**VINCENTIAN PARISH AND NEW EVANGELIZATION**

1. PRESENTATION

Allow me to begin this presentation by remembering Fr. Brian Moore. I remember that we make prayer of thanksgiving for him and hope for all of us. It was he who trusted me and insisted that I accept this task. To his memory I dedicate these words that I share with you.

Perhaps Fr. Brian trusted more of my person than that of my experience in parish pastoral work. My ministry in the parish, as charged with a parish, is short in time, although my contact with and knowledge of parishes has been ample, for having dedicated a great part of my pastoral and ministerial life to the popular missions, that is to say to the evangelization of the parishes and to trying that the evangelized parishes were in turn, evangelizing. They have been almost thirty years of sharing the mission, of encouraging persons and parochial communities, from the extraordinary pastoral work of the popular mission. The mission reveals the life of the parishes, discovers the lights and shadows of each of them. There have been small parishes, even of villages, big parishes, in towns and cities, parishes marked with vitality and dying parishes. In this missionary work I have been in contact with more than thirty Vincentian parishes (to which I was going with certain complex, thinking that in those places were missionaries who were doing an evangelizing work). I have seen, in those years, the sociological and religious change of the parishes, have taken part in their evangelizing efforts, have experienced the discouragements and the struggle of many priests and lay people looking for ways of evangelization and of encounter with the persons who form the parochial community, persons near and distant, persons who stay and persons who are in transit in the parish. I have experienced the gradual abandonment of the young people, of the teen-agers, and even of children, as soon as they are done with the first communion. I have seen that the parishes “have aged” in general, and that they want to open new ways, but without knowing how and with whom.

In my presentation I pretend to do neither an academic essay nor a magisterial lesson. I try only to tell a story, a report of our evangelizing history. As you can well imagine, this history will be partial, since I speak from the sector that I know, that is to say, of the parishes in Spain. But I am confident that the report can also be extrapolated to other parts of Europe.

2. AN EVANGELIZING PARISH?

One can possibly think that the parochial structures drown the missionary dimension of the parishes, because they are structures that fit already evangelized or, at least, christianized persons, for whom the parish is the normal channel through which his religious experience is realized.

The parish, in reality and in Canon Law, appears as an institution framed in an “epoch of Christendom.” Pope John XXIII symbolized the identity of the parish when he said that it was “the spring of the village,” and in this sense, the temple became the center of social life: to the church, as to the spring of the village, the whole world went. It went there for mass, for baptisms, weddings and funerals, to celebrate the patronal feasts and the social events. This parochial temple was lacking in halls for catechesis, offices for Caritas, rooms for groups of adults, because the awakening to religion was being done in the family, where also the Christian values were transmitted; the catechism was taught in the schools, sometimes in the same temple; the neighbors or the pious people were doing charity; the parochial office was the house of the priest. But from this epoch of Christendom we pass to the “epoch of secularism,” where there is no longer a “spring of the village,” because the village is now global, and the springs have multiplied: from the monumental springs to the irrigations of gardens; water is sold bottled in the “big commercial spaces” and comes to the faucet of every hearth; “raw cisterns” exist, or even “contaminated wells,” as in the times of the prophets, where one satiates his thirst. It is for this that the parochial traditional structure does not answer to the needs of the global village. Even today the people go to church (for mass, for catechesis - the parents stay outside-, for documents, for celebrating sacraments, with more or less faith, for used clothing or to the office of Caritas), and there is still room for the church to be one, the parochial community, that not only receives with good will , but also goes out seeking the “lost sheep” or to helping the fallen along the ways of Jericho, without much ado.

The Spanish Episcopal Conference in its 2002-2005 Pastoral Plan, n.48, referred to the parish in the following form:

The Parish is a privileged place of transmission and celebration of faith and of the experience of communion. She constitutes the basic framework of life of every Church, where the faithful can find natural channels of ecclesial participation. This institution born in the beginning of the Church, is called to continue exercising its beneficent influence in this new century, as community of communities and house open to all, inserted "together with the houses" of the neighbors and with a missionary spirit. Such is the orientation of the renewal that is started in the Pastoral Plans and diocesan Synods, attentive to the new situations of social mobility, urban concentration and rural depopulation.

Certainly, in many Pastoral Plans and Diocesan Synods of recent years one emphasizes the missionary and evangelizing dimension of the parish. An example is what the Pastoral Diocesan Plan of the nearby diocese of Tenerife, when it speaks of the parish as missionary community:

The parish not only has to have its doors open to all, but as Christ and as Church, it must go out to meet man in the crossroads of life. The missionary sending of Christ to his Church "Go to the whole world," is a perennial slogan for the whole parochial community.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Spain, in the eighties, celebrated two National Congresses: one on Evangelization and other on the evangelizing Parish.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the last one it was stated that only a minimal and insignificant percentage of the Spanish parishes were considered to be missionary. Both Congresses, however, concluded that the parish is a platform of evangelization for today's society. It is an opinion that important pastoral workers share. Among them, Miguel Payá,[[3]](#footnote-3) before a society on the way of dechristianization, proposes what should be the missionary response of the parishes and some operative lines of missionary ministry. The author sustains that the parish cannot remain turned on itself, since its reason of being is evangelization. It has to open itself to the concrete world where it is deeply rooted and where the people live through their struggles, their joys and sufferings. Given the dechristianization, the mission of the parish cannot be reduced to supporting the faith of the practicing Catholics, but has to decidedly present itself as strictly missionary evangelization.

