being achieved when it discerns the ways and means to remain faithful to the original inspiration and at the same time making it relevant to the present times.

As Vincentians, we are called to preach the good news to the poor and to help them in their integral development. This is our charism and identifying mark. This we do by following Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor. **We address St. Vincent as our father and patron of all charitable activities. Are we really his sons? At the moment we are known all over India and even abroad as a Congregation of Preachers. But this is only fifty per cent of our charism. We are not yet identified as a group dedicated to the service of the poor. It means we are yet to become sons of our father. The forthcoming synaxis will discuss ways and means of making service to the poor our identifying mark.**

In our prayer for Vincentian Spirit we ask for the grace to love what Vincent loved and to practice what he taught. He loved Jesus

and served Him in the poor. We do not pray for the grace to do what he did because we cannot do everything he had done. St. Vincent was a French man who lived in the 17th century France; but we live in the 21st century India. There is a distance of 7000 kilometers and a gap of four centuries between him and us. Many changes have taken place in the field of theology, spirituality and social sciences. We cannot blindly follow whatever he did. **We must remain faithful to his spirit, at the same time reinterpret his teaching for our times. Then only our Vincentian vocation becomes relevant to our time. This awareness will mean faithfulness to St. Vincent and to our times.**

Once we have set our goals clearly in front of us, it is easy for us to organize the other aspects of our life and ministry – apostolic activities, vows, community life, and formation. Then all our decisions will be in the light of our specific purpose and charism. Desire to serve the poor must be the compelling force behind all our decisions and activities. It is not that St. Vincent formed a community and served the poor, but he formed a community to serve the poor. Once we are clear and firm in our goal, it will be reflected in our formation and community life. **This Consultation Paper is to help us to understand our Vincentian vocation and to discover and explore concrete and practical steps towards its realization. Thus service to the poor really becomes our identifying mark.**

It is often heard among us that there is no community spirit. Members take up programs, as they like without any reference to the superior. There is no accountability and transparency with regard to the financial matters. Members are not interested in community activities such as prayer, monthly recollection

and community meetings. These days we have also seen some members leaving the Congregation and priesthood without any prick of conscience. St. Vincent too had his own personal problems such as worldly ambitions and temptations against faith. All these disappeared when he dedicated his life to the service of the poor. **Similarly the challenges we experience in community life and in the practice of vows will be overcome once we give serious attention to our charism. In short over all renewal of our Congregation is possible only when we remain faithful to our charism. Thus we have chosen the theme ‘FAITHFUL TO SAINT VINCENT AND FAITHFUL TO THE TIMES’ for the Synaxis 2013.**

0.2. Theme

Having a theme for the synaxis will give focus and direction to the deliberations and it can eventually lead to concrete and practical decisions. Otherwise we may discuss everything under the sun without arriving at any conclusion. There is also the danger of personal problems and grievances creeping into the deliberations. In such cases there is the possibility of discussions becoming centrifugal (going away from the central theme). Only a centripetal (concentrating on a central theme) approach will bring our energies together to march forward to the goal with increased momentum.

CHAPTER : 1

VINCENTIAN VOCATION

1.1. Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor is indeed the model and source of our vocation.

1.1.1. *Jesus was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit.* Jesus reveals that “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18a). This revelation is in line with the prophetic tradition of Isaiah who also confessed that “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me” (Isa 61:1a). The anointing with the Holy Spirit is thus an essential pre-requisite and a necessary condition in the evangelizer of the poor. He shall be endowed with the gifts (1Cor 12:1-11) and the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). This distinguishes an evangelizer from a social worker.

1.1.2. *Jesus himself was materially poor*

Jesus the Evangelizer of the poor was himself materially poor and was leading a life of poverty. Simplicity in life-style shall be an essential quality in us as evangelizers of the poor according to the example of Jesus. That is why Jesus chose His disciples and apostles from the poor people. Jesus cherished a preferential option for the poor. The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was first used by the Liberation Theologians of South America. But that term is now added to the terminology of Catholic theology and Biblical Studies. The phrase means that the ministry of Jesus was not exclusive to the poor, but preferential. Preference in the ministry of Jesus was to the poor. First priority was given to the poor. In a family with more than one child, the parents cherish a predilection to the younger ones. This is not a disregard to the elder ones, but instead a preferred concern for the growth of the

younger ones. Even so, in the family of God, there is a preferred concern for the younger, i.e., the marginalized, the poor etc. Jesus calls such, as His least brethren: “Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mat 25:40). Here lies the meaning of the specific charism of the Vincentian Congregation.

1.1.3. Good News is Jesus Himself. Etymologically the root word for good news is *euangelion*. In the ancient Greek literature, it means the good news that a king would send to the people from the battlefield when he won the war. This term is used in the Gospels in the same sense to mean that Jesus won the battle against the Evil One by His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

1.1.4. Jesus’ determination to proclaim the Good News to the poor

First of all, Jesus had the internal desire, determination and firm decision to proclaim the Good News to the poor according to His anointing with Holy Spirit by the Father. This is revealed in the words of Jesus after reading the text from Isaiah in the Synagogue of Nazareth: “He said to them, ‘Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21). He challenges his audience that they can be sure that this Scripture will be definitely fulfilled in his life and actions.

The word proclamation is sometimes misleading to mean only the oral proclamation. But the proclamation by Jesus involved both oral preaching (*Kerygma*) and service (*Diakonia*). **Both kerygma and diakonia together constitute proclamation or evangelization.** One without the other is incomplete according to the example of Jesus. He preached beatitude to the poor (Luke

6:20; Mat 5:3) and he served the poor (the blind beggar on the roadside, the lepers, etc.) bringing happiness in their lives.

1.2. Vincentian Vocation in the Statutes and Practical Norms

The Statutes of our Congregation present the Vincentian Vocation under three headings: Purpose, Nature and Spirit. They are like three sides of a triangle or three strands of a rope. Even the absence of one make it either non-existent or imperfect.

1.2.1. Purpose: It answers the question ‘Why you do something or why something exists?’ It is the *raison d’etre* for the existence of something. The purpose of the Vincentian Congregation is that which justifies its existence.

1.2.1.1. To strive for evangelical perfection (St.2). This is the perfection of charity by following Jesus more closely and imitating him by the practice of obedience, chastity and poverty. Here Christ of the Gospels is our Rule (St. 3). This is common to all religious.

1.2.1.2. To preach the gospel to the poor, especially the more abandoned and to help them in their integral development. ‘More abandoned’ means the poorest of the poor according to Mother Theresa. This is the criteria to choose the target group and place for any Vincentian ministry. As for example we shall start schools where there are no other agencies to do it.⁹ St. Vincent was very insistent on not accepting invitations for ministry in the cities.

1.2.1.3. This is the specific and pre-eminent purpose of our Congregation (St.4); it means that evangelization of the poor

is more important than all other activities. It is realized through Popular Missions, Retreats, educational and charitable activities.

1.2.1.4. This is the identifying mark (St.5) of our Congregation. This is our charism. Identifying mark is something by which we are recognized. Nowadays we are more often identified as Congregation of preachers. It is true, but only half the truth. It has brought about quite a few tangible positive results in the Church. There is an increased love for word of God, more interest in the reception of the sacraments and participation in the Eucharistic celebration. It is said about St. Vincent that “he practically changed the face of the Church”.¹⁰ We might have made some changes on one side of the face; we need to make corresponding change on the other side too so that we become his true sons.

1.2.1.5. We experience our vocation mainly as desire to serve the poor (St. 5). How did we experience our vocation when we joined the Congregation? How do we experience it now? Many of us might have joined the Congregation just to become a priest without fully knowing the meaning of the Vincentian vocation. There is nothing unusual about it because even the apostles did not realize all the implications of being a disciple of Jesus. He revealed it to them during the three years of formation He gave them. Even St. Vincent was ignorant of his true vocation when he was ordained a priest. He came to Paris to search for a good benefice so that he could help his family and enjoy a good retirement. It was revealed to him through his fellowship with some of the learned and saintly priests of Paris and through some painful experiences. The purpose of our formation is to teach the candidates about the purpose and nature of our vocation and to equip them for the same.

1.2.1.6. *This desire is the compelling force behind all our activities (St.5).* The spirit of competition or rivalry or prestige shall not prompt us to start any institution¹¹. Choice of place, personnel, and activities of a new Vincentian house is determined by this desire to serve the poor. According to St. Vincent **“Poor are our masters”**.¹² Master is the boss who takes decisions. A servant obeys his orders immediately and also without questioning. Servant eats after the master has eaten and has been satisfied (Lk 17:8) Vincentian houses are servants’ quarters/ staff quarters. It simply means that priority is to be given to the needs of the poor in our decisions and ministry. We live on that patrimony of the poor. We raise funds for them only. We are supposed to take only what is due to a servant. General Synaxis is an occasion to evaluate and renew our life and activities; but what are the criteria to do so? Are they success, efficiency or faithfulness to the charism?

1.2.1.7. *Formation of priests and seminarians.* This is an offshoot of the evangelization of the poor. It is like a king, after conquering a country, who leaves a garrison there to keep the country under his reign. Once people are won for Christ through the Missions, they can be preserved in that new found spirit only through the service of holy and learned priests. This inspired St. Vincent to organize a programme for the formation of priests and seminarians.

1.2.2. NATURE (St. 7-9)

‘Nature’ means the main characteristic of something. Characteristics will be present wherever you are and whatever you do. The nature of something can be destroyed only when the substance in which it inheres is destroyed. The nature of

our vocation is that we are an **apostolic society of common life**.¹³ As apostles we are called to be with Jesus and to be sent out to the ends of the earth (Mk 3:14). Apostolic (missionary) activity in the service of all, **especially the poor is part of our nature**.¹⁴ A Vincentian should be ready and willing to go anywhere in the world to announce good news to the poor. At the same time he remains always part of the Vincentian community through which God calls him and sends him. Along with the apostolic zeal we must cultivate a feeling for the community. We strive to achieve the above mentioned goals as a community. **This ministry to serve the poor is a gift given to our community viz Vincentian Congregation. One shares this gift so far as he remains part of this community. Since active apostolate and community life are part of our nature, if either of them is missing we cease to be a Vincentian Missionary.**

1.2.3. SPIRIT (St. 10-14)

‘Spirit’ means a particular way of thinking, feeling and behaving, especially a way that is typical of a group of people; it also means what is different from the body of a person. Thus it refers to the characteristics of a person that are considered as being separate from the body and which many religions believe continue to live even after one dies. Spirit is also that which gives enthusiasm or energy to a person. It is invisible, but without it the person is dead. It is manifested through the body and its activities.

