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The Uniqueness of the Vincentian Vow of Poverty in the Light of Canon 600 in the Contemporary Society

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Abstract: Particularly in light of Canons 600, which describe the canonical regulations of the Catholic Church, the Vincentian vow of poverty occupies a special place in religious life. Deeply ingrained in St. Vincent de Paul's spirituality, this vow entails a life of service, simplicity, and solidarity with the impoverished in addition to a sacrifice of worldly belongings. By contrasting the Vincentian vow of poverty with the rules outlined in Canon 600, this study aims to examine the vow's distinctiveness. In this era of consumerism, individualism, and social inequality, it aims to investigate how members of the Congregation of the Mission understand and uphold the commitment. The paper's goals are to analyze the Vincentian vow's theological and practical aspects, comprehend its significance in a Vincentian missionary's life, and draw attention to its difficulties and applicability in the contemporary world. The growing necessity for religious communities to modify traditional vows to the realities of modern living while staying true to their charism serves as the rationale for this study. With its radical simplicity and dedication to the impoverished, the Vincentian Vow of Poverty provides a unique example of religious life that can motivate people and communities to work toward social justice and equity. This study does, however, recognize several limits, such as the variety of interpretations within the Vincentian family and the larger international environment in which these vows are carried out. Furthermore, assessing the direct application of Canon 600 across diverse cultural contexts and religious practices may present difficulties for the research. Finally, when analyzed through the prism of Canon 600, the distinctiveness of the Vincentian vow of poverty provides significant insights into the interplay among law, spirituality, and social participation in a world that is changing quickly.

Key words: Vow of Poverty, Canon 600, Charism, Mission, Solidarity with the Poor

1.1 Background of the Study

The Vincentian Vow of poverty, grounded in the life and teachings of St. Vincent de Paul, are a profound expression of religious life, which uniquely combines the principles of poverty, with a special emphasis on service to the poor and marginalized. When examined through the lights of canon law (specifically, can 600), the uniqueness of the Vincentian vow of poverty becomes clearer, especially in the context of contemporary society where social, economic, and cultural changes are significantly shaping religious life and vocation.

Canon 600 speaks about the vow of poverty, which is taken to ensure that religious individuals live in simplicity, free from the distractions of material wealth. Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, said that poverty is not merely an external renunciation but a deep commitment to the values of the Kingdom of God, where all possessions are seen as gifts for the common good.¹ In the context of the Vincentian vows, this vow is not just about abstaining from material goods but is integrated with the call to serve the poor. The Vincentian vow of poverty has a unique emphasis on solidarity with the poor, mirroring St. Vincent's example.

In today's world, where individualism and consumerism are dominant cultural forces, the Vincentian vow of poverty stand as a prophetic witness to the values of solidarity, community, and service. The distinctive feature of this vow in contemporary society its focus is on the poor and marginalized, a call to live in a way that directly addresses social injustice and inequality. Mangan, R. noted, the Vincentian vow of poverty, in its essence, respond to the most pressing issues of contemporary society, particularly the need for a deep commitment to social justice.² This commitment calls Vincentian priests and brothers to not only live a life of poverty, but to do so in a way that directly confronts societal structures that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

Ford M., in his book the New Evangelization and Vincentian Religious Life, articulated that, Today, the Vincentian community must navigate the tension between tradition and modernity, seeking ways to remain faithful to the original spirit of the Vows while adapting to the contemporary world.³ These calls for a renewed understanding of the vow, where religious life is not static but continues to evolve to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized in a rapidly changing world. The Vincentian vow of poverty remains a powerful expression of religious life that resonates deeply in contemporary society, especially in a world that often overlooks the plight of the poor. Canon 600 offers a framework that, while rooted in traditional religious values, provides a context for a radical and committed response to social and economic inequality. The uniqueness of the Vincentian vow of poverty lies in its specific call to serve the poor and marginalized, and in their enduring relevance in a world that continues to grapple with issues of poverty, justice, and human dignity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is lack of commitment of service to the poor. The deeper problem we could solve is the challenge of living a life lack of radical dedication to God and to the mission. Currently, the Vincentians live a life that is not fully oriented toward their charism.

