



Christian Spirituality of Justice for the Poor in Vincentian Spirituality

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intrinsic link between justice and spirituality within Christian thought, in which justice is an essential and nonnegotiable element of Christian spiritual life. Emphasizing the Christian mandate to act justly on behalf of the poor, as illustrated in Luke 4:18, the paper underscores the importance of integrating justice into genuine worship and spiritual contemplation. It provides an overview of Christian spirituality, highlighting the critical role of justice for the poor. Additionally, it examines Saint Vincent de Paul's view of the poor as the image of Christ and presents Vincentian spirituality as a model of promoting justice for the impoverished. The paper demonstrates how justice is foundational to Christian spirituality and offers practical examples of living out this commitment through Vincentian principles.

Cet article explore le lien intrinsèque entre la justice et la spiritualité au sein de la pensée chrétienne, dans laquelle la justice est un élément essentiel et non négociable de la vie spirituelle chrétienne. En mettant l'accent sur le mandat chrétien d'agir avec justice au nom des pauvres, comme l'illustre Luc 4:18, l'article souligne l'importance d'intégrer la justice dans un culte authentique et une contemplation spirituelle. Il donne un aperçu de la spiritualité chrétienne, en soulignant le rôle essentiel de la justice pour les pauvres. En outre, il examine le point de vue de Saint Vincent de Paul sur les pauvres en tant qu'image du Christ et présente la spiritualité vincentienne comme un modèle de promotion de la justice pour les personnes démunies. L'article démontre comment la justice est à la base de la spiritualité chrétienne et offre des exemples pratiques pour vivre cet engagement à travers les principes vincentiens.

Este artículo explora el vínculo intrínseco entre justicia y espiritualidad dentro del pensamiento cristiano, en el que la justicia es un elemento esencial y no negociable de la vida espiritual cristiana. Haciendo hincapié en el mandato cristiano de actuar con justicia en favor de los pobres, como se ilustra en Lucas 4:18, el documento subraya la importancia de integrar la justicia en el culto genuino y la contemplación espiritual. Ofrece una visión general de la espiritualidad cristiana, destacando el papel fundamental de la justicia para con los pobres. Además, examina la visión de San Vicente de Paúl de los pobres como imagen de Cristo y presenta la espiritualidad vicenciana como modelo de promoción de la justicia para los empobrecidos. El documento demuestra cómo la justicia es fundamental para la espiritualidad cristiana y ofrece ejemplos prácticos de cómo vivir este compromiso a través de los principios vicencianos.

Keywords: Justice, Vincentian, Spirituality, Charity.

Introduction

Ronald Rolheiser, theologian, professor, and award-winning author in *Contemporary Spirituality*, highlights the profound connection between justice and spirituality, stating, “A crucial spiritual task for our time is bringing together justice and contemplation, commitment to the poor, and genuine worship of God.”¹ Justice is not

¹ Ronald Rolheiser, “Justice and Spirituality,” May 11, 1992, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://ronrolheiser.com/justice-and-spirituality/>



merely a social obligation but an integral component of spiritual life. Rolheiser emphasizes that justice is “an essential and nonnegotiable element within the spiritual life.”² Christians are called to act justly on behalf of the poor, continuing Christ’s mission: “To proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (*Luke 4:18*, NIV). In contemporary Christian discourse, the interplay between justice and spirituality often surfaces as a pivotal theme, reflecting a more profound theological and moral imperative. This paper delves into this intricate relationship by drawing from the rich theological insights and practical examples found in Christian spirituality. Firstly, it summarizes the essence of Christian spirituality, emphasizing how justice for the poor is central and indispensable to living a truly spiritual life. Secondly, the paper introduces the teachings of Saint Vincent de Paul, a towering figure in Christian history known for his profound commitment to the poor. By viewing the poor as the image of Christ, Vincent de Paul exemplified a life where spirituality and justice seamlessly converged. Lastly, the paper presents Vincentian spirituality as a contemporary model of promoting justice for the poor. Rooted in the legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul, Vincentian spirituality offers practical insights and methodologies for engaging with the poor, advocating for their rights, and integrating justice into the fabric of spiritual life. By examining these three aspects, the paper aims to illuminate how interwoven justice and spirituality challenge Christians to embody this synthesis in their daily lives.