Spirit of our Congregation is the Spirit of Christ characterized by an intimate and personal love of the Father, docility to the divine Providence, **ardent** (enthusiastic and strong feeling for some body or some thing, zeal) and **compassionate** (feeling with and

for others) love of the poor. This is almost the same as zeal which is charity on fire. This will lead us to hard work and simple life there by living in solidarity with the poor.

1.2.4 Means to imbue the spirit of Christ (St.11)

1.2.4.1. Recourse to the gospel: The word of God must be the constant subject of our study, meditation, prayer and contemplation. We need to have a heart that throbs with the heart of Jesus for the poor. What we meditate that we become. If only we meditate on the compassionate love of Jesus, we will become compassionate. The Prophet Jonah ran away from his call to help the people of Nineveh because he did not share the feelings of God.

1.2.4.2. Life and teachings of St. Vincent: We need to know St. Vincent de Paul also intimately and personally because we are called to follow Jesus and serve the poor according to the example of St. Vincent de Paul. That is why we pray for the gift of loving what he loved and practicing what he taught. This is possible only if we come in direct contact with him in his Common Rules, Correspondence and Conferences. Here we can appreciate the man and saint in him better.

1.2.4.3. Dialogue with the poor: This is not explicitly stated in the Statutes, but implied. Jesus saw the hungry crowd and was moved; the Good Samaritan took note of the wounded man and felt compassion; St. Vincent too heard the confession of a gentleman in Folleville and he was moved to start Popular Mission and also to found the Congregation of the Mission. He came to know the

suffering of the poor sick family in Chatillon and organized the Confraternity of Charity. **“The knowledge of social well being and of reform is to be learned not from books nor from public platform, but in climbing the stairs of poor man’s garret, sitting with him, feeling the cold that pierces him, sharing his lovely heart and troubled mind ... Then and only then you can sense it and resolve it”** says Frederic Ozanam

Spirit is manifested in the practice of the five virtues: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for souls.¹⁵ Vincentian Spirit as given in the Statutes could be graphically presented as follows:

THE VINCENTIAN SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST
AS SENT TO PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR
AS EVIDENCED IN THE GOSPEL AND EXPLAINED IN
THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF SAINT VINCENT DE
PAUL

CONCRETIZED PARTICULARLY THROUGH:
INTIMATE AND PERSONAL LOVE OF THE FATHER
DOCILITY TO THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE
ARDENT AND COMPASSIONATE LOVE OF THE POOR
SIMPLICITY
HUMILITY
MEEKNESS
MORTIFICATION
ZEAL FOR THE SOULS

CHAPTER : 2

VINCENTIAN WAY OF LIFE

2.1. Prayer

Vincentian Congregation is an apostolic community and an apostle is one who is being with the Jesus before being sent out with a mission (Mk 3:16). A messenger has to receive the message before it is being proclaimed; he has to get the mandate before fulfilling the mission. **Like Jesus himself he has to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. This brings us to the need of prayer in the life of a missionary. If only we have seen the face of Jesus in the morning prayer, can we recognize Him in the person of the poor during the day. St. Vincent de Paul was very emphatic about the importance of prayer in our life. “Give me a person of prayer and that individual will be capable of everything; he can say with the Apostle: ‘I can do all things in him who sustains and comforts me.’** The Congregation of the Mission will exist as long as the exercise of mental prayer is faithfully carried out in it. Prayer is an impregnable rampart that will shield missionaries from all sorts of attacks. It is a mystical arsenal, not only for the purpose of defense but also of attack, and for routing all the enemies of God and of the salvation of souls.”¹⁶ “Prayer is a sermon which one preaches to oneself to convince oneself of the need to have recourse to God and of cooperating with his grace to root out all defects from the soul. This, then, allows virtue to grow within us.”¹⁷ Prayer is a great reservoir from which one will receive inspirations to fulfill his duties.¹⁸

Being members of a community, we must give due importance to community prayer too. “If we come together

before our Lord and present ourselves all together to him as the first Christians used to do, he will give himself in turn to us, will illumine us with his lights, and will himself accomplish in and through us the good we are bound to do in his Church. Lastly, he will grant us the grace of attaining the degree of perfection he desires of us so that we may be able one day to possess him fully in the eternity of the ages.”¹⁹

When missionaries remain united in prayer they discover Jesus in their brothers and sisters. They can be powerful witnesses to Jesus both individually and collectively. Spirit of prayer or lack of it is the cause of rise and fall of a religious community. Therefore, let us listen to the words of Paul VI: **Do not forget ... the witness of history: faithfulness to prayer or its abandonment are the test of the vitality or decadence of the religious life. The discovery of intimacy with God, the necessity for adoration, the need for intercession ... the experience of Christian holiness shows us the fruitfulness of prayer, in which God reveals himself to the spirit and heart of his servants. The Lord gives us this knowledge of himself in the fervor of love.**²⁰

2.2. Vows— Better understood in the light of Community and Mission

St. Paul’s point of view, in explaining the variety of gifts of the Spirit which create different vocations among Christians is well known (cf. 1 Cor.12:4-30). The reason for this variety is that the Church, the community of believers, needs apostles, prophets, teachers, and administrators. We can develop his thought without falsifying it by saying that the Church needs celibates and married people, religious and secular people. It needs families

as well as religious communities; Christians dedicated to prayer and Christians consecrated to evangelization. The church needs everyone in order to be able to reveal and realize its potentialities and to accomplish all the services it has to render to humanity as an instrument of God's grace.

The profession of evangelical counsels, which makes a person totally free for the service of the Gospel, is important also for devoting themselves wholly to the mission of the Church.²¹ Each choice of a Christian lifestyle has an essential relationship with the entire community of believers, because the various vocational gifts are not only means for individual self-fulfillment but also different ways of contributing to the common upbuilding of the Church. Personal sanctification is never exclusively the aim of religious consecration. On the contrary, the more one is dedicated to Christ, the more one will be dedicated to one's brethren, because consecration to Christ means at the same time consecration for others. Those who profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience have an important role in fostering the Christian community's growth in holiness. Therefore, those who strive for personal holiness must do so in the context of a commitment of service to the Church's life and holiness. This is the necessary ecclesial dimension of religious consecration.

By the practice of the evangelical counsels, we seek an intimate, personal and experiential friendship with our Lord necessary for a fruitful apostolate.²² It also liberates from the obstacles which might draw us away from the fervor of charity and perfection of divine worship and to place our heart and soul at the disposal of our community for serving God and our neighbor."²³

2.2.1. Obedience

2.2.1.1. Shared Responsibility for the Mission and Immediate and Total Availability for the Mission: Consecrated persons profess obedience not primarily and essentially for their individual perfection or of their community, but for an ecclesial mission as it is “a divine gift which the Church has received from our Lord.”²⁴ Obedience binds together the various wills and unites them in one single fraternal community, endowed with a specific mission to be accomplished within the Church. Obedience to an authority conferred by the Church is ecclesial in character. The relations between the Church and the consecrated are animated by a sense of obedience and love for the Church, whereby the body of Christ is built up and grows through the exercise of authority and obedience. Our obedience is a believing with the Church, thinking and speaking with the Church, serving through her. The service, performed by superiors and subjects each in their own way, is thus, fundamentally, nothing other than a special sharing in the ministry and mission of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

The evangelical counsel of obedience makes the consecrated available to serve the universal loving will of God. For the proper discernment of God’s will, both the needs of the universal and the local Church must be considered. A smaller community must make its decisions in the context of the greater ecclesial communion, not only listening to the life of the Church and its needs, but also listening to those pastors who have received their ministry in apostolic succession. Therefore obedience is a full consecration to the mission of the Church. All personal gifts are given for the purpose of building up the Church and its functioning as the Body of Christ. While obeying their superiors according to their rules

and constitutions, the consecrated persons should bring their powers of intellect and will and their gifts of nature and grace to bear on the execution of commands and on the fulfillment of the tasks laid upon them, realizing that they are contributing towards the building up of the Body of Christ, according to God's plan.

The evangelical counsel of obedience confers upon consecrated persons a permanent state of apostolic availability.

In an address to consecrated persons, Pope John Paul II states: "Voluntary obedience is a special expression of your interior liberty. In thus carrying out the will of the Father, you contribute by your 'yes' to building up the Church of his Son in the Spirit, who raises up the families of religious."²⁵ Membership in an institute erected for the works of the apostolate binds each religious to accept and perform what has been established by those who are responsible for it, since the demands of the communitarian apostolate prevent each person from deciding on his own activity. Obedience ensures collaboration with the work of the Church in the place and manner willed by God in his plan of salvation. It is, moreover, the beginning and source of unity among the brethren called by God to live and work together. Religious, therefore, should cultivate a renewed awareness, by offering their services for the building up of the body of Christ, by persevering in fidelity to their rule, and by obeying their superiors. Obedience thus confers efficacy on apostolic activity, establishes a harmonious blending of the works of all the members according to the divine plan and creates a deeper participation in the apostolic action of the Church.

The fraternal living together in a community is based on the authority-obedience relationship among the members, as

a manifestation of their obedience to God. It is obedience, to whomever is responsible for the common good, that unites the hearts, minds and daily efforts of all members in the co-operative achievement of a good common to all. The bond of obedience thus appears as a commitment to live evangelical communion to its fullest extent, in a community. “Through obedience our works are coordinated and united, and thus the welfare of the Church, as well as that of the congregation, is promoted.”²⁶ “Fraternal collaboration, especially in pastoral and apostolic endeavors, unites the will and efforts of the brethren for the service of God and of the Church.”²⁷

The service performed by the superiors and subjects to be united in the will of God is a special sharing in the ministry and mission of the Church. In obeying the superiors, all personal gifts are given for the purpose of building up the Church and its functioning as the body of Christ. The following statute of our Congregation makes it clear by saying that, “by the practice of obedience we serve the Church in a more efficacious, orderly and united way, obeying our superiors.”²⁸ As obedience for Vincentians is the free and generous acceptance of God’s salvific will for the mankind,²⁹ they actively and with a sense of responsibility employ the powers of their intellect and will and the gifts of nature and grace for the well being of the body of Christ.³⁰

2.2.1.2. Listening to the voice of God and Cry of the Poor

Consecrated life is wholly designed to lead its members in the present age toward perfection in worship of God, and in love and service of God and neighbor. For a consecrated person, obedience is foremost a way of life towards God and a more intimate way of perfection involving both direct and indirect responses.