These are the desires of the Diocesan Plans, of the Congresses and of the pastoral workers, but the reality is that at present there coexist, at least, three types of parishes:

1. The preconciliar parish, of pastoral ministry of Christianity: sacramentalization predominates; it lacks a pastoral plan; catechesis for first communion and for the reception of the sacraments. Distribution of tasks does not exist, the priest does everything, the lay people are completely passive. Closed to the outside, with little or no social sensibility; there is neither parochial groups nor parochial council, at most there are old pious associations. One does what has always been done.

2. Conciliar parish, pastoral ministry of maintenance: the catechesis of children and of young people (Communion and Assertion) predominates; it tries to evangelize through liturgical celebration; its concern for those who have gone away is basically religious. A group of lay people collaborates with the clergy in the march of the parish, the rest are mere spectators; it organizes certain campaigns to encourage the participation of the lay people in the parochial tasks. It manifests a social sensibility to the human rights, and of welfare type more than promotional; it is sensitive to the relationship of faith-culture and to the promotion of parochial "works." There are different groups and a certain degree of community formed by the most active parishioners; a parochial plan and council exists.

3. Postconciliar parish, of missionary and liberating pastoral ministry: The missionary evangelization is the priority option; the adult catechesis has a more out-standing place than that of children and young people. The Eucharistic celebrations are participative; pastoral responsibility is shared, with good services of welcome, help and orientation; everyone is expected to take part. Sensibility to the problems of the quarter and of beyond is promoted: unemployment, alienation, drug, senior citizens, etc.; there is a clear option for the poor and concern that they are evangelized; the injustices are denounced and human rights are defended. The parish identifies practically with a community or with a network of communities, living the eclesial communion.

Today, as in 1988 when the Congress of Evangelizing Parish was celebrated, it can be stated that very few parishes have embarked in the missionary and liberating pastoral ministry. There are more parishes of maintenance, and among these, from my experience, we can count the parishes pastorally animated by the Vincentian missionaries. Nevertheless, by nature and charism, we should encourage, not only from theory but by actual pastoral practice, truly missionary parishes. We should be “specialists" of the mission also in parochial structures.

As I was suggesting previously, there is the unknown, not in theory but in practice, of the parish, which is the response to a society of Christianity, being valid for a secularized, dechristianized society. I have thought much about, and I want to share it with you, what I read not too long ago: *Without mission there is no future for the Church. Hence, what the moment demands is the missionary renewal of communities, since the style of the official Church till now has not reached its end.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

3. VINCENTIAN PARISH

3.1. “This is my experience.”

A few years ago, and I imagine it will keep on being the same, among the religious Congregations or Societies of apostolic life, we, Vincentians (Paúles, Vicentinos, Lazaristes,) had the most parishes in Spain (one time the Franciscans had more than us). This is a significant fact: a theoretically itinerant Congregation, as is the Mission, was in charge of the ordinary evangelization of parishes. Possibly it was a happy exit to the ecclesial, congregational and postconciliar context: the big theologates, studentates, and “novitiates" which were occupying many missionaries, disappeared; the same with the apostolic schools; the popular missions entered into crisis and diocesan seminaries are no longer attended; the formation “of our own” did not differ from other seminarians, identity was absent … All this made the evangelization of the Vincentians to lean to what was secure: the parishes, and perhaps this was the best option at this moment of crisis and of questioning.

And this seems to be not only a Spanish experience. In the meeting of the missionaries of Europe and Middle East who work at the parish ministry, celebrated in Naples in 2009, it was stated that, on a global scale, next to 70 % of our ministries are basically parochial. In the same meeting, and given the characteristics of the ministry in the parishes, the participants were summoned with the motto: "the parish, an opportunity or an impediment, to live the charism?” The expression already indicates a certain suspicion about being able to live the missionary and Vincentian charism in an institution, as the parish, dedicated fundamentally to the ministry of maintenance and sacramentalization. Nevertheless, in the opinion of those who were present at this Meeting and of the speakers, the response to this question was that the *parish is an occasion to live through charism*,” whenever they overcome *the two deviations that threaten the parochial ministry at present: the tendency make of the parish a self-referencing community or a “nest community,” and the tendency to consider the parish as a “center of services”*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One tried to exercise the missionary ministry from the parishes, but it has not been easy, nor almost possible. There were experiences of rural parishes, in which one wanted to work with a missionary sense, to create communities of some value, but in the end what came out were teams of rural priests that were absorbed by the parochial structure. There were, and still are, parishes in marginal villages, but they have not centered on evangelization, because the parish continued to be an "office of services," in spite of the effort to be with the poor, the situation of whom one tried to improve, but whom one has not known, or has not been able, to evangelize. The same can be said of the parishes of city, to the point in which there can exist among the Vincentian pastors a sense that is more diocesan than Vincentian (“parochial assimilation”[[6]](#footnote-6)) and an absence of the sense of belonging to the CM. The advantage is that the parishes can be attended, in the ministry of maintenance, by a community better than by a single priest. There has been an attempt to be faithful to the charism, but, in general, this structure has not changed. Yes, a proper tone has been given to our vocation and our life-style as it concerns dealing with persons, the responsibility of the tasks, on the stress of concern for the poor and for the Christian formation. But, in my humble opinion, our Vincentian parishes need to be turned into mission.