I. Justice for the Poor in Christian Spirituality

1. Christian Spirituality

Spirituality has many different definitions. All spiritual authors have their definitions. Barbara Bowe lists standard definitions of spirituality such as "relationship, journey, intimacy, horizon, way of life... and so forth."³ According to Bowe, spirituality is how we respond to the Ultimate Reality, “which both animates and transcends our bodily, physical selves.”⁴ Similarly, according to Ronald Rolheiser, spirituality is “how we do with the fire inside of us and how we channel our eros.”⁵ So spirituality is the way of living with the deepest motivation and strongest conviction about the ultimate meaning of life.

In Christianity, the ultimate meaning and purpose of human existence is revealed through Jesus Christ: to reach a spiritual union with God. In the Gospels, Jesus shows us a particular way of living filled with the Holy Spirit and striving for perfection, leading to that ultimate purpose.⁶ Christian spirituality is the way of following Jesus and living out what Jesus taught in the Gospel so that Christians are transformed and united with God in God’s glory.⁷

² Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 64.

³ Barbara E. Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 10.

⁴ Bowe, 11.

⁵ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 11.

⁶ Joann Wolski Conn, “Toward Spiritual Maturity,” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 236-37.

⁷ Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 240-41.

Christian spirituality is based on the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, which is rooted in the Hebrew Bible and extended in other New Testament literatures. The Bible is the primary source of Christian spirituality.⁸ Through the Holy Bible, we recognize God, who reveals and acts in human history. Through the Holy Bible, we know that God is concerned for humans, especially the poor and oppressed, reflected in Jesus, the Word of God, the Perfect Revelation of God, made flesh, and lived in history. Jesus is the perfect model for all Christians who are called to follow and imitate Him.

Christian spirituality is both a way of living and an academic discipline in the theological field. According to Sandra Schneiders, Christian spirituality is the study of lived Christian experiences.⁹ Christian spirituality is an interdisciplinary discipline that connects with other academic disciplines, such as sociology, theology, psychology, etc. More importantly, unlike other academic disciplines, Christian spirituality explains our ultimate questions and meanings about our lives that other academic disciplines could not provide.¹⁰

Christian spirituality, as a way of living, is not limited to interiority and mystical contemplation. Spirituality is the experience of God that is expressed through relationships with God, others, oneself, and nature. Spirituality includes the inner experience or encounter with God and the real life of the outer world with others and nature. Sheldrake writes: "Mystical union, therefore, becomes a new point of departure for a renewed practice of everyday discipleship."¹¹ The spiritual writer and pacifist Evelyn Underhill likewise asserts that the union with God impels the person toward an active and outward life.¹²

By nature, humans must know themselves (self-awareness) and live in solidarity with others to build up a human community. Similarly, spirituality has two dimensions: individuality and community, which incorporate persons more deeply into the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.¹³ Spirituality is not limited to private experiences or purely devotional or ascetical exercise but is a way of living publicly that includes interaction and participation of persons in social life.¹⁴

2. Justice for the Poor in Christian Spirituality

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines: "Justice is a moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor [...]. Justice toward humans requires respect for the rights of each other and the establishment of harmony in human relationships that promote equity concerning persons and the common

⁸ Bowe, 13.

⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 5-6.

¹⁰ Schneiders, 17-18.

¹¹ Philip F. Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," *Spiritus* 3 (Spring 2003), 25.

¹² Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: One World Publication, 1993), 172.

¹³ James Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 14.

¹⁴ Sheldrake, 20, 26.

good.”¹⁵ Justice, rooted in the Biblical teaching, is one of the primary concerns of Christians. In his 1967 encyclical on development, Pope Paul VI recognized that “The injustice of certain situations cries out for God’s attention.”¹⁶

In the Old Testament, justice for the poor is essential because God cares for the poor. God is the defender, protector, and liberator of the poor (cf. Ex 3: 8a). God listens to the cries of the poor and commands those who follow him to do likewise to those who are weak and defenseless.¹⁷ God commands the leaders of Israel to defend the poor so that justice might flourish among God’s people (cf. Ps 71: 1-11). Whoever laughs at the poor insults the God who made them (cf. Prov 17:5). In other words, poverty, injustice, and oppression, according to Gustavo Gutiérrez, are sins against God. Knowing and loving God are expressed through doing justice to the poor and the oppressed and establishing just relationships among humans.¹⁸ Justice for the poor is one of the prophets’ most important messages to restore the relationship with God. (cf. Is 1: 10-17; 58: 6-7; Jer 22:14-16; Hos 4: 1-2; 6:4-6).