One's time, energies, and external activities are at the constant disposition of superiors' care for the common good. The call to love, to a growing union and familiarity with God is central to the evangelical counsel of obedience. Eagerness to do the will of God in all things is a mark of the undivided love towards God. The consecrated person embraces the will of God in the evangelical counsel of obedience, makes it his own, and makes it flow into his own life so that it may become the activating force of his acts.

By freeing the consecrated from the spiteful self will, their obedience directs them to contemplate God's truth and will. This is the freedom that the counsel of obedience brings to the consecrated for an undivided love towards God. Obedience obliges the consecrated one to live for God alone, to seek in everything His glory and the fulfillment of His will. It is a sign of the exclusive dedication of the energies of the consecrated to the concerns of the Lord and what is pleasing to him.

In the life of Jesus the attitude and activity of service originated from his obedience to the Father. After the example of the Son of man, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk.10:45), the consecrated persons also develop the same attitude through their obedience. It helps them to be compassionate with all people who suffer, who are poor, excluded, and marginalized. The consecrated are called by obedience to embrace all and to include all.

The evangelical counsel of obedience obliges the consecrated to accept in faith the superiors appointed to interpret the will of God in the community as representatives of God and to obey their directives as the will of God. **By submitting their will to**

their superiors, first and foremost, they bow before the loving and saving will of God. When an order is given by a superior who habitually tries to live in the will of God, who has prayed and has no personal interest to defend, but only the good of the subject, then the very authority of God becomes the counterpart of that order and decision. So in consecrated obedience, those disciples whom Jesus calls to follow him pledge in faith an obedience to him personally in subjecting themselves to those “who hold God’s place.” In this sense the consecrated one obeys only God.

2.2.2. Chastity

2.2.2.1. Undivided Attachment to the Lord and the Poor: In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the ecclesiastical Magisterium reconfirmed the common vocation to sanctity and defined it primarily in terms of the two commandments of love.³¹ **It then affirmed that the gift of virginity or celibacy is granted to some which “uniquely frees the human heart (cf. 1 Cor.7:32-35) so that one becomes more fervent in love for God and for all people... it is a most effective means of dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to the service of God and the works of the apostolate.”**³² Chastity, embraced for the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt.19:12), makes the person’s heart free in a special way (cf. 1 Cor.7:32-f), so as to set it on fire more and more with charity for God and for the brethren. It is Jesus who reveals that healthy, fruitful celibate living is an existential possibility. He is utterly caught up in the life and work of his Father and at the same time, he loves his brothers and sisters with a warm, outgoing, human love that embraces all.

The parable of the great supper (Lk.14:16-21) reminds us that the freer the heart from egoistic or material ties, the more undividedly it can concern itself with the things of God. Consecrated celibacy is a means by which one can attain in a special way that undivided heart and that consecration to God alone. Consecrated chastity provides freedom from the temporal preoccupations necessary for married and family life, and so increases freedom externally and internally for life, directly with God. What characterizes consecrated celibacy is, therefore, a relationship and an orientation toward God and His affairs, just as what characterizes marriage is a relationship and an orientation toward the spouse and secular affairs. The complete gift of self to the kingdom of God justifies and sanctifies celibacy.

Christian faith maintains that our relationship to God is expressed and lived out in our relationship to neighbors.³³ The celibate's love of neighbor becomes a universal love, not bound to particular persons. Consecrated celibacy expressed in the love of neighbor is realized in the community and through ministry. The chastity of Consecrated persons does not mean sterility. On the contrary, it signifies the utmost fruitfulness, obviously on a different higher level than the physical, a fruitfulness of the spirit, not of the body. As Christian marriage increases life in the mystical body on the natural level, consecrated celibacy increases it on the supernatural level of grace. Celibate love embraces everyone with God's love which often converts others to Christ or deepens their relationship with him. **Consecrated chastity thus 'begets' and 'raises' children in, with, and for Christ. There are so many people around us who need food, clothing, visiting, nursing and medical assistance, help, consolation, education and correction. The consecrated celibate life leaves**

the heart free to love them, not with an ordinary love, but with a father's or mother's tenderness; free for a gratuitous, undivided devotion that looks for no reward. Our example in this is the Apostle Paul himself, who said he wanted to "spend what he had and to be spent" for the sake of his children in Corinth (cf. 2 Cor.12:15). Unless there is a giving away of self, celibacy is supreme sterility. Lived positively, selflessly, celibacy can be distinctively and consciously creative.

The project of vowed celibacy is not just to love God and remain unmarried, but a project to love honestly, freely, and yet remain mobile as well to carry out the mission of God's love to areas where it is most needed. To the consecrated persons, John Paul II says, in chastity or virginity "you have espoused Christ, who calls you to encounter him not only in contemplation, but also in the innumerable occasions for charity."³⁴

According to our Statutes, consecrated celibacy, which is "an expression of an undivided love for God,"³⁵ "liberates the human heart in a unique way so that it may be more concerned with God and His cause in order to please Him."³⁶ It "does not stifle affection nor diminish personality but sublimates them to fuller charity"³⁷ and ensures "total availability for the apostolate."³⁸

2.2.2.2. Sharing of Love and Freedom to Love Beyond Boundaries: The counsel of consecrated celibacy calls the consecrated to love God and humanity with the love of Jesus (cf. Jn.13:34), "the love to which the incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life."³⁹ To love with the God's love is the content and challenge of consecrated celibacy. The finality of the counsel lies in loving God, oneself, others and everything as God loves. As the Father loves constantly, never decreasing

in loving fidelity, so the call of the consecrated celibates is to participate in this unfailing love of the Father enthusiastically. **Following the paternal model, their celibate love is a love that embraces all, irrespective of class, creed and color; a love that surprises both friend and enemy alike and a love above all that finds a place for the other within oneself.** Egoistic self-centered love has no place in the life of the consecrated. In other words, instead of being closed within, he is to be open to include all. That is, a possessive or exclusive intimacy is out of question in celibate love since theirs is an all-inclusive, all-embracing, all-encompassing love.

Celibate life helps consecrated persons to become hospitable, sincere in their words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ever ready to serve, capable of opening themselves to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, quick to understand, forgive and console. When they love and care for children who are not their own according to the flesh, nurse the sick, care for the old and carry the weight of other people's sins, bringing them before God through prayer and intercession, we cannot call such a life a sterile one. Instead of becoming father or mother to one or more children on earth, they are now able to love everybody in Christ. For this reason people call them 'father' or 'mother'.

2.2.3. Poverty

2.2.3.1 *Sharing our Being and Having with the Community in the Service of the Poor:* In the teachings of the Church, deprivation in itself has never been a value. Poverty becomes a value only when it is accepted for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Jesus embraced poverty not for its own sake, but as an expression of his total obedience and love to the Father for the carrying out of his mission and as a manifestation of God's unending love for humankind. The primary concern of Jesus' earthly ministry was to communicate the saving will of the Father. For this he detached himself from material things and kept an attitude of total freedom and availability for his mission. Consecrated poverty, living in the manner of Christ, manifests the invitation of God to a total dedication to his kingdom. Detachment from material goods is the point of departure and the sign of a way of life which characterizes our relations with God, with ourselves and with our brethren, especially the poor. The primary objective of consecrated poverty is the love and service of God and neighbor.

The evangelical counsel of poverty is a total gift of self without any reservation. It consists in giving; giving not only what one has but also what one is - both being and having. The model ahead for such self-giving is the Triune God. "When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ... it becomes an expression of that total gift of self which the three divine persons make to one another."⁴⁰ A total availability not only to the other divine persons but also for humanity is the very core of Trinitarian life. The Father keeps nothing for himself. Even his paternity which is proper to him, does not have a sense without the begotten Son. This is true also with the Son and the Spirit. The evangelical counsel of poverty invites the consecrated to that mutual sharing, to be an expression of that total gift of self, which the three divine persons make to one another. It is a call to be prepared for a total and unconditional availability for God and His people so that they feel free to share all that they possess as in the case of the divine persons. The poverty that makes the consecrated one rich is this

richness of Trinitarian poverty. God demands through St. Paul: “I do not want what is yours but you” (2 Cor.12:14).

Evangelical poverty binds consecrated persons to work for the welfare of the Church. In the words of John Paul II, **“religious poverty is a basic spiritual attitude, a voluntary renunciation; a return of one’s being to God in service to the kingdom.”** The multiplicity of apostolic services in the Church by the consecrated persons is a magnificent expression of their love for Christ and his people. They choose poverty for the sake of the poor and the rich. They assist the poor by using their wealth, time and talents, and the rich through the example of a simple life-style. They must involve themselves not only for the material and spiritual welfare of the poor, but also and equally, for the spiritual welfare of the rich.

Evangelical poverty invites consecrated ones to a state of universal and unconditional availability of service. It is not making ourselves ‘free from’; but liberation to be ‘free for’; not to close in our own shell, but to donate ourselves more completely. We don’t close ourselves within a small group of people, but we are open and available to love everybody. For this we need to be detached, to keep free and available. We put our person and also our existence, our qualities, our time, our things, and our life at the disposal of God and our brethren. On the other hand, any form of closing of ourselves, selfishness, lack of collaboration, individualism, inactivity, etc. are failures against evangelical poverty. Open-hearted love and open-handed generosity are the key-note expressions of evangelical poverty.

“The members shall dedicate themselves to apostolic activities

in a spirit of service and labor without any desire for worldly gain, renouncing their own conveniences and ‘seeking above all the kingdom of God and His justice’ (Mt.6:33)”.⁴¹ The evangelical counsel of poverty helps the Vincentians to be available to the needs of the Church and calls them to spend their “talents and goods for promoting the apostolic works, for the needs of the Church and for the betterment of the people.”⁴²

2.2.3.2. Solidarity with the Poor; Living on the Patrimony of the Poor: In consecrated life, the option of leaving the material riches is not simply for emptiness, but in order to make themselves available to all without any hindrance. **Hence the deepening of communion with the needy is an essential part of evangelical poverty. It is not enough to assume a sort of abstract condition of poverty without any concrete reference to those who endure actual poverty.** On this poverty John Paul II says: “This makes you free. You can let go, be available and be united in solidarity with the ‘poor’ of our times. Through your poverty you have special ties with those who are weak and without rights, those who are exploited and helpless. Place yourselves at their side and stand up for them, with courage and loyalty. Then it can rightfully be said of you: “You are poor but you make others rich; you seem to have nothing, yet everything is yours” (cf. 2 Cor.6:10).