3.2. Theory and projects of the Vincentian parish

I would like to invite you now to a virtual tour of a Vincentian library and we will discover that, in spite of the reality that we have just mentioned, reflection and Vincentian norms on this parish ministry are abundantly rich, as they insist on what should be typical of our parochial ministry. I will indicate some small but significant examples, lingering a bit more in the documents that are closer to me:

1. “Specific elements for a pastoral project of parishes attended by the C.M.” [1990].[[7]](#footnote-7) The document presents a few CRITERIA, a few LINES OF ACTION and the ATTITUDES of the Vincentian priest sent to this ministry. I gather the general criteria:

1. We insert ourselves in the particular Church.
2. In permanent mission: *Our evangelizing presence in the parishes justifies itself only from a permanent missionary action, as it corresponds to our charism. The situation of unbelief of the current society and the insufficiency of the traditional pastoral ministry call us to a new evangelization.[[8]](#footnote-8)*
3. There where the poor are: *In virtue of our charism we accept only the parishes in places where a full dedication to the poor and the marginalized is possible and where the diocesan clergy could not come.[[9]](#footnote-9)*
4. To evangelize according to our own charism: as St. Vincent, we are called to respond to the situations of new poverty that the society generates.[[10]](#footnote-10)
5. And to build the Christian community: In the horizon of our objecive we take the parish as a communion of communities.[[11]](#footnote-11)
6. Joint responsibility.[[12]](#footnote-12)
7. And we assume all this as Vincentian apostolic community.

Each of these objectives is accompanied by a few Lines of Action that are concrete and adapted to the evangelizing task in the Vincentian parish. Also, the attitudes of the Vincentian missionaries to push forward these objectives and Lines of Action are emphasized, in consonance with the proper charism and with the needs of the new evangelization.[[13]](#footnote-13)

There is little to be added, even today, thirteen years later, when we are speaking of new evangelization. The ideas are clear, so the desires; but what about the reality?

2. “The Statute Vincentian parish” [2007].[[14]](#footnote-14) It starts by admitting that *the parish is a privileged place from which the Church presents itself before the world as a sacrament of salvation, with the mission to live, announce and establish God's Kingdom in all the peoples.* Its general objective is: *The Vincentian parish, by its peculiarity, has to live with a special sensibility the evangelizing action, which results in the charitable action and the commitment for the separated and marginalized*. (Cf. CC. 5, 6, 7, 12).

The Statute gathers the appropriate places for a Vincentian parish; the temporalities; the centrality of charitable action and formation in the Social Doctrine of the Church; the participation of the Vincentian Family in evangelization; the adult formation through catechumenates; life and witness impregnated with the proper virtues, especially simplicity and humility; inspired and inspiring persons that work as a team.

The Statute reviews the different parochial actions (missionary, catechetical, pastoral, charitable, team of priests, parochial and economic councils), indicating in each one the lines of action for the parish to be truly missionary. Finally, it proposes a “Model of Vincentian Parochial Plan.” Naturally it includes also the specific objectives that specify the general.

It intends the parish to be a “community of communities,” centering the regard and the pastoral action inwards, without forgetting the witness, the charitable and social action towards the outside.

The attempt is praiseworthy, the reflection interesting and encouraging, but, in the end, it seems to have left a parish that looks inwards and its missionary sense being concretized in the twinning with a mission “ad gentes.” It is a beautiful attempt to create a significant community, and this can be a very missionary, yet insufficient, feature.

3. Provincial norms and Lines of Operation - Province of Saragossa 2006[[15]](#footnote-15)

As the Province of Saragossa held this Meeting, let's take a look at its regulation on the Vincentian parish. The epigraph of this ministry appears in the Provincial Norms as: "Parishes - missions.” One detects, somehow, a certain guilt-complex or a justification of a ministry that is done by the majority, yet not too identified with the mission. Also in this case criteria and objectives are proposed: to work towards a missionary Church opened to the estranged and non-believers; to be determined in promoting the evangelizing dimension of all our pastoral action; systematic catechesis oriented to forming communities sensitive to the poor and outsiders, and that the lay people have responsibilities and autonomy. The Lines of Operation specify these criteria and objectives: to prepare a ministry Plan that favors continuity; to work towards a parochial missionary community that receives, lives, celebrates and announces the Good News of Jesus Christ; to promote charitable-social action, with concrete projects; to promote the associations of the Vincentian Family; the primordial task of the laymen's formation, through the catechumenate of adults that leads them to maturity of faith, to participation and coresponsibility in the parochial organs and to the socio-political commitment; to implant in our parishes a group of evangelization that animates the missionary dimension (I have not seen it in any of our parishes).

The regulation is clear, a fruit of several Provincial Assemblies, and I am sure that the attempts to enliven the norm have been present in our Province, but the reality is that we seem to be closer to what we have indicated earlier as “conciliar parish to conciliate, community of communities" than the “postconciliar parish, of missionary and liberating ministry.”

4. Meeting of Missionaries of Europe and Middle East, who work at the parish ministry.[[16]](#footnote-16)

I make use of the notes of one of the parsons who took part in this meeting. From the papers that were presented and the shared experience we can trace some Vincentian strokes.

