



## TRAINING REFLECTION: JANUARY 2018

# The Prophetic Dimension of the Vincentian Charism in light of the Social Doctrine of the Church

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### 8. By way of conclusion: visions and dreams

We can say with Mother Guillemin that ***“there is nothing more timely in the world today than the spirit of Saint Vincent”***. For her this was one of the great discoveries and one of the greatest marvels that occurred during the Council. She expressed this idea in the following manner: *“Every time some idea was proposed which appeared new I said to myself, with a deep sense of personal, filial satisfaction: “Saint Vincent taught us that!” Not with the same words of course, but using the words and language of his epoch. His thought had that purity, that clarity, that authenticity of doctrine which has never been denied or opposed by what the church has taught ... let us rejoice at being [children] of such a father”* (Mother Guillemin, Instructions to the Sisters Servants, Responsibility for the Local Community, 1966).

I would be happy if, overcoming the distance of time, this were the sentiment that each one of us were strengthening this morning.

Allow me to invite you to deepen your understanding of the Church’s social doctrine since this will help us to remain faithful in four essential aspects of our life:

- faithful to **humankind and to the signs of the time**
- faithful to **Christ and the gospel**
- faithful to **the Church and its mission in the world**
- faithful to **the charism of our Founder.**

In addition to the treasure of faith we have another great treasure, the Vincentian charism and paraphrasing Saint Paul ***“we hold this treasure in earthen vessels”*** (2 Corinthians 4:7). Let us take the time to ask ourselves if in our every day existence we are **prophets**? What do we proclaim? To whom and to what realities do we **give witness**? Let us then confront our responses with the prophetic life of our Founder, with the life of our prophets whom we have

cited in this presentation and with the life of the many other prophets whom we know in the Vincentian Family.

Let us remember that the prophets are those who have the courage to **raise their eyes and to stare into the eyes of God**, to encounter God face to face, like Moses, but who also **remove their sandals** before the burning bush, that is, they **cast aside their certainty** and security and they look for another point of reference as did Mary of Nazareth. Like the potter in the book of Jeremiah, **they are willing to divest themselves of that which is of no use**. They encounter Yahweh and do not die because the prophets are able to see God (at times in an intimate manner). When they hear the call, they are fearful and want to flee like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jonah. They expect to die in the desert but when they hear the call of God they are able to say: ***“here I am, send me! You have duped me!”***

As they respond to the signs of the time that arise in the midst of our world, the prophets are called to valiantly reproduce the **boldness, the creativity and the holiness of our Founders** and to do this by being **faithful to our charism** and by adapting our charism to the situations and the needs of our time (*Vita consecrate*, #37).

The Council has told us: ***“One is entitled to think that the future of humanity is in the hands of those men who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism”*** (*Gaudium et spes*, #31). More recently Pope John Paul II has stated: ***“Now is the time for a new “creativity” in charity”*** (*Novo Milenio Ineunte*, #50).

We often offend the Creator and the Savior when we embrace the pessimism of this age and we can understand why pessimism is the philosophy of life for those persons who do not believe in God.

In the spirit of Jesus we ought to cultivate that **hope** that allows us (as Saint Paul states in his letter to the Romans) to **look with confidence at the future** of creation and humanity, ***“groaning in labor pains even until now”***, certain that **this is the path to liberation** (cf. Roman 8:18-20). **Hope in the Kingdom** is not verified by passive resignation but by anticipating this Kingdom through (no matter how small) **specific, partial liberations** ... for these small steps **lead to a future of fullness**.

We remember that the prophets not only plan but with their life they attempt to **make their dreams a reality** and this is **hope ... this is the Christian utopia**. Therefore they are willing to **lose their life** little by little or, if need be, in a single stroke.

The prophets have a distinct sensitivity. Their heart is inflamed with the certainty that God’s creativity cannot be held captive. It is necessary therefore to be always attentive, to stay awake and to look at the reality with new eyes because at any moment something unexpected and surprising might occur (Cf., B. González Buelta, *Ver o perecer*).

Let us listen to the prophet Joel: ***“Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions”*** Joel 3:1).

We remember that for the people of Israel *visions* and *dreams* are divine communications. Our world, the poor and the church have the right and the need to share in our visions and our dreams. The above text from the book of the prophet Joel invites us to **dream with God, to dream the dreams of God for his people**, to foresee a better world and to work with all our strength so that this dream becomes a reality. Is this not what Vincent de Paul did? Is this not what so many “prophets” did who preceded us in sharing and living the Vincentian charism?

When we have visions ... when we dream about wonderful things for the poor whom God has entrusted to us ... when it seems that all these things are impossible ... **then we realize that these are the dreams of God** and we struggle so that they do become a reality. Let us deepen our understanding of the Word of God ... let us deepen our understanding of the Church’s social doctrine ... let us deepen our understanding of the Vincentian charism ... and then we will see how this new understanding will encourage us and animate us to have great dreams and great visions ... visions and dreams that provide **the best for each one of the poor women and men whom God has entrusted to us**. So be it.

### **AIC’s suggestion for reflection:**

1. What is it that Mother Guillermin says about Saint Vincent? Discuss it in your group and say if you agree or not and why.
2. What are the four great loyalties that we maintain thanks to the Social Doctrine of the Church?
3. Remember that through our baptism we are all PROPHETS. What reflections come to your mind having read this text? Are we true prophets who continue moving forward and following the call of the Lord our God, regardless of the “storms”? (Work on these questions individually and then as a group)
4. What are our dreams, 400 years after having been founded?