In the treatment of the practice of poverty, the theme of the preferential option for the poor is outstanding. *In Vita Consecrata*, the consecrated persons’ option and service for the poor is considered as a prophetic role for the Church and the world.⁴³ It lays stress on the evangelical motive of consecrated persons for the preferential love for the needy as their closer following of Christ and ardent imitation of his attitudes. *Vita*

Consecrata uses the term “to join Christ in washing the feet of the poor” to express the service directed in particular to the poorest and the neediest.⁴⁴ Such an option requires of them a commitment to the promotion of justice and human advancement which today are seen as integral aspects of the new evangelization. It underlines the importance of embracing the conditions of life, the sufferings, the problems and the perils of the poor, the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as ‘the least.’

2.2.3.3. *Hard Work: The Poor have to Work Hard for the Livelihood:* Hard work is one of the expressed signs of evangelical poverty which brings the consecrated persons nearer to the lives of the poor. It is by work that they provide for the needs of the community and those of others, especially of the poor, and place themselves on the same level of the people of our times. This form of poverty is truly better understood and appreciated. The commitment to work is not aimed at accumulating wealth or to finding personal satisfaction but through work one may produce fruits to share with others. Pope John Paul II states: “In the past, there was the choice and practice of begging, a sign of poverty, humility and beneficial charity towards the needy. Today it is rather by their labor that religious are provided with whatever they need for their sustenance or their work. It is a law of life and a practice of poverty. Embracing it freely and joyfully means accepting the counsel and believing in the Gospel blessedness of poverty.”

The members of our Congregation are called upon to bear witness to the human value of work as a means of support and of service. *“As the law of labor is universal, every one of us*

should labor earnestly to contribute his share to the concerted work of the congregation. Since we are members of one and the same family, the fruits of our labors shall be common to all of us."⁴⁵ The common law of labor is a means to bind the Vincentians among themselves just as it binds them to the poor. Through this we could participate in the life style and anxieties of working people. Through tireless work in schools, missions, orphanages, as well as through preaching, visiting the sick, and ministering to the various needs of the poor we actively contribute to the well-being of society."⁴⁶

2.2.3.4. *Simplicity: Being Satisfied with the Minimum and Transparency in Dealings:* While institutes have the right to possess whatever they need for their temporal life and work according to their rules and constitutions, they should avoid any semblance of luxury, excessive wealth and accumulation of property. Among the various religious institutes, the external aspects of poverty vary according to their specific vocations. Communities which intend to incarnate the Gospel among the outcasts by sharing their actual condition, practice a form of poverty which differs from that of communities founded for the apostolate or for the benefit of the poor. In these cases the possession of material resources is necessary. The important thing is that these assets be effectively dedicated to their purpose and that consecrated persons, individually and collectively, be mere administrators of these goods. Thus they give a corporate life-style of authentic witness about Christ's counsel of poverty to the people among whom they live and work.

Evangelical poverty is no longer be an attitude of someone trying to understand, but of someone determined to act. "Now

that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly” (Jn.13:17). The blessed are not those who know everything about the poor in spirit, but those who are poor in spirit. Blessedness is not only a call to feel with the poor; it is a challenge to us to become poor ourselves.

The genuine life of evangelical poverty should be a counter-cultural protest against materialism, consumerism, greed, competition and luxury that is side-by-side with hunger, poverty and deprivation. By disciplining forcefully our human desire to possess, consecrated poverty challenges prophetically both the idolatry of money that ends up losing the very meaning of things possessed and the senseless use and consumption of the earth’s resources that ends up destructive of our present and future well-being.

The challenge of today’s society also requires consecrated persons to give a renewed, vigorous witness of a simple and austere way of lifestyle both as **individual** and as a community that is not indifferent to the needs of neighbor, and even shares lovingly the sufferings, problems and perils of the most neglected. In a society, which is often fascinated with luxury, consecrated persons should avoid the exaggerated seeking of comfort and expensive means of living as individuals and communities. As men and women consecrated to Christ, they must be examples of evangelical poverty, reflecting simplicity and self-denial in the way they live. Let our consecration be shown by our rejection of styles of life which go against the values of the Gospel.

It is necessary to liberate individuals and communities from acquisitiveness and possessiveness. For this, the rules of

religious communities have always included recommendations toward simplicity of life, especially regarding their houses, rooms, clothing, food, travel, and entertainment. The *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation* states that the members shall be satisfied with the food, clothing, books, furnishing of the room and other necessary things given to them from the community.⁴⁷ Therefore, in the Vincentian way of life, in their buildings and in the equipment of their institutions however efficient they may have to be for their apostolate, there must be nothing that smacks of show or luxury. In the practical norms of the Congregation we read: “Our Church buildings and furnishings must excel in simplicity.”⁴⁸

The simple life and hard work of the poor who lack even the necessities of life or can only procure bare necessities, shall inspire us to be moderate in the use of material things. The simple life-style in keeping with what we profess is, therefore, in logical consistency with the biblical understanding of the poor and a practical expression of our faith in Jesus Christ who identified himself with the poor. Lavish spending by a Vincentian, who has vowed to follow the poverty of Jesus, is an insult to the poor who struggle for their food and their existence, and a countersign to the kingdom of God. The voluntary poverty in the Vincentinas’ lives, on the contrary, shows their union and solidarity with the poor and will probably be the most convincing sign of their proclamation of the values of the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER : 3

VINCENTIAN FORMATION

3.1.1 *Fr. Vincent was a priest who noticed a need.* His eyes and ears were tuned to notice needs. And he noticed a need by **listening**. He never missed an opportunity when he came across one. His listening and noticing the need resulted in the founding of the company of the ‘Priest of the Mission.’ It had its origin in a sermon in Follville on 25th Jan. 1617. Vincent noticed the need for charity in another case of his listening and noticing, this time in Chatillon. That was the beginning of the ‘Confraternity of Charity’, today known as the ‘International Association of Charity’ (AIC). He never missed other opportunities where he had his eyes and ears trained to see and hear the need of the poor. A mission preaching in Joigny led to the hospital ministry and later service to the street children, old people, adults without work, orphans, abandoned children, widows, those ruined by war, etc. Fr Vincent could be our model in the way we listen to the people and notice their need today, and respond to those needs in a practical and sustained manner.

3.1.2. *Fr Vincent had the ability to motivate people in the service of the poor.* Using his influence he opened the eyes of those with money and time to see the unjust and inhuman situation in which vast majority of the rural peasants lived. The ability to motivate those people who are blessed with riches to contribute it generously together with their time and talents is part of a Vincentian vocation. So is the ability to involve others in the work.

3.1.3. *Vincent was a bridge builder in society.* He had an extraordinary ability to move from the world of the rich and

famous to that of the poor and forgotten. Though he did not belong to the nobility himself, he could with ease be present even in the court of the king of France.

3.1.4. *Vincent and Social Justice.* He summarized the mission of the Charities in these words: ‘To assist the poor spiritually and materially.’ The word ‘assist’ has a different connotation than what it usually has for us. To put it simply it is not the same as ‘help’. In Latin language the verb *assistere* means ‘to stand next to’ or ‘to be with’. Thus it includes the notion of sharing, accompanying, being in solidarity, etc. The objective of any charitable action is to rescue the poor from all their sufferings, with special emphasis on promotion of empowerment and liberation and access to God.

3.1.5. *The ‘practical spirituality’ of St. Vincent.* Vincent combined in a very healthy and wholesome manner two values in evangelization-spiritual and material, to present it in another manner- faith and love. While the priests of the Mission had also to undertake charitable works, the Confraternity was clearly meant to help the poor of the city spiritually as well as materially. Evangelization by Work and Action, Affective and Effective love, Spiritually and Corporally are terms used by Vincent.

3.1.6. *Saint Vincent was a Sign in his time and the conscience of France in the 17th century.* When the rich and famous of France behaved in a callous manner towards the poor, St. Vincent served as their Conscience. That was his charisma; it is ours too.

Whatever Vincent said in the 17th century is found repeatedly in the contemporary Church documents. E.g. integral development, preferential option for the poor, involvement of lay people, integration of prayer and action, etc.

St. Vincent was a man of his time. He accepted the then social structure and tried to help the poor within the structure. Even the universal Church was not thinking of sinful structures. St. Paul also did the same. E.g. He accepted slavery as something acceptable. Nowadays we speak of sinful structures which cause poverty and think of systemic change. Forms of poverty also are varied. “Love is inventive, even to infinity” says St. Vincent. So our challenge today is to find new ways of loving and serving the poor.

3.2. Centrality of Christ in the spiritual experience of Vincent de Paul

Vincent de Paul discovers and follows a Christ who is the evangelizer and servant of the poor. The discovery of the religious ignorance and poverty of the country folk was a call for him to continue the mission of Jesus in evangelizing the poor.

“To follow” is to leave everything for the sake of Jesus and his mission. It is to assume the life-style of Jesus. (Mt 9:9). In his conference on the end of his Congregation Vincent says: “The intention of the Company is to imitate Our Lord to the extent that poor, insignificant persons can do. What does that mean? It means that the Company aspires to take Him as a model in the way He acted, what He did, His ministries, and His aims. How can one person represent another, if he doesn’t have the same characteristics, features, manners, and looks? That can’t be. So, if we’re determined to make ourselves like this divine model, and feel in our hearts this desire and holy affection, it’s necessary, I repeat, it’s necessary to strive to model our thoughts, works, and intentions on His. He’s not only *Deus virtutum*, but He came to

practice all the virtues, and since what He did and did not do were so many virtues, we, too, must conform ourselves to them by striving to be men of virtue, not only with regard to the interior, but by acting virtuously exteriorly so that what we do or don't do is based on this principle."⁴⁹ The centrality of Christ is again reflected in one of his letters to Fr Portail: "Remember, Monsieur, we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ."⁵⁰ These texts express St. Vincent's profound identification with Jesus Christ and his words resonate the experience and conviction of St. Paul: "My life is Christ; I live, not I, it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20); "in life and in death we belong to Jesus Christ." (Rom 14:8)

3.3. Christ who is evangelizer and servant of the poor

Evangelization of the poor is the heart of Jesus' Mission. It is impossible to disassociate the announcement of the Gospel to the poor from those who are chosen to deliver this Good News. So, the Vincentian Congregation, its members and its structures, are not able to disassociate themselves from their purpose: following Jesus, the evangelizer of the poor: "In this vocation, we're very much in conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to have made His principal aim, in coming into the world, to assist poor people and to take care of them. *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus*. And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" 'To assist the poor.' "Anything else?" 'To assist the poor,' etc. Now, He had only poor persons in His company and He devoted himself very little to cities, almost always conversing

with and instructing village people. So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if some were to question a Missioner, wouldn't it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, *Misit me evangelizare pauperibus?*"⁵¹ Vincent repeats this time and again in his conferences. In the conference on the end of the Congregation he states: "to make God known to poor persons, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it's for persons who are poor. O What a great thing that is! ... it's such a lofty ministry to evangelize poor persons, which is, par excellence, the work of God."⁵²