On the features of our charism in the parish ministry one things like the following were said:

* Mission and Charity, that characterize our charism, have to be present in any parish that wants to be evangelizing, they have to be the distinctive tone of a Vincentian parish.
* We are called to invent a regenerated parish, with a new face, for this we have to be specialists in the Christian initiation of the adults.
* The Vincentian parish takes care in a special way of the formation of the lay people for the mission, not as mere collaborators, but as jointly responsible in the same mission.
* Special care about the social dimension based on the Social Doctrine of the Church.
* We have to convinced that it is not the time of the 'masses' in our parishes, but of community nuclei formed by families capable of living and of presenting an beautiful existence of believers.
* In the parish one has to live a rhythm at “two speeds”: on one hand the nucleus of reference, formed by Christians ready to live the faith profoundly and, on the other, an ordinary ministry of welcome and attention to those who come requesting sacraments, a propitious occasion for the first announcing.

This conclusion was reached: today in the ministry there are no recipes, one has to experiment with intelligence, responsibility and courage, and then to evaluate constantly, conscious that the proper places to regenerate the faith are the family and the Christian community.

Beautiful words and suggestive lines for our parishes. When they speak about a parish at “two speeds,” one hopes that they refer to the ordinary ministry that looks inwards and to the "ordinary" ministry that looks outwards, and not that the second speed be only the ministry of welcome and attention to those who come requesting the sacraments.

5. Letter of by Fr. Gregory Gay, General Superior.

In October, 2011 Fr. General wrote a letter to all the missionaries of the Congregation in which he took note of the response to the questionnaire that was sent to all the Provinces that they reflect on the parochial ministry and from which was seen the possibility of preparing a Practical Guide for the Parishes.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The letter shows the great variety and richness of this ministry, but also the difficulties and shortcomings, not the least “the risk of justifying and legitimizing all our parishes so that ultimately our Vincentian identity is weakened and becomes devoid of meaning.” From the variety he gathers some features that might shape the Vincentian identity of our parishes: to be among the poor and be at their service (“People who are poor, with their need for a holistic evangelization, are at the geographical, social and pastoral center of every Vincentian missionary parish.”); the parish as “House of Mission”; any pastoral parochial action must be impregnated by the Vincentian spirit, highlighting five Vincentian missionary virtues; holistic mission (Word and Charity); promotion of the laity; development of the prophetic ministry and attention to the new forms of poverty; support to the missions and achievement of popular missions; support and joint collaboration with the groups of the Vincentian Family; collaboration with the diocesan clergy; development of the community spirit, the parish as network of communities …

After this virtual trip in the archives of a library, we are left with the sensation that the regulation and the theory, the desires and the illusions, are truly good and that they serve to orient the missionary parochial ministry, but, as in all attempts of reaching the utopia, we are still far from the parishes being truly missionary.

4. NEW EVANGELIZATION IN THE VINCENTIAN PARISH.

We have heard, from Paul VI up to Benedict XVI, through John Paul II, that “the Church exists to evangelize” and that “the identity of the Church is the mission.” What is said about the Church, one has to say certainly of the parishes: they exist to evangelize, that their identity is the mission. And this affects in the deepest sense the Vincentian parish, whose charismatic identity is the mission.

The new evangelization tries to recover the missionary consciousness of the Church, and therefore of our parishes. Hence, one reads in the Lineamenta for the Bishops' next Synod that “new evangelization is synonymous with mission.”[[18]](#footnote-18) I like saying that the new evangelization is the old evangelization, the first evangelization. And I like saying that evangelization is always new, because evangelization has always been the Christian response to every new historical, cultural, ecclesial situation.

4.1. To look at the “Missionary of the Father.”

As St. Vincent liked doing, the first step for our Vincentian parishes is to contemplate the “First missionary,” to put on his spirit and to do what He did. The new evangelization proposes to the Vincentian parishes, first of all, to look at the “evangelist of the Father,” and to see how he evangelizes:

 In the 'house' Jesus teaches and to it the patients come to be healed, even making a hole in the roof to put the paralytic before the Lord, whose sins he forgives, before the scandal of the scribes, and whom he commands to get up, to take up his stretcher and leave the house. In the 'house' of Bethany the friendship is lived, there is one who chooses to be with the Lord, “the best part,” while others “walk worried” on what needs to be done in the parish. In the cenacle "house," one listens to the Lord confiding himself in farewell, one sees him kneeling down and washing the feet of the disciples, one receives the new commandment, breaks the bread breaks and shares the wine, the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus, to do in his memory. This 'house' has to be the parish. But in the gospels we see the Lord going through the roads and the villages, where he is approached by a leper, the outcast, whom he introduces in the society, he staying “at the outskirts” for having been contaminated; we see the Lord being invited for dinner with the onlooker and ill regarded Zaccheus, and with Him entered salvation; before speaking, as San Vicente would say, he started treating the blind person in the way of Jericho, resuscitating the son (and the mother) of the widow of Naim; he went through the “little recommended" places, where he freed the possessed by the devil and cured the daughter of the mother who asked for “the crumbs that fell the table of the children”; he sat down at table with the (evil-minded)Pharisee; he rescued from stoning the woman caught in adultery …, and we could go on until the point of weariness. And on the road he spoke of the Kingdom of God and of God the Father in parables. He also went up the mountain, as well as in the plains, to proclaim the beatitude to all the peoples, and in the mountain he sought God's will in a night of prayer. This is the second image of evangelization, of the mission done by “the missionary of the Father.” The Vincentian parish has also to frequent the less recommended places, to go out to the ways and the villages, where the Lord will have to pass. It has to get dirty, be contaminated, with the outcast; it must go up the mountain of the Beatitudes and proclaim the newness of the gospel, of God's Kingdom, to those who do not come to the temple; it must go to “the wells of Jacob” where so many Samaritans are looking for water that satisfies their thirst for love, for happiness, to offer “water that springs up to eternal life”; it must feed “five thousand men” with five breads and two fish; it must become contemplative at Tabor and be prepared to suffer, to give one's life.[[19]](#footnote-19)