In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, Jesus reveals the image of God as the God of the poor through his teachings and life. Jesus is born among the poor and lives among the poor. He reaches out to the sick, the sinners, and the rejected to associate with them.¹⁹ In his public ministry, Jesus declares his mission to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free (cf. Lk 4: 18). Finally, he dies among poor sinners to liberate humans from their sins. More importantly, in the parable of the final judgment (cf. Mt 25: 31-46), Jesus identifies himself with the poor. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37) is a classic example of how all Christians can become good neighbors to others by providing service to those in need.

Christians are called to follow Jesus and to continue his mission, which is to proclaim good news to the poor and to bring justice to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18). Gutiérrez states: “... to be followers of Jesus requires that they walk with and be committed to the poor.”²⁰ Thus, justice for the poor is at the root of Christian spirituality and is an essential requirement of the Christian spiritual journey. In Christianity, there is no separation between the vocation of Christians to a spiritual union with God in Christ and the Christian vocation to engage in social justice ministries.²¹ In other words, a genuine Christian spirituality can only flourish within association and solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, and the persecuted who are identified with Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cr 8: 9; Act 9: 1-5).²²

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II, 2nd ed.* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), no. 1807.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 30, accessed March 20, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html

¹⁷ Groody, 32, 38.

¹⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Ina and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), 194-95.

¹⁹ Groody, 49.

²⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 38.

²¹ Matthew L. Lamb, “Christian Spirituality and Social Justice,” *Horizons* 10 (1983), 34.

²² Lamb, 46 ; Ignacio Ellacuría, *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 283.

Moreover, the relationship with the poor is the condition for sharing the glory in the Kingdom of God. Through encountering their neighbors, humans encounter God. Through the love of their neighbors, humans love God.²³ Thus, on the last day, humans will be judged by how they treated the poor. The parables of Lazarus and the rich (cf. Lk 16:19-31) and the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25: 31-46) reveal the importance of taking care of the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the naked ... in inheriting eternal life. Doing justice for the poor is not an optional choice but an obligatory, divine order. Jesus warns that those who fail to serve the poor and the least will receive terrifying consequences (cf. Mt 25: 45-46).

II. The Poor, the Image of Christ for Saint Vincent

During the sixteenth century, in many European countries, the priesthood was one of the best ways to achieve power and wealth. Through entering the Church hierarchy, Vincent wanted to enjoy a luxurious and comfortable life. On September 23, 1600, Vincent de Paul was ordained to the priesthood.²⁴ Vincent tried his best to become rich and famous according to his plan. He became one of the chaplains of Queen Marguerite in 1609. After a short time in Clichy as a parish pastor, in 1613, Vincent entered the wealthy family of the Gondi to serve as a tutor to their sons. Living with the Gondi family, Vincent encountered peasants and their spiritual and material poverty. Gradually, he recognized that God was calling him to evangelize the poor.²⁵

With the support of the Gondi family, Vincent founded the Congregation of the Mission on April 17, 1625. With the cooperation of Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), on November 29, 1633, Vincent founded the Company of Daughters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. Vincent had worked steadfastly for the poor, religious, and clergy to the end of his life.²⁶ He rested in the Lord on September 27, 1660, but his spirit and works continue in his spiritual family. Pope Benedict XIII beatified Vincent on August 13, 1729. Vincent was canonized on June 16, 1737, by Pope Clement XII. Saint Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of charitable organizations and institutions in the Catholic Church.²⁷

Vincent understood the poor to be those burdened with hardships of all kinds: material, moral, and spiritual. In Vincent's time, the poor were the victims of the wars and conflicts, which destroyed villages and crops. The poor were also the sick in hospitals or their homes, the disabled, children, the elderly, and the prisoners.²⁸ According to Saint Vincent, ignorance and sin are the other kinds of poverty. During Vincent de Paul's life, the poor were spiritually and physically abandoned in France, where there were many civil and religious wars, epidemics, and famines. Undernourished, abused, frustrated, and illiterate, most people lived in poverty, fear, and suspicion of witchcraft.²⁹

²³ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 202.