For Saint Vincent Christ is the evangelizer of the poor. He made an explicit choice for Christ the evangelizer of the poor. His spirituality flows out of the contemplation of this Christ. It is the driving force of all his activities. On another occasion he advised his confreres: "Let us go then, my brothers, and work with a new love in the service of the poor looking even for the most poor and the most abandoned, recognizing before God that they are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy to render them our small services."⁵³

Everything in his life revolved around these two poles: Jesus and the poor. When Saint Vincent took over the house of Saint-Lazar, there were some poor and insane people being looked after there. Regarding this he once said in a conference: "Let's thank God, Messieurs, for having given this Community the care of the mentally ill and the incorrigible. ... At that time, we were involved in a lawsuit, in which there was question of our being evicted or staying in the Saint-Lazar house. I recall asking myself then, If you had to leave this house right now, what and who would touch

you the most? What would give you the greatest displeasure and sadness?’ And I thought at that time that it would be that I’d be unable to see those poor persons any longer and would be obliged to abandon their care and service.”⁵⁴

St. Vincent loved the Church, formed the clergy and lay apostles, all for Jesus and the poor. “... we who are Vincentians follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor. Focus on, and commitment to, this Christ is the heart of Vincentian spirituality.”⁵⁵

3.4. Christ- the Total Healer

Christ comes to liberate his people, to release them from the bondage of their corporal and spiritual wounds. Vincent also imbibed this spirit of Christ and insisted that his disciples also understood their vocation with these twofold aspects. So he warned his companions in the Congregation of the Mission against seeing their mission only in spiritual terms. They should care for the sick, the insane, foundlings, etc. Thus they will preach the gospel both through words and works. He also speaks about ‘affective’ and ‘effective’ love. Affective love of God is to be suspected if there is no practice of effective love.

To evangelize through word and action; while explaining the essence of their vocation Saint Vincent made this point very strongly: “If there are any among us who think that they are in the Mission in order to evangelize the poor and not to alleviate their sufferings, to take care of their spiritual needs but not their temporal ones, I reply that we have to help them and have them assisted in every way, by us and by others, if we want to hear those pleasing words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, ‘Come, beloved of my Father, and enter into my kingdom

that has been prepared for you because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you assisted me.’ To do that is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, and that’s the most perfect way; it’s also what Our Lord did, and what those should do who represent Him on earth, officially and by nature, as priest do.”⁵⁶

3.5. Jesus’ Concern for the Poor

3.5.1. Jesus concern for the poor and compassion: Jesus concern for the poor came from his basic motive of compassion. God is revealed to be a compassionate God through Jesus. Jesus was the complete embodiment of divine compassion in our world. His response to the ignorant, hungry, sick, blind, lepers, and widows, flowed from divine compassion which led God become one with us. Compassion is that intimate, intense and spontaneous feeling of kindness from the depth of our being toward the poor, just as mother to her child in the womb. For Jesus compassion was not something peripheral or superficial feeling of sympathy, rather it extended to the most vulnerable part of his being.

The word compassion is derived from the Latin word *cum pati*, meaning “to suffer with”. Compassion for the poor asks us to go where it hurts, enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. It challenges us to cry out with those who are in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. It requires us to be weak with weak, vulnerable with vulnerable, powerless with powerless.

3.5.2. Compassion for the poor derives from Jesus’ servanthood: Jesus compassion for the poor was manifested in his being a servant, in his self emptying. In Philippians 2:6-8 St. Paul

presents the compassion of God revealed through Jesus. The compassionate God who revealed through Jesus is the God who became a servant. God's compassion is a compassion that reveals itself in servanthood. Jesus became subject to the same powers and influences that dominate us, and suffered our fears, uncertainties, and anxieties with us. Jesus emptied himself. Not only he became human, but also he became human in the most dejected and rejected way. In his death and humiliation Jesus lived out the full implication of emptying himself to be with us in compassion. Karl Barth says "Jesus moves from the heights to the depth, from victory to defeat, from riches to poverty, from triumph to suffering, from life to death."⁵⁷

Compassion means not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position, not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below. It is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary it is going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and makes a home there. God's compassion is going to the most forgotten corners of the world, and cannot rest as long as he knows that there are still human beings with tears in their eyes.

3.5.3. *Servanthood, a means to encounter God:* Radical servanthood does not make sense unless we see it as a way to encounter God himself. To be humble and persecuted cannot be desired unless we find God in humility and persecution. When we begin to see God himself, the source of all comfort and consolation, in the centre of servanthood, compassion becomes much more than doing good for unfortunate people. Here we find that service is an expression of the search for God and not a desire

to bring about individual or social change. Radical servanthood challenges us while attempting to overcome poverty, hunger, illness, and any other form of human misery, to reveal the gentle presence of our compassionate God in the midst of our broken world.

3.5.4. *Love for the poor in perfect obedience:* Jesus compassion for the poor was manifested in his servanthood in perfect obedience. Often we experience a strong desire to offer ourselves for the service of the poor and live in solidarity with the poor. Sometimes these dreams lead to generous actions, to worthwhile projects and to years of dedicated work. But the initiative still remains ours. We decide when we go and when we return, what to do and how to do it. We decide the level and intensity of our servanthood. But Jesus went to the far country because he was sent. Being sent remained uppermost in his consciousness. He was an obedient servant who said and did nothing unless it was commanded by the Father. Through Jesus complete obedience God made his compassionate entry in to our broken, wounded and painful condition. Jesus' obedience was a total listening, a giving attention with no hesitation or limitation. It was an expression of intimacy existing between two persons (Mt. 3:17, 17:15). Jesus was not a great hero who performs acts of self denial that no one can imitate. Jesus was not a superstar whose compassion makes us jealous and competitive. Jesus is an obedient servant who hears the call and desires to respond even when it leads to pain and suffering. This desire is not to experience pain but to give his full undivided attention to the voice of his beloved Father.

Jesus came to include us in his divine obedience. When we come to recognize that in and through Jesus we are called to be

children of God and listen to him, our heavenly Father, with total trust and surrender, we will also see that we are invited to be no less compassionate than Jesus himself. When obedience becomes our primary and only concern, we too can move into the world with compassion and feel the suffering of the world so deeply, that through our compassion we can give new life to others (Jn. 14:11-13).

3.5.5. Communitarian aspect of the compassion for the poor:

Compassion is not an individual character trait, a personal attitude, but a way of living together. When St. Paul exhorts the Philippians to live a compassionate life with the mind of Christ he gives a concrete description of what he means –“do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). More often Paul stresses that compassionate life is a life in the community (Phil 2:1-2). Precisely because we are so inclined to think in terms of individual greatness and personal heroism, it is important for us to reflect carefully on the fact that the compassionate life is a community life. We witness to God’s compassionate presence in the world by the way we live and work together.

The compassionate community life of the early Christians amazed people and they began to say “see how they love each other”(Acts 2:44-47) . **By entering into fellowship with Christ who emptied himself we enter into a new fellowship with each other.** Our life in the community is the manifestation of the mind of Christ (Rom12:2). Discipleship is walking together in the same path. We are fellow travelers on the same path and have formed a new community. Compassion always reveals

itself in community in a new way of living together. **Fellowship with Christ is fellowship with our brothers and sisters. God's compassion revealed in Jesus is represented in time and space by the Christian community.**

Servanthood is a quality of the community. Our individual ability to serve is quite limited. We may be able to help a few people. But to respond to the needs of all people at all times is impossible as an individual. As a community we can transcend our limitations and become a concrete realization of self emptying way of Christ. Some work with youngsters, others with elders, others with sick, with prisoners etc. As an individual we cannot be everything to everyone. But as a community we can indeed serve a wide variety of needs. More over by the constant support of the members we can remain faithful to our commitment to serve.

Obedience as an attentive listening to the Father is very much a communal vocation. It is precisely through constant prayer and meditation that the community remains alert and open to the needs of the world. Left to ourselves we might easily begin to idealize our particular form or style of ministry as personal hobby. We realize that together, we want to discern God's will for us and make our service a response to his compassionate presence in our midst. Thus God's solidarity, servanthood, and obedience revealed to us in the life of Jesus, are the marks of a compassionate life lived in the community. In and through the community they can slowly become a real and integral part of our individual life.

3.5.6. Compassion for the poor, a form of voluntary displacement:

According to Webster's Dictionary, displacement means moving from the ordinary and proper place. Flood, natural calamities, civil war etc. cause displacement of people, that is moving from the

ordinary and proper place. This is a kind of forced displacement. But Jesus' compassion for the poor led him to a voluntary displacement. St. Paul presents Jesus as the one who voluntarily displaced himself (Phil. 2:6-7). The mystery of incarnation is that God did not remain in the place that was proper for him, but moved to the condition of suffering human being. God displaced himself so that he could experience fully the brokenness of our human condition. As a child –he endures the flight to Egypt, as a boy- he leaves his parents and stays in the temple, as an adult he goes to the desert to fast and to be tempted. During the years of ministry- he continuously moves away from power, success and popularity in order to remain faithful to his call. When people are satisfied with bread and wanted to make him king he withdraws to the wilderness. Finally this displacement led him to the cross. There rejected by all and feeling abandoned by God, Jesus becomes the most displaced human being. Thus displacement which started in Bethlehem reaches fulfillment in the death on the cross.

St. Vincent de Paul followed this displaced Jesus. He moved from the ordinary and proper place (His presbytery, house of Lord Gondi etc.) to the vulnerable place- to the galley slaves, to the abandoned children, to the estates of the Lords where material and spiritual poverty was acute.

It is by following our displaced Lord that the Christian community is formed. A Christian community is a place where the displaced people come together. **The word community generally expresses a certain supportive and nurturing way of living and working together.** The desire for community is most often a desire for a sense of unity, a feeling of being accepted and experience of at-hominess, but a compassionate community should go far

beyond these spontaneous associations. Community can never be the place where God's obedient servanthood reveals itself if community is understood principally as something warm, soft, homey, comfortable, or protective. When we form community principally to heal personal wounds, it cannot become a place where we effectively realize solidarity with other people's pains. The paradox of Christian community is that people are gathered together in voluntary displacement. The togetherness of those who form Christian community is a being-together-in-displacement. We want to be ordinary and proper people who live ordinary and proper lives. There is an enormous pressure on us to do what is ordinary and proper, and find the satisfaction of general acceptance. The call to community as we hear from the Lord is the call to move away from the ordinary and proper place. The gospels confront us with persistent voice of inviting us to move from where it is comfortable, where we want to stay, where we feel at home. Through voluntary displacement we counteract the tendency to become settled in a false comfort. It leads us to the essential recognition of our inner brokenness and brings us to a deeper solidarity with the brokenness of our fellow human beings. Community is a place of compassion therefore always requires displacement.