4.2. To evangelize from the proper charism.

The “parochial assimilation” cannot drown the charism, the proper characteristics with which the Congregation of the Mission evangelizes. The new evangelization challenges us to put at the service of the gospel, from the parish, the missionary capacity of the C.M., every community and every missionary. The Vincentian parish evangelizes with a proper style, from the mandate to evangelize to the poor up to the manner of evangelizing them. The Vincentian parish should have, after the expression of St. Louise de Marillac, the fragrance of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal (the passion) for the salvation of souls.

We will not insist, but the frame and the horizon of new evangelization from the Vincentian parish must be the criteria indicated in the Constitutions in the article 12 and in the Statute 10.[[20]](#footnote-20) They are the signs of identity, which also respond today to the requirements of the new evangelization: Thus, the article 12 of the Constitutions indicates these criteria or characteristics in any task of evangelization, and in this case we refer to the evangelization in the Vincentian parishes: clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, attention to the realities of the human society to fulfill better the prophetic function, some participation in the condition of the poor, genuine community spirit in the apostolic works, readiness to go to where one is sent, search for continued conversion.

4.3. In tune with the new evangelization.

 As we have previously seen, there are authorized voices that speak of “a definitive end of the Christianity of Constantinian stamp and of the form of the Christian marked by the existence of official Churches” (Card. Kurt KOCH).[[21]](#footnote-21) Hence, new evangelization is demanded not only from the outside, but also from the interior of the Church. The style of current parish has “to start from zero” toward something new, and in this task the Vincentian charism can open up ways. As any beginning, more so in this case because it would be said that we do not "start from zero,” it will entail displeasures and difficulties, sufferings and, without doubt, joys and hope. But it has been always this way, from Jesus of Nazarett, the first communities and the first apostles, up to the renewed ecclesial movements, the march of the Councils, and any type of reform.

 Allow me to frame some aspects of the new evangelization in the Vincentian parishes from a scheme that was well engraved in me when I was taking the speciality in Youth and Catechetical Apostolate, hearing it explained by Prof. Emilio Alberich. The Church has the task of evangelizing, for that it exists, for that it has been sent, and it does from four ecclesial dimensions or, as the Professor put it “the essential articulations of ecclesial praxis,” that we can apply to the parish:

1. The Church realizes God's Kingdom by means of DIAKONIA.

The Vincentian parish evangelizes and realizes the kingdom serving to the poor. In addition to the announcing of the word, the Vincentian parish has to be characterized and stand in the society and in the diocese by its service to the poor. This service to the poor affects all other parochial dimensions, as a force that transverses and renders of each of them dynamic. The Vincentian parish turns on this axis; therefore, not only does it accepts the poor that come to the 'house', but it has to go out to the by-ways where the lepers, the outcast, the strangers are, and there exercise the healing action of Jesus Christ, the mission entrusted to the disciples. Sensibility and concrete actions: to favor from the parish the whole charitable and social action that is realized; that the work of Caritas be slightly more than an office; or that the work of the AIC be something more that to give meal-packs; to encourage and to commit all the parochial groups in this task of serving the poor; to prepare seriously the agents of this ministry; to cooperate actively with all the social movements and in solidarity in the defense of the rights of the poor. It would be brilliant if the Vincentian parish were the church of the poor, but not only for those come to the office of Caritas or those who beg at the door, but also for those who enter and feel at home, for those who are outside and feel invited to take part of God's Kingdom. But the Vincentian parish cannot be content with the reception and the service of the poor, but it has to make an effort to give them, according to the Vincentian experience, the bread and the Word. The poor need the Word and we will have to exert a great effort to answer this need.

2. The Church announces the God's Kingdom by means of KERIGMA.

This is the other of the inalienable, typical and significant elements of a Vincentian parish. Perhaps the most necessary thing for new evangelization. And in this, the Vincentians have to be experts. It is impressive to read that already in 1960 it was said (now Cardinal Kasper) that the ministry of the Church must start “from the supremacy of the word before the sacrament.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In the documents of the Vatican II flows as new sap the importance of the Word in the life of the Christian and of the Church. The postconciliar Popes have abundantly insisted on this reality.