1.3.0 Purpose of the Study

This vow is a central part of the vocation of those who belong to this congregation, and they shape the way members live out their faith and mission. The purpose of this study is to enable the members of the Congregation of the Mission to live out their commitment to evangelization and to embody the values of humility, simplicity, mortification, meekness and zeal in their lives. By taking the vow of poverty, the

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* (Vatican Press, 1996), 33.

² MANGAN R., *Vincentian Spirituality and the Call to Social Justice* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2009), 41.

³ FORD M., *The New Evangelization and Vincentian Religious Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 123.

Vincentians seek to follow in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, whose life was dedicated to serving the poor, educating others, and fostering a spirit of charity and justice.

1.3.1 Objectives of the Study

The study investigated the central importance of the vow of poverty in the congregation of the mission and its challenges in the contemporary time. Creates awareness and sensitize the members to overcome the effects of contemporary challenges such as individualism, secularism, too much social media and tribalism. To show the Vincentians have a strong missionary commitment, particularly to evangelize the poor and the underserved. To help the contemporary society to overcome the challenges in living the vow of poverty. Yet the Vincentians have some issues, challenges in actually living by the vow of poverty.

1.4 Justification of the Study

The justifications for studying the vows of the CM, is to understanding the spiritual and ecclesial foundations of the congregation. The vow of poverty of the Vincentians is integral to the community's spiritual and apostolic life. By studying this vow, one gains deeper insight into the charism of the Congregation and its commitment to serving the Church and the marginalized. This vow is not just personal commitment but is tied to the mission of evangelization and service that the Congregation carries out, particularly among the poor.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is for every individual member of the congregation. For the superiors, formators, and brothers of the congregation of the mission. This vow is not only shape the lives of the Vincentian priests and brothers but also influence the broader Catholic mission of service to the poor and marginalized. Through their commitment of the vow, the members of the Congregation of the Mission continue to live out the charism of St. Vincent de Paul, being a powerful witness to the transformative power of the Gospel in the world.

1.6 Book review on the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty

The vow of poverty, as an evangelical counsel, continues to challenge and inspire both theology and lived religious experience across the world. From a global perspective, writers such as Stefano Maria Pasini, Alberto Perlasca, Roberta Richini, Sugawara, Giulietta Bodrito, and Pope John Paul II have provided rich theological and canonical insights that form the universal foundation for understanding this counsel. Pasini (1995) views poverty not merely as material deprivation but as a deep spiritual disposition rooted in total trust and dependence on God. Drawing from Mark 10:17-22, he underscores that authentic Christian poverty involves radical detachment and openness to divine providence, reflecting the self-emptying love of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9. Perlasca (2002), meanwhile, discusses the canonical dimension of poverty in relation to the stipends of the Holy Mass, emphasizing transparency and communal use of offerings. His canonical interpretation situates poverty within a framework of ecclesial accountability, aligning the practice with mission and service to the poor.

Richini (2001) broadens this by examining poverty as a collective witness within religious institutes. Based on canon 640, she stresses that the Church itself must embody a "poor Church for the poor," inspired by Vatican II's *Perfectae Caritatis* (13). Here, poverty becomes a testimony of solidarity and shared charity, calling religious institutes to concrete acts of communal simplicity and generosity. Similarly, Sugawara (2000) delves into canon 668 to explain the radical renunciation of material goods,

portraying voluntary poverty as both ascetic discipline and apostolic witness. This total detachment imitates Christ's own poverty and transforms it into a tool for evangelization and social renewal. Giulietta Bodrito (2005) advances this theological reflection by linking consecrated poverty to baptismal consecration, describing it as a deepened covenantal relationship with God. She affirms that consecrated life, in its poverty, chastity, and obedience, becomes a visible sign of the Church's mission in the world. Pope John Paul II (1983) complements these insights by clarifying the spiritual and ecclesial meaning of consecration: a covenant of love and communion that mirrors Christ's total dedication to the Father. Thus, in the global context, the vow of poverty is simultaneously theological, spiritual, and apostolic a witness of divine love expressed in service and solidarity.