3.6. Vocation to Evangelize the Poor in and through the Community

As the consecrated persons grow in the spirit of evangelical poverty, they become more sensitive to the needs of others by restricting their own needs. Today more than ever, in virtue of their professed poverty, they have the duty to respond to the cry of the poor, avoiding every compromise with any form of social

injustice, awakening consciences to the drama of misery, and doing all that they can to change existing mentalities and attitudes. **The option for the poor is fundamental to the Vincentians because the reason for their existence in the Church is to continue the mission of Christ, the evangelizer of the poor by following the paths of St. Vincent.** *The Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation states:* “Since we are called to form an apostolic community following the example of Christ in his evangelization of the poor, we have to engage ourselves in the service of the poor... Being fully conscious of the miseries of the people and seeing God in them we should be solicitous to help them.”⁵⁸ Evangelical poverty enables them to identify themselves with Christ, the poor and humble; frees them to share the life of the poor and to employ what they are and what they have in their service, regarding their material goods as the patrimony of the poor. When they look at the world from the viewpoint of suffering human beings, their mode of being in society, thinking, and priorities in life will undergo a deep transformation and they can render a moral and spiritual force to the suffering people.

The specific and pre-eminent mission of the members of Vincentian Congregation is the evangelization of the poor. This is realized not only through the preaching of the Gospel but also through a commitment to the human and Christian advancement of the people, where they are working.⁵⁹ **“As St. Vincent dedicated himself to serve the poor materially and spiritually, we too shall regard the poor as our pre-eminent lot in the work of evangelization so that we may proclaim to them the mystery of salvation and help them in their needs. We shall engage ourselves in the process of empowering the poor.”**⁶⁰

The Congregation shows special interest in preaching the Gospel

in places where it has not yet been preached or where the Church is not yet well established.⁶¹

The compelling force behind all the activities of Vincentians is the desire to serve the poor.⁶² The whole question of poverty must lead to greater love of God and the neighbor; otherwise the observance of poverty, and the voluntary renunciation of any goods, would become an end in itself which has no meaning in a Christ-like life. **For the Vincentians, “poverty should become a sign of charity.”**⁶³ One of the important purposes of our material goods is doing the works of charity towards the needy.⁶⁴ The act of charity on behalf of the most needy will assume manifold expressions in carrying out the temporal and spiritual works of mercy. It includes helping the poor, freeing them from poverty and to put them in a condition of being able to claim their rights in legitimate ways.

The principal and positive norm of poverty for the members of the Vincentian Congregation is to dedicate themselves for helping the poor in their needs.⁶⁵ This dedication for the poor finds expressions in sympathetic attitude towards them, words of comfort, material help, choice of a way of life resembling the poor and especially in spreading the social doctrine of the Church and awakening the conscience of the wealthy. Vincentians, by their example, by their words and works must instill in all, in society as well as individuals, a mentality and an awareness of their responsibility for fighting against poverty and social injustices by non-violent but efficacious means in view of the integral development of man. The fundamental principle of their social and charitable activities is the social message of Jesus revealed in the Sacred Scriptures and practiced by St. Vincent de Paul and the purpose of those

activities is to bring the people to the kingdom of God.⁶⁶ The words of our Lord in the description of the last judgment, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren you did it to me” (Mt.25:40), always inspire them to serve the poor.⁶⁷

The Vincentian motto of preaching the good news to the poor is to be realized mostly in a context wherein hunger, ignorance, sickness, unemployment, oppression, exploitation and corruption have the upper hand. This socio-economic backwardness of the people arouses in them a desire to have closer proximity to the neediest and the impoverished. This proximity leads them to adopt a personal and communitarian style of life more in keeping with their commitment to follow the poor and humble Christ closely.

3.6.1. Identifying Mark of the Community – Service to the Poor:

In his encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II declares that to ignore the multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and above all, those without hope of a better future, would mean becoming like the ‘rich man’ who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. Lk.16:19-31).⁶⁸ **He teaches that one cannot ignore the poor and the needy “in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things.”**⁶⁹ “Being fully conscious of the miseries of the people and seeing God in them,”⁷⁰ the Vincentians are always active in serving the poor. For the members of the Vincentian Congregation, evangelical poverty as a whole-hearted commitment to the evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian advancement is a “mark

of authenticity”⁷¹ of their vocation, an “identifying mark”⁷² of their Congregation and a “fortress”⁷³ of their community. The Vincentians should profess it at all times and in all places, because without the practice of poverty they cannot have credibility as servants of the poor.

3.6.2. *Poor and poverty:* The idea of distinction between spiritual poverty and material poverty is misleading. Some of our members are already distinguishing between spiritually poor, intellectually poor and materially poor. And they justify their lack of interest in service of the real poor, saying that they are serving the spiritually poor through retreats and administration of sacraments, and serving the intellectually poor through schools, etc. The evangelical sense of poverty does not have the nuances of spiritually and intellectually poor. By evangelical sense of poverty we mean the sense in which Jesus addressed the poor directly and for their sake.

The term “poor” in the common understanding means “having little or no money for sustenance”. This is the sense in which Jesus understands the poor in his proclamation. The evangelist Luke is undoubtedly clear about this sense. The evangelist Matthew is adding a qualification and uses the phrase “poor in spirit”. The meaning of this phrase basically means the same, i.e., those having little or no money for sustenance. The phrase “in spirit” is added to indicate the poor in the background of the OT. In the OT the poor are basically those who have little or no money for sustenance. But the poor people of the OT believed in Yahweh and trusted that Yahweh will protect them in their poverty. Besides, the OT reveals the faith that helping the poor is a virtue and harming them is a sin. OT revelation is that God

helps and protects the poor. This faith is confirmed in a special way through deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt where they were utterly poor under the yoke of slavery to Pharaoh.

The prophetic tradition of Isaiah 61:1-3 is in this historical background that prophet Isaiah is anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, who were literally so when they returned from their captivity in Babylonia. The Israelites had lost everything they had as they were captured by the king of Babylon and they had nothing to bring with them after the exile. Jesus quotes the words of Isaiah to explain His mission to evangelize the poor (Luke 4:18) in the prophetic tradition of Isaiah. St. Vincent de Paul followed the spirit and words of Jesus in serving the poor.

3.7. Our Programme of formation

Every corporate agency has its training programme for its staff. The purpose of that training is to prepare them for achieving the goal of the organization. For this they are trained in hard and soft skills. This ensures the optimum quality and quantity of their products. The Vincentian Congregation too has its training programme and its goals are laid down as follows: **(1) Each member comes daily to a deeper appreciation of the fact that Jesus Christ and His Mystery is the centre of his life and the fundamental law of our Congregation. (2) All of us, animated by the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and leading a community life in the Congregation, become fit for carrying out its specific works of apostolate (St.106). There are four points to be taken care of: Jesus, Vincent de Paul, community life and specific apostolate, i.e., evangelization of the poor.**

The life and growth of the Church depends mostly on the life and

ministry of the priests. **Formation is one of the most vital aspects of religious life as it decides the quality and commitment of the personnel in the religious order.** The foundational formative process needs a more responsible review and the vacuum in the area of ongoing formation should be faced with realistic retrospection. Any negligence in handling effectively the formators and the process of formation will do unbearable harm to persons under formation. And that will, in turn, hurt the life and mission of the religious community they belong to.

The documents such as *Optatam Totius*, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Vita Consecrata* envision a priestly and religious formation that is dynamic, integrative and holistic. This involves renewal, reformation, transformation, correction and so on. “God always calls his priests from specific human and ecclesial contexts, which inevitably influence them; and to these same contexts the priest is sent for the service of Christ’s Gospel.”⁷⁴ Therefore an ideal format of formation can be marked as the ‘facilitation of the continuing development of the identity of the individual so that he may commit himself ever more deeply and fully to the person and mission of Christ. The person is to be led to a deeper sense of self awareness, growth and commitment gradually, beginning with each person ‘where he is at’ intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. Formation is basically an inner activity by an individual human person facilitated by formators. It cannot be imposed on anybody but received consciously and willingly by individuals.

Constitution categorically points out the priorities in formation such as human maturity, spirit of sacrifice, commitment to the community life, discipline in life and personal responsibility.⁷⁵

The goals clearly exposed in the constitution should guide our whole formation programme and the personal efforts of formators at different stages.

3.7.1. *Integrated personality:* Reforming individuals into an integrated personality is the practical goal of formation. “An integrated person is intellectually free and open to new values, new experiences and new approaches to reality; he is emotionally free to relate to both men and women with openness, trust and love; and he is spiritually free always to seek, find and do God’s will.”⁷⁶ Molding a holy, wise and emotionally balanced religious priest is the perfect purpose. A well timed balance among all the above said elements is necessary. And any extreme may harm the image of Christ today. The changing colour of the contemporary culture has added the complexities in the candidates who come to religious life fresh. The four areas of formation discussed in PDV, viz. human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation, sum up the integrated personality.

3.7.2. *Human Formation (Affective and Psycho-sexual Formation):* Human formation is the basis of all other areas of priestly formation. As grace is built upon nature, priestly qualities are built upon human qualities. Actually a thorough, gradual and conscious formation in this aspect is very important for the good of the community, personal growth, to face the temptations and attractions etc.⁷⁷ Nurturing human qualities in the candidates lays the foundation for their gradual transforming into a holy priest proper for the time. The priest is the living image of Christ and should be the human perfection after the model of Jesus.⁷⁸ Vatican has come up with ‘*Guidelines for the use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for Priesthood*’ which

obviously states the necessity of using Psychological tools for analyzing and improving motivations and attitudes.⁷⁹ **Hence the availability of a Psychologist at least partially is suggested for the affective formation.** Candidates should be given ample training to have healthy and positive relationships, especially with the opposite sex. Purifying one's motivation and fostering human qualities are also the prime needs of formation. Formators are expected to be balanced persons who can handle the emotions healthily and can help the formees to live as authentic human persons.