It is a question of speaking about God and about Jesus Christ in new, challenging and heart-warming way, such that the persons feel moved and affected in their heart and in their life, the world is transformed, and the Church becomes a hearth for many who ask questions and are in search. Evangelization can be carried out successfully only by persons who, filled with enthusiasm by God, give enthusiastic witness of Him with his words and his works. Only one who is evangelized can evangelize and strives for his own renewal, and faith can be transmitted only by one who is rooted in it.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The Vincentian parish puts itself at the service of the new evangelization proclaiming the Word, given the circumstances, so much as the first announcing as in the pastoral attention and in the new evangelization (as recommend by the Lineamenta[[24]](#footnote-24)). But one has to go still further, because these three moments are seen from the internal perspective, that is to say, for those who come to the parish; one has to make an effort to go out of the “parochial walls,” even of the “court of the gentiles.” In this sense, in the words also of the Cardinal Kasper, a ministry that is very much ours has great importance: *The community renewal that is directed to active members of the community cannot replace the old popular missions. Because beyond the renewal of faith and the life of the practicing members of the community, there appears the double task of recovering those who in their days were a part of the community, and have drifted apart from it, and to reach and gain for the first time those who have never had relation with the Church.[[25]](#footnote-25)*

To make it concrete: in the Vincentian parish one has to foster the processes of maturation in faith. *The renewal of the catechumenate has become in the meantime, for the historical Churches, a vital need, into something that is indispensable for survival.[[26]](#footnote-26)* If we were courageous, and conscious of the end of an epoch, we would have to choose to give up a catechesis that is only sacramental, whose formation ends as soon as the sacrament is received(conscious of the ecclesial difficulties and especially social that would emerge). "Would there be a Vincentian pastor who, with the consent of the parochial council, would put in the bulletin board: ' "*Here, catechesis of first communion is not given. What is done here is the catechesis of Christian initiation*"? And similar thing we can say of the catechesis of Confirmation or presacramental catechesis. We would have to propose processes of Christian initiation, from the religious awakening up to the commitment of a believer. The third chapter of the Lineamenta is entitled: "To initiate a Christian experience” and presents the Christian initiation as an evangelizing process.[[27]](#footnote-27) One would have to choose as major concern the adult catechesis in parochial or Vincentian catechumenates, in parochial groups of formation, in those which community experience is held. One would also take risks in in experiences that are already in process, like catechesis of families or intergenerational catechesis.

This dimension of the Word, in a Vincentian parish, must also cover other dimensions and parochial actions, taking care of the preaching, the formation of parochial groups, the first announcing to those who come for the first time or the new evangelization to those who have drifted away. The Word is announced and becomes alive in diakonía, in koinonía and in liturgía, all of them impregnated by the fragrance of the announced Good News.

3. The Church lives God's Kingdom by means of KOINONÍA

The new evangelization in the Vincentian parish has to recover the spirit of community, proper of the disciples who were called “to be with Him” and to be sent from the community. Two fundamental words: *communio* and *missio*. And the two affect the Vincentian charism. We need, it was said in the eighties, communities of human dimension, of adult Christians in the faith, without taking space from who continue a process of initiation and maturation in faith, received by a parochial community, in which the values of the Kingdom already live.

Specifying once again: the Vincentian parish is a channel of new evangelization if it manages to live this community of faith. Those who form it must feel active members of the same, who distribute responsibilities among themselves, who truly trust in the evangelizing force of the laity, aside from valuing themselves in other fields, like the economy, the parish pastoral council, in the ministry of service to the poor or in the education in faith, and also in the liturgy. Finally, the Vincentian parish has to stop being clerical, to become communitarian and lay. It has to encourage all kinds of meetings that nourish communion of life, from prayer to the celebratory meetings, through the fraternal correction in sacrament of conciliation, without ever forgetting to form community around the Word and the Table of the Eucharist,

New evangelization cannot be content with guiding persons to the community with Jesus Christ, but it must invite them to become also members of Christ's Body incorporated to the community of faith that is the Church. New evangelization is realized not only in the announcing, but is, above all, a new form of life in the communion of the Church.[[28]](#footnote-28) And this communion must open itself to the mission. The Vincentian parish cannot lose the condition of an evangelized parish and evangelizing parish, that is to say, missionary. One cannot be content with the “heat of the nest,” but, as it was said in the blessed eighties, one has to go out “to the borders” and be "outdoors."

4. The Church celebrates God's Kingdom in the LITURGÍA.

New evangelization has to favor a deep change in this liturgical dimension. The Vincentian parish also here must be courageous and willing to take risks. In the Lineamenta it is said that the new evangelization is an attitude, a bold style.[[29]](#footnote-29) This bold style has to be applied also in the Liturgy. What Vincentian pastor will dare "stamp the feet” to the routine sacramentalization and to the instrumentalization of the liturgy as place of instruction and catechesis? Who will dare deny marriage or baptism to those who do not conform to the life of the Christian community and isolate themselves from the Christian faith?

The liturgical celebrations in the new evangelization should also recover the sense of the celebrations of the catechumenate, including the importance of the *mistagogía*, the initiation to the life with the living God who in his Son has showed us his real face; and, therefore, also the initiation to the community of faith of those who believe in this God.

The Vincentian parish has to bear in mind, and therefore break with many “religious practices,” that the sacramental liturgies of the Church cannot be used to simulate the ecclesial belonging of persons who scarcely take part in the sacraments and in the life of the Church, and given that such persons might be overwhelmed by the sacramental liturgies, the way of the new evangelization needs to develop alternative forms of celebration, distinguishing the sacramental liturgies in strict sense from other celebrations.[[30]](#footnote-30) Also in this dimension a few courageous attitudes and style are needed. Using a proper terminology, we would say that here has to be manifested a “creative fidelity for the mission.”