From a continental level and more contextualized perspective, authors such as Rangarirai Mutanga and O. Carm. (2023) explore how the evangelical counsel of poverty resonates with African spirituality and social realities. They interpret poverty as practical solidarity with those for whom deprivation is not a choice but a condition imposed by social injustice. Drawing on Christ's example, they emphasize that evangelical poverty must move beyond theory into transformative engagement with the marginalized, echoing Pope Francis's call to touch the flesh of the poor Christ. In this view, poverty teaches solidarity, sharing, and joy in simplicity, challenging religious to live counter-culturally in societies marked by materialism and inequality. Poverty becomes a means of evangelizing through compassion and justice, uniting consecrated persons with the struggles of the poor while fostering deeper union with God.

At the regional level, writers such as Anitren Migiharacea (2008) focus on the formative dimension of the evangelical counsels, especially poverty. Migiharacea highlights the importance of formation in cultivating spiritual maturity, detachment from materialism, and commitment to communal living among seminarians and religious. He stresses that proper formation should integrate the theological, canonical, and psychological dimensions of poverty, guiding future priests and consecrated persons toward humility and simplicity. His perspective reflects the Church's adaptation of global principles to the African ecclesial and cultural context, emphasizing inculturation of the vow of poverty within local charisms, including those of Vincentian spirituality.

At the local level, John O. Okello (2023) contributes a canonical and practical perspective on the vow of poverty, emphasizing dependence on one's institute and simplicity of life. Referring to canons 668 and 669, he clarifies that religious poverty involves relinquishing personal control over material goods and working not for profit but for the sustenance of the community and service to the poor. Poverty, for Okello, is a concrete expression of trust in divine providence and communal responsibility. His Kenyan context reflects growing attention to accountability, communal sharing, and mission-oriented work among consecrated persons, aligning with the Vincentian ideal of being with and for the poor.

Across these perspectives, a clear knowledge gap emerges concerning the Vincentian understanding of the vow of poverty. While global and African theologians and canonists provide a robust framework, few address how the Vincentian charism uniquely integrates poverty with evangelization and social justice. In the Vincentian tradition, poverty does not imply total material deprivation but rather communal sharing and solidarity with the poor. It demands that all possessions and stipends serve the mission of evangelizing and uplifting the marginalized. The Vincentian vow of poverty thus represents a spirituality of action an interior disposition manifest in external service.

Bridging this gap requires situating Vincentian poverty within both global canonical norms (such as canon 600) and local realities marked by inequality and need. As seen in East African and Kenyan contexts, Vincentian poverty offers a model of lived Gospel simplicity that transforms communities through service and love. It integrates prayer, work, and solidarity with the poor as one holistic expression of consecration. Consequently, this research aims to illuminate the uniqueness of the Vincentian vow of poverty a dynamic synthesis of spirituality, mission, and justice that embodies the love of Christ poor, humble, and servant of all.

1.7 Uniqueness of the Vincentian Vow of Poverty

The Vincentian Vow of Poverty, made by members of the Congregation of the Mission started by St. Vincent de Paul, is a special way of showing religious devotion that is strongly connected to helping the poor. It is different from general evangelical poverty, which focuses on giving up material things to reach spiritual perfection. Instead, the Vincentian way of poverty is focused on being active in service and mission. It's not just about living simply for personal holiness, but about being humbler and more effective in serving those who are forgotten or in need.

This vow is one of the four Vincentian vows: poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability. It combines spiritual practices with real-world service. The Vincentian way sees poverty as a means to connect with the poor, promoting humility, sharing, and letting go of material things so that members can truly understand and help those they are serving. Unlike some religious forms of poverty that involve living apart from society, Vincentian poverty is lived out in the world, especially in places like missions, parishes, hospitals, schools and other places where people in need are cared for. The vow also involves sharing belongings together, which means Vincentians don't keep personal property for themselves. Instead, they use resources together as a community to support their mission.

This article looks into the special spirit of the Vincentian vow of poverty, rooted in the life and mission of St. Vincent de Paul and the Congregation of the Mission. It covers the society's history, its charism, content, nature and its purpose of spreading the Good News to the poor. Then, it delves into what the vow of poverty means, as explained in the Common Rules, Constitutions, and Statutes.