²⁴ André Dodin, *Vincent de Paul and Charity: A Contemporary Portrait of His Life and Apostolic Spirit*, trans. Jean Marie Smith and Dennis Saunders (New York: New City Press, 1993), 17.

²⁵ Dodin, 23-26.

²⁶ Dodin, 46.

²⁷ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "St. Vincent de Paul," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 23, 2022, accessed March 19, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Vincent-de-Paul>.

²⁸ Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents* (New City Press, New York, 1985-2012), vol. XIIIb, 24, 43, 54. Future reference to this thirteen volume work will be noted with the letters CCD, followed by the volume number, and then the page number, for example, CCD XIIIb, 24, 43, 54.

²⁹ CCD XII, 4; Dodin, 11-13.

Through a sequence of events, Vincent encountered the poor, discovered the image of Christ in them, and discovered more deeply the mystery of God through these interactions. To Vincent, “Christ lives in the person of the poor. He continues to suffer in them.”³⁰ In other words, Christ revealed to Vincent and invited Vincent to love him in the poor.³¹ So, those who serve the poor’s physical and spiritual needs serve Jesus Christ, the foundation and center of Vincentian spirituality.

In Vincent’s view, Christ was not a general, abstract idea but a concrete person who was present in the poor, the sick, prisoners, enslaved persons, and abandoned children. Because of this identification with Christ, Vincent called the poor lords and masters. He encouraged his followers, saying: “Let us go and work with a new love in the service of the poor, looking even for the poorest 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.”³²

Furthermore, Vincent was convinced that when encountering the poor, the missionaries are evangelized by the poor.³³ The poor witness virtues such as humility, simplicity, faith, hope, hard work, and patience. Saint Vincent called it the school of the poor, “It is among them, among those poor people, that true religion and a living faith are preserved.”³⁴ The poor evangelize and teach the true meaning of religion.³⁵ Vincent recognized that the poor are the inheritance of Jesus. “We live on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of poor people. The poor people feed us.”³⁶

III. Justice for the Poor in Vincentian Spirituality

1. Justice for the Poor in Vincentian Teaching

Vincent was a person with a strict sense of justice. Vincent demanded that those who work with him be just.³⁷ Vincent did not view justice as an ordinary moral virtue but as an attribute of God humans must seek. He explained in a long conference on the words of Jesus: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice” (Mt 6: 33). Vincent affirmed that God established justice and that the justice of God is sovereign. In that conference, Vincent explained two sorts of justice in its scholastic meaning: commutative and distributive, both found in God.³⁸

Vincent considered justice to be so crucial that he encouraged his confreres to make God’s glory, kingdom, and justice “the primary concern of the interior life, faith, trust, love, spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, works, and troubles in the

³⁰ Robert P. Maloney, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor* (New York: New City Press, 2003), 26; CCD X, 680.

³¹ Roberto Gómez, “Saint Vincent: Mystic of Charity Between Action and Contemplation,” trans. John Rybolt, *Vincentiana* 63 (April – June 2019), 266.

³² Maloney, *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, 26- 27; CCD XIII, 540.

³³ *The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission*, 12, in Congregation of the Mission, *Constitutions and Rules* (Philadelphia: De Paul University, 1989).

³⁴ CCD XI, 190-191

³⁵ Pope Francis also writes: “The poor evangelize us and help us each day to discover the beauty of the Gospel” Pope Francis, “Message for the World Day” (November 18, 2018), <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/do-not-be-indifferent-to-the-cry-of-the-poor-7817>

³⁶ CCD XI, 191.

³⁷ Andrés Roman María Motto Gaglia, “The Relationship of Justice with Charity in Vincentian Thought,” in *Vincentiana* 52 (September-October 2008), 376.