Specifying once again: new evangelization demands our parishes to extend and to make more differentiated repertoire of celebrations, in such a way that not all the needs and religious expectations are satisfied immediately and exclusively with a sacrament. Would we dare to do a celebration of blessing for a newborn infant without administering the sacrament of baptism? Or a matrimonial blessing without the need to theatrelise (dramatize!) the sacrament of the marriage? Perhaps new evangelization should recover *the Sacramentals* opposite to the indiscriminate sacramentalization that is often lacking in faith. One may have to dust off those postconciliar paraliturgies and to take example of the “Celebrations of the Word” in countries of mission. All this in favor of a liturgy that is meaningful and open to the mystery, to the transcendent.

5. The Church gives witness of God's Kingdom by means of MARTYRIA

Some time ago, the Sisters' Director, and old formator of mine, invited me to give a short course of catechesis to a group of Daughters of the Charity and at the end of having exposed these four dimensions through which the Church makes God's Kingdom present, told me that perhaps it would be good to add a fifth dimension. And with great pleasure I do it since then.[[31]](#footnote-31) It is but through martyría that every evangelization must pass, since this has been so since Jesus Christ, the first communities and any evangelizing task. New evangelization cannot be carried out without conflicts, and neither could the (first) ancient evangelization avoid it. *Evangelization is carried out always under the sign of the cross, and only through the cross is the hope in the new life of the Easter possible.[[32]](#footnote-32)*  Internal conflicts will make people suffer. The task of Jeremiah is ungrateful because it has to destroy and to uproot, to build and to plant. New evangelization, from the Vincentian parish, has to assume the suffering and the cross. It will make the witness of Christians credible and alive. The missionaries who evangelize in the parishes will have to put one the virtue of the mortification, which is but to suffer what it is necessary to be faithful in the following of Jesus Christ and to the mission of evangelizing the poor.

In the Lineamenta the new evangelization is stated to demand confrontation with the new stages of the evangelization (secularism, phenomenon of migration, media of social communication, economy, science and technology, politics),[[33]](#footnote-33) not enclosing ourselves in the enclosures of our communities and of our institutions, but accepting the challenge of entering into these phenomena, to take the word and to offer our witness. This is the form that the Christian martyría assumes in today's world, accepting also the confrontation with the recent forms of aggressive atheism or of extreme secularization, the purpose of which is to eclipse the question of God in the life of man.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Specifying: the Vincentian parish, if it goes for this style of evangelization and in the dimensions that we have pointed out, must have the certainty that it involves an uphill climb to Jerusalem, the place of passion and death, but also place of resurrection. The criticism and the scorn of the good will not be absent, those who know about God and who hold that "it has always been like that.” Hence, one will need to pray also in the garden of olives and be deeply charismatic. There will not be lacking also the misunderstandings and contempt of those from the outside who see “the order altered.” Without doubt, the evangelization in this style of Vincentian parish, will be carried forward by persons with a big *parresía*, because evangelization can be carried out only successfully by persons who filled with enthusiasm of God, who give enthusiastic witness of Him with their words and their deeds.

Conclusion

We live through a crucial time in the life of the Church because we find ourselves in the end of an epoch or phase of Christianity, which has not yet passed living in a context of Christianity to living the faith in a "secularized," "dechristianized," and "unchurched" Europe. New evangelization has to begin from the interior of the Church and by each of the Christians. And while this is not attained, the words and the documents will take to the wind. The Vincentian missionaries who work at the parish ministry have a big responsibility of contributing to this epochal change, that is always a call to the conversion. They have the task of making the parishes foci of evangelization, lights in the middle of the shadows of the contemporary world. Evangelized parishes and evangelizing parishes. New evangelization will put to test the “creative fidelity for the mission” of all the missionaries who exercise his ministry in the parishes. We have the everlasting task: to be missionaries, followers of Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor, in the world and in the Church of a today that is difficult yet encouraging. And we have to do it with the force of the Holy Spirit, because only with this force is the Church, the Vincentian parish, capable of evangelizing.

Pablo Domínguez, c.m.

1. Diócesis de Tenerife, Plan Diocesano de Pastoral, «*“Haz memoria de Jesucristo Resucitado”. Cuatrienio 2007-2011»*, *La parroquia*, n. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Congreso *Parroquia evangelizadora*, Madrid, Edice, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cfr. PAYÁ Miguel, *La parroquia, comunidad evangelizadora,* Madrid, PPC, 1989. The author proposes the operative lines of the missionary ministry:

1st To awaken and nourish the consciousness of mission: We have to recover the consciousness that we are sent by God to the current society for its evangelization. It is a gift (and a task). For it:

2nd To initiate a deep effort of displacement to life: Instead of centering almost exclusively on their internal problems, the parishes have to make an effort to look outwards, paying greater attention to what the people lives, thinks, enjoys, and suffers...

3rd To develop a more diversified ministry: to promote a more diversified pastoral attention that answers more adequately to the diverse levels of faith of persons.

4th To promote the missionary catechesis: We need to discover and to start procedures and methods to initiate in the faith or to achieve a more personalized faith.