1.8 Brief History and Nature of the Society

The Congregation of the Mission was started in 1625 by St. Vincent de Paul. Its main goal was to help poor people in rural areas and to teach priests. From the start, the group had a strong desire to spread the faith to different places. As Karackavayalil describes, the Vincentian way of life includes being active, moving forward, going to the edges of society, and not staying still.⁴ This early energy helped the group spread their mission work throughout France and even to other countries.

One of the first big expansions happened in North Africa, where Vincentian missionaries helped Christian slaves who were captured by pirates. Their work wasn't just about helping people in need; it was also about giving them spiritual support. Maloney says, they provided comfort through their preaching, teaching, missionary work, and giving sacraments to slaves in the prisons and ships of Tunis

⁴ Cf. ANIL THOMAS KARACKAVAYALIL, "Revitalizing the Vincentian Identity in the Context of Mission Ad Gentes," *Studia Vincentiana* 1, no. 1 (2024): 27.

and Algiers.⁵ This showed the Congregation's strong belief in helping those who were forgotten or left out, a value that still matters today.

Another important mission was in Madagascar, where the early missionaries faced serious health problems and tough conditions. Even with these difficulties, they kept working to spread the faith. José María Román, explains that they translated religious teachings into the local language and made changes in worship practices to fit the culture.⁶ This ability to adapt and respect local traditions was a key part of the Congregation's early efforts to reach people around the world.

The Congregation of the Mission is a society of apostolic life of pontifical right. It includes secular priests and brothers who don't take formal vows but live together in a community, focusing on mission work. Their main goal is based on both spiritual beliefs and active service. As Jean Morin says, the spirit of Christ is the spirit of the mission, and so Christ is the rule of the Mission.⁷ This shows how deeply connected the Congregation is to Christ's teachings.

Vincentians don't just work alone; they live in what is called a community for the mission. This term, used by Hugh O'Donnell, means that living together is not just support for the mission but is part of the mission itself.⁸ So, community and mission go hand in hand and are both key parts of who Vincentians are. In terms of values, the Vincentian tradition is built around five main virtues: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and a strong desire to help others. These values are shown through real, loving service to the poor. As Richard explains, Vincentians are called to a practical, affective love that expresses itself in real service to the poor.⁹

In the Vincentian tradition, taking a vow of poverty means more than just giving up things like money or possessions. It's about deeply believing in and living with the poor, sharing their struggles and joys. This way of life includes living simply, living together with others, and using what you have wisely and carefully. As noted in the Vincentian Constitutions, "the vow of poverty makes our service of the poor both possible and credible."¹⁰ This vow is based on the example of Jesus Christ, who lived a life of poverty, service, and humility. The Vincentian vow of poverty asks members to follow Christ by letting go of attachment to material things. This helps their service to the poor to be real and trustworthy.

Vincentian poverty creates a community focused on service. The shared life in this community is more than just sharing possessions. Instead, the shared goods are meant to build a sense of brotherhood, making sure everyone's needs are cared for, helping each other in real ways, and ending differences caused by money and wealth. As the Constitution of the congregation discuss, the needs of the Congregation require a way of life that is simple but enough to help carry out its mission.¹¹ Although members choose to live with personal poverty, they also need resources to do their work in sharing the

⁵ Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, "The Poor, Our Masters," *Vincentiana* 39, no. 3 (1995): 216.

⁶ Cf. JOSÉ MARÍA ROMÁN, "The Vincentians in Madagascar," *Vincentiana* 38, no. 2 (1994): 190-191.

⁷ Cf. JEAN MORIN, "Reflections on the Common Life of the Vincentian Missionary," *Vincentiana* 44, no. 4 (2000): 382.

⁸ Cf. HUGH O'DONNELL, "Community for the Mission," *Vincentiana* 43, no. 1 (1999): 41.

⁹ Cf. RICHARD BENSON, "Charity in the Vincentian Tradition," *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 18, no. 1 (1997): 21.