³⁸ CCD XII, 114.

sight of God, the Sovereign Lord.”³⁹ Vincent emphasized, "God will reward us, based on justice and accounting of works."⁴⁰ For Vincent, justice was the referent point for all activities, advising that the sisters who work in the hospital walk in God's presence and "raise their heart to His Divine Goodness and Justice."⁴¹

Doing justice means returning to the others what is due regarding their rights. Consequently, doing charity is the obligation of justice. "It's a matter of both gratitude and justice that we must render these duties of charity to the poor persons."⁴² As the saint wrote in a letter: "There is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice."⁴³ Justice is the context of charity; both are the basis for how to treat others. Justice and charity demand the same attitude: going out of oneself to care for the other's good. The practice of justice is a way of serving the poor by giving them food, clothes, medicines, and all other things that are due to them by their rights.⁴⁴

During his lifetime, Vincent cared that the poor be treated with justice even though he had to confront the state's authority. He defended the poor by appealing to the Prime Ministers of France, Richelieu, and Mazarin, to alleviate the people's misery and to stop the wars. Vincent even opposed Mazarin when he pursued the wars because the Prime Minister did not care for the poor. Vincent also appealed to Pope Innocent X, asking him to intervene for the people's peace.⁴⁵

Vincent repeatedly reminded his followers that they should respect the dignity of the poor, which belongs to human beings while serving the poor or accompanying them. Vincent required the same respect for the poor as was given to everyone. In a conference, Vincent strongly reminded his followers to give the poor what they provided the priests. He continued: "You are committing an injustice against these poor people, some of whom are totally innocent, who are locked up and cannot complain of the injustice you commit against them. Yes, I call it an injustice."⁴⁶ So, in Vincentian spirituality, serving the poor is to bring justice to the poor.

2. Justice for the Poor: Responsibility of Vincentian Missionaries in Today's World

Saint Vincent de Paul's legacy emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs of the poor. The saint founded the Congregation of the Mission to follow Christ and evangelize the poor.⁴⁷ The *Constitutions* of the Congregation confirms: "The characteristics in the work of evangelization which the Congregation possess is clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor."⁴⁸ In the formula of vows according to the *Constitutions*, Vincentian members declare their intentions to follow Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer of the poor, for the sake of evangelizing the poor.⁴⁹

³⁹ CCD XII, 112.

⁴⁰ CCD XII, 114.

⁴¹ CCD XIIIb, 143.

⁴² CCD XI, 194; Gaglia, 389.

⁴³ CCD II, 68.

⁴⁴ Gaglia, 375-76, 391-92.

⁴⁵ Gaglia, 391.

⁴⁶ CCD XI, 300.

⁴⁷ *The Constitutions*, 1.

⁴⁸ *The Constitutions*, 12.

⁴⁹ *The Constitutions*, 58, §2.

Saint Vincent encourages his followers to care for the poor spiritually and corporally, affectively and effectively.⁵⁰ Thus, when sent to preach the Good News to the poor, the Vincentian missionaries had the responsibility to help the poor overcome their material and spiritual poverty. The *Constitutions* reminds the missionaries “to pay attention to the realities of present-day society, especially the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's good, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization.”⁵¹ In other words, the Vincentian missionaries are responsible for bringing justice to the poor. The *Final Document* of the 2016 General Assembly reminds the members that the Vincentians should listen to the cries of the poor, the refugees, the immigrants, and those who are excluded.⁵²

Vincentian members must take concrete actions to help the poor, especially the most abandoned. The *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission* states:

Following St. Vincent, who, like the Good Samaritan of the gospel parable (cf. Lk 10: 30-37), gave effective help to the abandoned, provinces and members should earnestly strive to serve those rejected by society and those who are victims of disasters and injustices of every kind. We should also assist those who suffer from forms of moral poverty. Members should endeavor to implement the demands of social justice and evangelical charity.⁵³

According to Rolheiser, justice is about changing the system to find the reason for poverty.⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II reminds the Vincentian missionaries to search out more than ever the causes of poverty and to find adaptable, concrete solutions.⁵⁵ Bringing justice to the poor requires personal contact with the poor and suffering, simultaneous development of resources, and collaboration with the wealthy and those in power. The Congregation of the Mission integrates evangelization and human promotion with special efforts in its ministries: spirituality of the poor and spirituality of justice.⁵⁶

In 2006, the Congregation of the Mission and other leaders of the International Vincentian Family created an International Commission to Promote Systemic Change. The methodology, mainly through projects, aims to help the poor and oppressed escape poverty and misery.⁵⁷ The working group, Systemic Change, “... aims beyond providing food, clothing, and shelter and alleviating immediate needs. It enables people to identify

⁵⁰ Patricia Nava and Robert Paul Maloney, “Systemic Change: The Theme of the Vincentian Family for the Upcoming Two Years,” *Vincentiana* 52 (January-April 2008), 73.

