

Reflection #2

The First Rule (1617)

Second Theme: The Purpose and the Spirit of the Association

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of *Lectio Divina*:

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, may your presence fill the depths of my being and may your image enflame my heart so that I might walk in the light of your life! In this way I will be able to think as you thought, to act as you acted, to speak as you spoke, to dream as you dreamed and to love as you loved. Amen.



❖ **Second Theme: *The Purpose and the Spirit of the Association***

○ Reflection:

The purpose of the Association is what we desire to achieve through it and what we desire to achieve is service.

Every Catholic Association has a purpose: to love God and to love the neighbor. Those are characteristics that the gospels highlight. Saint Vincent taught us to love the neighbor through service on behalf of those living in poverty. Such was his initiative, which was quite novel at that time. *The Official Rule of the Confraternity at Châtillon* (December 1617) reveals the depths of Vincent's heart, his compassion for the poor, his heart rooted in Jesus Christ and his talent as an organizer.

In this Rule everything was carefully considered: the spirit and the purpose of the Association, the spiritual life of the members, the manner of serving and caring for the infirm and the procedure to be followed in the election of officers.

The Rule assures continuity in the work that is rooted in the gospel. Thus all the volunteers are servants of those living in poverty. According to the Rule *“each of the Servants of the Poor will prepare their food and serve them for an entire day. The Prioress will begin, the Treasurer will follow, then the Assistant, and so forth, one after the other, in the order in which they were received, up to the latest arrival. Afterward, the Prioress will start over, and the others will follow, observing the order begun, so that, by this continual rotation, the patients will be served always in line with this organization. Nevertheless, all will be done in such a way that, if one of them falls ill, she will be excused from her service, informing the Prioress so that the latter can continue the succession with the others”*¹.

Its Purpose: *“The Confraternity of Charity was instituted to honor its patron Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother, and to assist the sick poor **corporally and spiritually** in places where it is established”* (CCD:XIIIb:5).

Its Name: *“The confraternity will be called Confraternity of Charity, in imitation of the Charity Hospital in Rome, and the persons of which it will be mainly composed will be called Servants of the Poor or of the Charity”* (CCD:XIIIb:9).

Its Patron: *“Since, in all confraternities, the holy custom of the Church is to propose a patron, and since the works gain their value and dignity from the purpose for which they are performed, the Servants of the Poor will take for patron Our Lord Jesus”* (CCD:XIIIb:9).

Its Members: *“The confraternity will be composed of women: widows, wives and unmarried women, whose piety and virtue are known and whose perseverance can be counted on. Nevertheless, the wives and unmarried women must have the permission of their husbands or parents”* (CCD:XIIIb:9).

Number of Members: *“To avoid the confusion that comes from too large a number, it should be limited to twenty, until further orders”* (CCD:XIIIb:9).

The tasks of the leaders: Vincent described with much detail the tasks of the leaders: prioress, assistants and treasurer (their term of office and their responsibilities). Vincent insisted that the members should meet together on a monthly basis, they were to pray together and were to treat one another with respect. The accounting was to be done in a transparent manner (for this reason two persons were appointed to

¹ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Miriam Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIIIb, p. 12; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XIIIb:12.

do the accounting). **We can see that these were wonderful organizational structures that can be useful to us even now in the twenty-first century.**

A spirituality of communion: *“They will cherish one another as persons whom Our Lord has united and bound together by His love; they will visit and console one another in their afflictions and illnesses; will go as a body to the funeral of the members who die”* (CCD:XIIIb:7).

We find in the Rule many of the distinctive elements of the Confraternities which would be developed later and which would give the Confraternity a specific spirituality. These elements include the ecclesial character of the Association, its lay membership, the fact that its members would be mostly women, a concern for holistic service on behalf of those living in poverty and a concern for the organization of the Confraternity and the training of its members.

- Words of Saint Vincent:

“We are to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire.”
(CCD:XI:25)

Vincent de Paul

(If you want to read the whole document that contains the First Rule of the Confraternity that was given to the members on December 8th, 1617 you can visit our website at: www.aic-international.org).