3.7.3. Spiritual Formation: The priest is a man of God and so is always related to God in all his activities. The only foundation of the specific lifestyle a priest has chosen is Christ and any other expertise void of spirituality would be of no use to his way of life. Taking this point *Presbyterorum Ordinis* says that priest has a special reason to be holy.⁸⁰ Bishop Fulton J Sheen says, "Every worldly priest hinders the growth of the Church; every saintly priest promotes it". John Paul II approached holiness as "an urgent pastoral need."⁸¹

We can never afford forgetting the fact that the work we are doing is not our personal work, but we have been employed by our Master. And getting into the cloak of our Master is the only strategy to make our mission effective and fruitful. Special and concentrated effort should be taken to form candidates in a prayerful atmosphere from the minor seminaries. Training should be given for personal prayer and meditation. Ever-accompanying formators and spiritual fathers in their path of spiritual growth are also equally important. Well meditated tools may be used to make them acquainted with the Word of God. The ultimate goal

of spiritual formation is that Jesus Christ becomes the centre of their life and they become alter Christus.

3.7.4. Intellectual Formation: The priest as the leader of the community should be competent enough to guide the people of different categories. In a world where materialism and religious indifferentism prevail, it is very important to proclaim the Good News of salvation in a convincing way. “Intellectual formation of candidates to the priesthood aims at widening their vision of God, world and man... To be pastorally effective, intellectual formation is to be integrated with a spirituality marked by a personal experience of God.”⁸²

Being a community dedicated to the evangelization of the poor our members must be proficient in philosophy, theology and social sciences. **“No less important is the commitment to use the Church’s social doctrine in the formation of priests and candidates to the priesthood who, in the context of their preparation for ministry, must develop a thorough knowledge of the Church’s teaching and her pastoral concerns in the social sphere as well as a keen interest in the social issues of their day.** The Congregation for Catholic Education has published a document, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, which gives specific indications and recommendations for a correct and appropriate plan of studies for this teaching.”⁸³

Laxity in reading and deep study is common among the media-friendly new generation. Candidates should be motivated to reach a knowledgeable position as teachers (*guru*) in spiritual and material realms. Initiation in the habit of reading can do a lot in

this effort.

3.7.5. Pastoral Formation: The purpose of all areas of formation is to have good shepherds for the people of God. So the different aspects of formation should be directed to a specific pastoral end. “The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Hence, their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character.”⁸⁴ Above all pastoral prudence is needed in his ministry. The self-centeredness of the contemporary culture should be pruned to make them filled with the spirit of sacrifice for broadening the Kingdom of God. The zeal of St. Vincent De Paul for the souls and the great deeds he committed for the cause of others should be presented as the best model to be followed. Pastoral formation or better charismatic formation for us religious consists in helping the candidates to put into practice the Vincentian identity through concrete pastoral activities. They must be trained to notice like St. Vincent the needs of the poor and respond to them effectively. In this aspect a warning against considering our mission only in spiritual terms is necessary. Pastoral ministry is often understood as oral preaching of the Word and administration of Sacraments alone. Of course, they are of utmost importance; but that alone is not the pastoral ministry expected of a Vincentian, according to his call. **A Vincentian as a shepherd of the sheep, the poor, must be equipped with appropriate skills to serve the poor. First of all he must be endowed with the skills of the heart with compassionate love. It involves four essential elements as taught by Jesus through the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37): seeing the unfortunate situation of the victim, feeling compassion for the victim, going near to the victim,**

and serving him. These skills of the heart can be achieved only by exercising these elements continually in circumstances of one's life. Skills of the intellect can be achieved by training through Studies in Social Work. **We should re-think about the system of our formation. Is it according to the charism of our Congregation? During the formation the seminarians should be given opportunities to learn about the situation of the poor and the marginalized and to get experiences of helping the poor and the marginalized. There should be conscious effort to instill the love of the poor in the minds of the seminarians throughout the formation period. The choice for the preferential option for the poor in our ministry "should be cultivated from the time of initial formation, so that it is not considered as reserved only for the most generous and courageous."**⁸⁵

3.7.6. On a strong Value System: The positive dimension of formation is to build the candidates into responsible persons. Obeying rules and regulations in the surveillance of the formators, and discipline only when being observed are not good signs. Many a time formators fail to see the real attitude of the formee. What is expected is to "give themselves to God with due awareness and freedom, in responsibility towards themselves and the Church..."⁸⁶ Therefore attempts should be concentrated to form a responsible conscience in the candidates. They should be taught to decide correctly what is good and what is evil, so that their conscience chooses the good spontaneously. We are admitting candidates with fluctuating and perplexing conscience mainly due to the cultural transitions and the media invasion in our value systems. We have to teach them that the vocation to

priesthood is a lot more than a profession. Inculcating proper motivation is the most important challenge in this process. Some divine goals should catch the imagination of the young ones who join the seminary. Such a deep-rooted motivation would enable them to work hard and mould themselves to live a committed religious life in all seasons.

Trends show that there is more risk of candidates of today carrying on without fundamental value system. Natural values and personal values of them should be affirmed in the process of formation. Psychology and tools of other sciences can be very useful in helping them to mature in community life and in celibate life.

3.7.7. Ongoing Formation: Priestly formation is an ongoing formation. Only the first stage of formation is completed in the seminary. **Continuous reading, study and formation programmes are needed all through the priestly life because human nature becomes perfect only through continuous training.** The reality of change and development in the academic and theological spheres necessitates ongoing training. The Council points out some ways of accomplishing this: “Secular culture and even sacred science are advancing at an unprecedented rate in our time. Priests are therefore urged to adequate and continuous perfection of their knowledge of things divine and human. In this way they will prepare themselves to enter with greater advantage into dialogue with their contemporaries. To facilitate study and the more effective learning of methods of evangelization and the apostolate, every attention is to be given to providing priests with suitable helps. Examples of these are the organization according to the conditions of each territory of courses or congresses, the

setting up of centers designed for pastoral studies, the founding of libraries, and the proper direction of studies by suitable persons.”⁸⁷

We need to update our knowledge and skill in the social apostolate. Even the multinational corporations teach their employees about social responsibility. Our approach should also be changed when we serve the poor and the marginalized. While we are serving the poor we are in the charity mode. We have more than enough and so we share a part of it with them. But today we recognise the rights of the poor. It is not the generosity that prompts us to serve the poor and the marginalized. Rather it is because they have a right to food, clothing, shelter, medicine, education, etc. As Vincentians we are duty bound to serve the poor and the marginalized and provide them their rights. The Vincentian dictum ‘the poor are our masters’ has these implications also. The concepts of social work also are many: service, welfare, reforms, development, empowerment etc. All these amply speak about the need of intellectual updating and practical training as part of ongoing formation.

At present there is a laxity in this important stage of formation in the pretext of its voluntary nature. We have now only quinquennial course as a regular ongoing formation other than some higher studies. Ongoing formation demands much more earnest treatment and we must have a proper planning and programme; experts must be assigned in charge of such programmes and superiors shall give the clear message that ongoing formation is not something optional but a stage of formation compulsory for all.

3.7.8. Formation Community

A lived experience is far more effective than a verbal testimony. Hence community life has a privileged role in formation at every

stage. **“Formation depends to a great extent on the quality of this community. This quality is the result of its general climate and the style of life of its members, in conformity with the particular character and spirit of the institute. ...** A community is formative to the extent that it permits each one of its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord according to the charism of his or her institute. To accomplish this, the members must be clear among themselves on why the community exists, and on its basic objectives. Their interpersonal relationships will be marked by simplicity and confidence, being based primarily upon faith and charity. Toward this end, the community is formed each day under the action of the Holy Spirit, allowing itself to be judged and converted by the Word of God, purified by penance, constructed by the Eucharist, and vivified by the celebration of the liturgical year. It strengthens its communion by generous mutual assistance and by a continuous exchange of material and spiritual goods, in a spirit of poverty and with the help of friendship and dialogue. The community lives the spirit of its founder and the rule of the institute profoundly. Superiors will consider it their particular office to seek to build a community of brothers or sisters in Christ. Then, each one, aware of his or her responsibility within the community, is moved to grow, not only for self but for the good of all.”⁸⁸

“Religious in formation should be able to find a spiritual atmosphere, an austerity of life, and an apostolic enthusiasm within their community which are conducive to their following Christ according to the radicalism of their consecration.”⁸⁹ In short the young people under formation should live in communities where there are required condition for a complete formation: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian, and pastoral.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENT CHALLENGES AND OUR PRIORITIES

4.1. Challenges

4.1.1. Prophetic life: Religious share in a very special way in the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ. Naturally it implies facing challenges in our life and ministry. The following challenges are mentioned in the *Vita Consecrata*.⁹⁰ There seems to be an absence of the sign of God's presence in the present day world. The religious should affirm the primacy of God and of eternal life by following Jesus through their life of obedience, chastity and obedience.

4.1.2. One with the Church: We are to fulfill our missionary duty in full harmony with the Church's Magisterium and discipline. Many consecrated men and women have been harassed while engaged in the missionary activity, in action on behalf of the poor, in assisting the sick and the marginalized. The prophetic task of the consecrated life has to face three major challenges addressed to the Church herself. These challenges relate directly to the evangelical counsels of chastity (sexuality without objective moral norms and treating it as a consumer good), poverty (materialism which craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest) and obedience (freedom without truth and moral norms). This document presents some new fields of mission also.⁹¹ Our presence in the field of education needs a renewed commitment. We are called upon to show that faith in Jesus Christ enlightens the whole enterprise of education

confirming and elevating human values. Catholic educational institutions should preserve their unique Catholic identity in fidelity to the Church's Magisterium. Evangelizing culture is another field. Consecrated life in the past had a great influence in the formation and transformation of culture. The promotion of culture, and dialogue between culture and faith is deeply felt in the Church today. In this context we are invited for a renewed commitment to the intellectual life as a means of formation and as a path of asceticism in the face of cultural diversity. Also we are challenged anew by the need to proclaim the Gospel through the communication media. We need to learn the language of the media to speak effectively of Christ to our contemporaries, interpreting their "joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties." The Church expects us to work towards Christian unity and to engage in interreligious dialogue.

4.1.3. *Credibility:* Prophecy is powerful and effective when there is consistency between proclamation and life. The main obstacle in our evangelization efforts is the discrepancy between the message proclaimed and the daily life of the missionary. So we need to follow the "way of penance and renewal," the "narrow way of the cross." Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men.⁹² St. Vincent says: "Take heed not to undo by your actions what you have established by the sermon; not to destroy with one hand what you have built up with the other."