⁵¹ *The Constitutions*, 12.

⁵² The 2016 General Assembly, “Final Document: Four Hundred Years of Fidelity to the Charism and the New Evangelization,” in *Vincentiana* 60 (July – September 2016), 418.

⁵³ *The Constitutions*, 18.

⁵⁴ Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 169.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, “Message to General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1986,” quoted in John Freund, “The Challenge of Pope John Paul II, July 29, 2020, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://johnfreund.net/2020/07/29/the-challenge-of-pope-john-paul-ii/>

⁵⁶ Paul Dan Broklik, “Vincentian Spirituality: A Spirituality of the Poor? A Spirituality of Justice?” *VincenWiki*, accessed March 20, 2024, https://wiki.famvin.org/en/Spirituality_of_the_Poor%3F_Spirituality_of_Justice%3F

⁵⁷ International Commission of the Vincentian Family to Promote Systemic Change, *Manual for Systemic Change*, trans. Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli (Curitiba, Brazil: ICQ Editora Gráfica e Pré-Impressão Ltda, 2017), 9.

the root causes of their poverty and to create strategies, including advocacy, to change those structures that keep them in poverty.”⁵⁸

The apostolate of the Congregation of the Mission should be incorporated into the Church's pastoral activity and conform with the documents and instructions of the Holy See.⁵⁹ Thus, in the *Final Document* of the 2022 General Assembly, the Congregation mentions that evangelizing the poor is to build a prophetic and synodal Church. Concretely, the *Final Document* outlines several activities, such as listening to the voices of marginalized geographically and existentially, those whose lives are precarious, and who live "in need of the light of the Gospel" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 20). The *Final Document* instructs Vincentian to address contemporary problems, such as to defend the victims of hunger and poverty caused by COVID-19, wars, and human trafficking; listen to and hear the survivors of sexual abuse who have been victims of abuse by our confreres; work to protect our common home and promote systemic change as our specific method of evangelizing. The General Assembly calls for promoting evangelization projects with the poor and the excluded.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Christian spirituality has been misunderstood as a private activity in a personal relationship with God. However, a genuine Christian spirituality requires two dimensions: relationships with God and neighbors. The Lord is revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor so that serving the poor is the departure for following Jesus Christ.⁶¹ Pope Francis reminds Christians to become instruments of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor. To do so demands attentiveness to the cry of the poor and a willingness to come to their aid.⁶² Saint Vincent de Paul heard the cries of the poor and recognized the image of Christ in the poor. He brought justice to the poor by evangelizing them and helping them to overcome their poverty. Today, the Vincentian missionaries, whose charism is connected with the poor, study the conditions and the injustices that brought such poverty about so that they may have concrete plans for long-term improvement. Vincentian ministry is more than social work, however. The Vincentian missionary imitates Jesus Christ and continues His mission.⁶³ In the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission*: “Through the intimate union of prayer and apostolate, the Vincentian missionary becomes a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer.”⁶⁴ Vincentian spirituality, therefore, brings together “justice and contemplation, commitment to the poor and genuine worship of God.”⁶⁵

⁵⁸ The Leaders of the Vincentian Family in North America, “Systemic Change Resources,” accessed March 20, 2024, <https://vinformation.org/en/vincentian-formation-resources/systemic-change-resources/>

⁵⁹ *The Constitutions*, 13.

⁶⁰ The 2022 General Assembly, “Final Document: Calls to Revitalize the Identity of the CM,” 4, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://cmglobal.org/en/files/2023/05/Final-Documents-CALLS-TO-REVITALIZE-THE-IDENTITY-OF-THE-CM.pdf>.

⁶¹ Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 38.

⁶² Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 187, accessed March 20, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

⁶³ Broklik, “Vincentian Spirituality: A Spirituality of the Poor? A Spirituality of Justice?”

⁶⁴ *The Constitutions*, 42.

⁶⁵ Rolheiser, “Justice and Spirituality.”

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