5th To celebrate the liturgy in a missionary key. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. KASPER Walter, in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *El desafío de la nueva evangelización. Impulsos para la revitalización de la fe”*, (*The challenge of new evangelization. Impulses for a revitalization of faith*) Santander, Sal Terrae (=Presencia Teológica, 184), 2012. p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Text taken from the notes of a missionary who took part in the meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cfr. MALONEY Robert, *Del compromiso vicenciano en las parroquias*, II, 2, en «Vincentiana» (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A small photocopy booklet, result of much dialogue and consultation and of much experience. It appeared in 1990 thanks to an interprovincial commission, formed by the Visitors of the Provinces of Spain. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lines of action that accompany this objective: To make present in the world of the estranged, through witness, the concern about social problems, the dialogue with culture … To make an effort through education in faith in the different catechetical processes, with a preferred dedication in resources and in persons to the adult catechumenate … To give missionary character to the whole parochial action... To make use of the Popular Mission as an extraordinary pastoral action. To promote groups dedicated to the missionary ministry. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Lines of action for this objective: The life and the life style of the missionaries has to be in consonance with the standard of living of the poor, to avoid distances and obstacles in the evangelization. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Lines of action: Start from the knowledge of reality. The whole pastoral action has to be programmed according to the poor. To help the laity to transform the situations of injustice and to satisfy the aspirations of the poor. To organize the charitable - social action (effective services and expression of the Christian love of the parochial community). In coordination with other organisms that work in favor of the poor. The parish has to be a voice of the voiceless, against the injustices of which they are victims, by means of the information to the community and denunciation (of injustices). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. To offer an adult catecumenado of “Vincentian inspiration.” To create a network of small communities and diverse groups, which articulate the community and are channels of meeting. To favor ecclesial communion between groups and associations. To take care of celebrations, to promote festive meetings and to promote the vocational ministry that helps to discover and to animate the possible responses of service to the Church and to the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. To promote all the means of formation, participation and corresponsability of the laity in the “ work of the evangelization that is the fundamental duty of God's People ” (AG, 35). To have Pastoral Council and Economic Council . Preparation of the laity in order to guarantee pastoral continuity in the parishes. Promotion of the Vincentian laity. Parochial assemblies. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Among the attitudes of the missionaries that must accompany these criteria and lines, the following are given emphasis: Always to act according to Christ's maxims, living the following attitudes: continued conversion, "being on the journey" and detachment, collaboration and teamwork, austerity in the means, conviviality and affability in the dealing with each other, humility to allow oneself to be taught, compassion and mercy, sensibility to poverty and injustices, share personally and in community with others, especially with the poor. These attitudes must put on the proper spirit of the Congregation, by means of the practice of the five virtues: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for the salvation of the souls. More than managers of services, to give priority to the missionary task. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Document of the Province of Salamanca in 2007. Also the fruit of long reflection and rich experience. This can be consulted in the website of Salamanca Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The 13th Provincial Assembly (2009) did not modify either the Provincial Norms or the Lines of Operations. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Notes taken by a missionary of the Province of Zaragossa (Fr. Ander Arregui) who took part in the meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 23 Provinces answered this questionnaire. The. General and his Council studied the material received and Fr. General, acting as secretary, communicates to all the missionaries the result of reflection of the General Council on the received responses. The intention of offering a Practical Guide of the Vincentian parish needs a major clarity to be able to agree on the content of the above mentioned Guide. That's why P. General proposes a more exhaustive study on the part of all the Provinces, the Continental Conferences, Visitors and their Councils, in order to give an unanimous response to this Vincentian parochial ministry, which might be also a response to the new evangelization in which the Church is involved. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lineamenta No. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. San Vicente understood this way of evangelizing perfectly and this way he taught to any person who came into contact him, whatever his "ministry," his task (Lady of Charity, Priest or Brother of the Mission, Daughter of Charity, Bishop or priest of the people, women and men of Charities). He himself began to experience this evangelization being a pastor in Clichy or in Chatillón. He taught it to his missionaries: to evangelize with word and with service, imitating Jesus Christ. New evangelization, therefore, is to do what Jesus Christ did, for us also what San Vicente did, as the same Saint would say, “adapting ourselves to the times, the places and the persons.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cfr. MALONEY Robert, art.cit., the III: *Some reflections on the Vincentian commitment in the parishes today.* Commenting on the Statute 10, P. Robert Maloney proposes some commitments to evangelize from the parish: to be among the real poor; where the diocesan clergy lacks personal resources; with temporary commitments with the dioceses, if possible by means of a contract; to evangelize with well defined goals for a limited time, the preparation is for the permanent pastoral formation in the future, particularly for the formation of leaders in different ministries; it is a community mission; to organize practical charity to the service of those in need; to evangelize also with the Vincentian groups (SSVP, AIC, JMV, AMM …); to offer a systematical formation of the social doctrine of the Church; the 'style' of the ministry is simple and humble; and as evangelizing parish, to put a strong emphasis on the word of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. KOCH Kurt, *¿Misión o des-misión de la Iglesia?*, en AUGUSTIN George (ed.), *op.cit.,* p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cited by KOCH Kurt, *art.cit.*, AUGUSTIN George (ed.), *op.cit.,* p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cfr. KASPER Walter, *La nueva evangelización: un desafío pastoral, teológico y espiritual, (New Evangelization: a pastoral, theological and spiritual challenge)* in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *op.cit.*, pp. 19-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lineamenta, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. KASPER Walter, *art.cit.,* in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *ibidem* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lineamenta, 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. KASPER Walter, *art.cit.,* in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *op.cit.*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lineamenta, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. KASPER Walter, *art.cit.,* in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *op.cit.*, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Years after my studies I found out that Prof. Emilio Alberich himself included this dimension in his book *La catequesis en la Iglesia,* Madrid, Ed. CCS, 1991(2ªed.). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. KASPER Walter, *art.cit.,* in AUGUSTIN George (ed), *op.cit.*, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Lineamenta, 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Lineamenta, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)