4.1.4. *In a globalized world:* Dramatic events which have taken

place in the world in the recent years, have given rise to new and weighty questions to this liberalized, privatized and globalized (LPG) world. The dynamics of globalization is a complex one. On the positive side it brings the peoples and cultures together, but on the negative side there is the risk of producing further disparities, injustices and marginalization.⁹³ “Not only are technology and economy globalized but also insecurity and fear, crime and violence, injustices and war.”⁹⁴ “The vastness and depth of technological innovations influence the processes of access to knowledge, socialization, relations with nature and they foreshadow radical, not always positive, changes in huge sectors of the life of humankind. Consecrated persons cannot shirk wondering about the impact that these technologies will have on people, on means of communication, on the future of society.”⁹⁵ How do we interpret the present signs of the times where areas of darkness and mystery abound? “As with the disciples of on the walk towards Emmaus, the Lord himself must be our traveling companion and grant us his Spirit. Only the Lord, present among us, can help us to fully understand and carry out his word, he can enlighten minds and warm hearts.”⁹⁶

4.1.5. Creative in Charity: Another challenge is to be creative in charity. Love is inventive up to infinity’ says St. Vincent. Recent Church documents also echo this. Consecrated life is recognized to be the “manifestation of God’s love in the world.” “This dynamism must continue to be exercised with creative fidelity because it constitutes an irreplaceable resource in the Church’s pastoral work. At a time when a creativity in charity and an authentic proof and confirmation of the charity of word

and action are called for, consecrated life admirably safeguards the apostolic creativity which has given rise to thousands of faces of charity and holiness in specific forms; there, it cannot help but feel the urgency to continue, with the Spirit's creativity, to surprise the world with new form of effective evangelical love which respond to the needs of our time."⁹⁷ This calls us to place our people and resources at the service of new boundaries of evangelization. This means becoming one with the poor, the aged, the addicted, those suffering from AIDS and all people who suffer in the reality in which they find themselves. The traditional way of giving assistance alone is not sufficient. Being attentive to the new models of service we shall eradicate the causes of poverty.⁹⁸

4.1.6. In collaboration with others: The international Vincentian Family is fostering collaboration among its different braches towards working for systemic change.⁹⁹ Many who work among the poor nowadays speak frequently of the need for systemic change. "They affirm that, in order to change the situation of the poor, we must focus not only on one particular problem, like supplying food, important as that may be at times. Experience teaches that 'quick fix' solutions, while temporarily helpful, prove inadequate in the long run. Beyond them, one must examine the whole socio-economic situation in which the poor live, and then intervene in such a way that the system as a whole is modified. Such an approach is necessarily interdisciplinary and involves many different actors within society: the poor themselves, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, the private sector, leaders in business, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, etc."¹⁰⁰

“Systemic change, in this context, aims beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate the immediate needs of the poor. It focuses on assisting the needy to change the overall structures within which they live and helps them develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.”¹⁰¹ The concept of “systemic change” is a contemporary one and it was unknown during the time of St. Vincent. Still we find related ideas in the rule he wrote for the “Confraternity of Charity” where he mentions that the poor sometimes suffer more from a lack of “order” in the help given to them rather than from a lack of charitable persons who want to help.¹⁰² The words of John Paul II addressed to the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1986 is worth hearing in our context too: **“Search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long-term solutions- adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so you will work for the credibility of the gospel and of the Church.”**¹⁰³ Such an approach really needs change of attitude and acquisition of appropriate skills.

4.1.7. Challenges from within and without: There are challenges we have to overcome from within and without. To increase the interest of our members in accomplishing our mission in accordance with our specific charism is a challenge from within. It was the unanimous opinion of the last general synaxis to organize more activities in service of the poor; but we do not seem to have made much progress. We may have compassion, but not ardent enough to go near the poor and help them like the Good Samaritan. We ‘look on and pass by’ like the priest and the

Levite. Some of the external challenges are 1. to creatively make use of the interest of many people of good will in the society in serving the poor. 2. to give leadership in the Church for service to the poor. 3. to persuade others to participate actively in serving the poor according to the mind of and vision of Jesus. St. Vincent motivated the rich and organized others to serve the poor.

4.2. OUR PRIORITIES

As mentioned earlier even the unanimous understanding of the last general synaxis could not make any noticeable progress in our social apostolate. At the same time a number of activities are going on everywhere in the form of renovation, expansion, starting new institutions and mission centres. All these are needed, but priority should go to the ‘pre-eminent purpose’ of the congregation. We shall encourage and empower, expand and develop in every possible way, the existing ministries that are specifically for the poor. While expanding our missions and their activities first priority is to be given to our specific charism. It will be a great achievement if this synaxis can give certain concrete and definite priorities to be executed in a time bound manner for the coming four years.

CONCLUSION

A new or Re-Vincentianization seems to be necessary for the whole Congregation. Initiatives of members to be fully “Vincentian” are to be encouraged and supported in every manner by the Bodies of the General and Provincial Administration. Our holy founder Rev. Fr. Varkey Kattarath wanted to live and die as a son of St. Vincent de Paul. In his letter to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission requesting him permission to take the vows, he wrote: “Thus you will satisfy my most ardent and long preserved desire of dying as a son, though most unworthy, of St. Vincent de Paul, whom, since many years, I revere and venerate as my Patron.”¹⁰⁴ God is our Father and we are his sons, yet we are asked to become his children (Jn 1:12). Similarly we call St. Vincent our Father’, but we too have to become his sons by being faithful to the charism we have inherited, at the same time, like him, being attentive to the signs of the times.

QUESTIONS FOR SELF AWARENESS AND FUTURE PLANNING

1. What are the problems and issues we face in the fields of social Apostolate? What are your suggestions for strengthening our Social Apostolate?
2. “Development of every man and whole man” is the dream of the Church (*Populorum Progressio*). What are the practical implications of this to our Houses and institutions?
3. Who are the poor around your local Vincentian House? What are their problems?
4. What shall we do urgently and concretely to make service to the poor, the identifying mark of our Congregation?
5. What are the concrete suggestions for conscientizing (theory and practice) of our members in various stages of formation to prepare them to fulfill our duty towards the poor?
6. Do the needs of poor in any way influence our individual and community decision making?
7. While starting a new centre does our charism play any role in choosing the location and activity?
8. What are the contemporary signs of the present day Church and world which await our response?
9. What shall be done at the Local, Provincial and Generalate levels to make service to the poor our identifying mark?
10. What are the areas and agencies with which we can cooperate in serving the poor?
11. How shall we fulfill our prophetic responsibility of announcing good news and denouncing evils?
12. Are we able to overcome our self-will, and unite our will with

that of Jesus and St. Vincent?

13. Do the confreres really believe that our superiors habitually try to live in the will of God?

14. How do the confreres assess the approach of the Provincial and General Administrative Bodies and of the Major Superiors? What change do you suggest in the approach of the above bodies and persons?

15. Our life is authentic only to the extent we serve the poor and thus remain faithful to our charism. How do you assess the reasons for the recent drop outs from our Congregation?

16. How is our preaching ministry different from that of others? Do we include specifically Vincentian themes and inspire the people to serve the poor?

17. What shall be our priorities in the coming four years?

NOTES

1 St.166.b; 180

2 St.167

3 St.181

4 St.6

5 *Vita Consecrata*, 42

6 Directives on Formation in Religious Life, 26

7 Cf. *Perfecte Caritatis*, 2.

8 Fernando Quintano, C.M., “Faithful to the Vincentian Identity, Creative in Facing the New Challenges” in Vincentian Heritage.

9 PN 100

10 Henri de Maupas du Tour, Funeral Oration of St. Vincent, Quoted by Andre Dodin, in St. Vincent de Paul and Charity, New City Press, 1994, p. 78

11 PN.68, CR12:10

12 CCD Vol. 11, p. 349

13 St. 7-8

14 St. 9

15 St. 12.a

16 “*On Prayer*,” extract from an undated conference, quoted in The Way of Saint Vincent is our Way, p.326

17 “*On Prayer*,” extract from an undated conference, quoted in The Way of Saint Vincent is our Way, p.326-27

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19 “*Letter to the superiors of the Company*,” January 15,1650 quoted in The Way of Saint Vincent is our Way, p.247

20 *Evangelica Testificatio*, 42-43.

- 21 *Vita Consecrata*, nn. 19; 34; 72; 105
- 22 St.40
- 23 St. 38
- 24 L.G. 43
- 25 John Paul II, Homily to Religious in Netherlands, (12 May 1985) in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21, 27 May 1985, 3.
- 26 St. 44
- 27 St. 33
- 28 St. 47
- 29 St. 46.a
- 30 St. 46.c
- 31 LG. 40
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- 33 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 16-18.
- 34 JOHN PAUL II, Address to Women Religious in Colombia, (5 July 1986), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 34, 25 August 1986, 10.
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- 36 St. 54
- 37 St. 54
- 38 St. 53
- 39 *Vita Consecrata*, 21
- 40 *Vita Consecrata*, 21
- 41 St. 76
- 42 St.62
- 43 *Vita Consecrata*, 82
- 44 *Vita Consecrata*, 75; 110
- 45 St. 63.a
- 46 St. 10.b 40

- 47 St. 65, 66
- 48 PN. 29
- 49 “*Conference on the Purpose of the Congregation*”,
 CCD Vol. 12. pp. 67-68
- 50 “*Letter to Antoine Portail*”, 1 May 1635, CCD Vol. 1. p. 276
- 51 “*On perseverance in one’s vocation*”, conference of October 29, 1638,
 CCD Vol.11, No. 86
- 52 *Conference on the Purpose of the Congregation* Dec. 6, 1658, CCD Vol.
 12. p.71
- 53 CCD Vol. 11, p. 349
- 54 An undated conference on The mentally ill or depraved boarders confined
 at Saint-Lazare, CCD Vol.11, No.13
- 55 Robert P. Maloney, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (Hyde Park, NY: New
 City Press, 1995) 113
- 56 CCD, Vol. 12, pp.77-78
- 57 Karl Bath, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1
- 58 St. 62
- 59 St. 4-5
- 60 St. 82
- 61 St. 81
- 62 St. 5
- 63 St. 64
- 64 St. 280; PN. 90
- 65 St. 70.b
- 66 St. 92
- 67 St. 62; 92
- 68 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42
- 69 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 31
- 70 St. 62

71 St. 64

72 St. 5

73 St. 64

74 PDV, 5

75 St. 106-110

76 Charter of Priestly Formation in India, 3.1.4

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86 Guidelines, No.9

87 PO.19.

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98 ibid

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