¹⁰ CONSTITUTIONS AND STATUTES OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, 1984, C.33.

¹¹ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, CONSTITUTIONS AND STATUTES OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, 1984, C.32.

Gospel effectively. The motto of the congregation is “He has sent me to evangelize the poor.”¹² This motto is reflecting the Vincentian mission to serve the spiritual and material needs of the poor.

The Vincentian vow of poverty is based on the belief that by helping the poor, members are actually serving Christ. The poor are viewed as representing Christ, and helping them is seen as the real way to honor God. This idea shows the deep spiritual meaning of the vow, and how it helps both individuals and the community grow in holiness.

1.9 The Nature of the Vow of Poverty in the Congregation of the Mission

The vow of poverty professed by members of the Congregation of the Mission is a private vow, made through its legitimate superior. The members, by the sacred bond of vows of chastity, poverty, Stability and obedience, are consecrated to God.¹³ Vincentians embrace the vow of poverty as part of a sacred bond but not as a religious vow in the strict sense used for religious institutes. By reason of the bond which arises from sacred vows, incorporated members dedicate themselves to the Congregation and its works.¹⁴ The Congregation of the Mission is a clerical society of apostolic life, not a religious institute. Hence, the members do not profess religious vows in the canonical sense but rather sacred bonds by vow typical of societies of apostolic life.¹⁵

Vincentians do profess the vow of poverty, but not as a religious vow. Rather, it is a simple, perpetual vow made in the context of a society of apostolic life. The vow is perpetual (not temporary), usually made after initial formation and incorporation into the Congregation. It is simple, not solemn, in canonical terms.¹⁶ It carries many of the same obligations as a religious vow (e.g., regarding property), but it is governed by the proper law of the Congregation, not by the norms for religious institutes.

1.10 The Content of the Vow of Poverty in the Congregation of the Mission

The vow of poverty in the Congregation entails a commitment to live in communal simplicity, detachment from material possessions, and a renunciation of independent use or disposal of temporal goods. They shall regard themselves as bound by their vow to avoid all appearance of luxury, immoderate gain, or accumulation of money.¹⁷ This includes: Living a simple lifestyle in line with the poor they serve. Not possessing or using goods independently. Using material goods only with the permission of superiors. Recognizing that any income or property acquired belongs to the Congregation.

1.11 Poverty in the Proper Laws of the Congregation of the Mission

Poverty, as practiced by the Congregation of the Mission, is based on the Common Rules of St. Vincent de Paul. These rules ask members to live simply, not be too attached to things they own, and rely on God’s care. The Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation repeat this teaching, focusing on sharing with others, taking care of what we have responsibly, and standing with the poor. In the congregation local leaders help adjust how poverty is lived out to fit the needs and situations of each place, while still keeping the main Vincentian idea of poverty as a way to serve others. The General assemblies of the

¹² Luke 4:18

¹³ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *Constitutions*, no. 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 28

¹⁵ cf. *CANON* 731 §2.

¹⁶ Cf. *CANONS*, 1192 §1; c. 731 §2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Statutes*, no.3.

Congregation keep updating how poverty should be lived in a real and meaningful way, making sure people stay accountable and develop spiritual discipline. The traditions within the Congregation encourage humility and a focus on missions, connecting personal poverty with the bigger goal of helping the poor through evangelization.

1.12 Poverty in the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission

The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, written by St. Vincent de Paul and promulgated in 1658, provide the foundational spiritual and communal guidelines for members of the Congregation. The evangelical counsels embraced by the Congregation are chastity, poverty, stability and obedience. Poverty occupies a significant place in the congregation. It is seen not merely as personal renunciation but as a communal and apostolic way of life, deeply tied to the mission of evangelizing the poor. St. Vincent defines poverty in the Common Rules as a radical detachment from material possessions and a conscious choice to live in dependence on the community. In Common Rule III, 6, “it is stated, the vow of poverty binds us to strive to practice real poverty, by depending entirely on the superiors in everything relating to food, clothing, and the use of other necessities.”¹⁸

This rule shows that Vincentian poverty is not just external but internal a spirit of simplicity, trust in Providence, and solidarity with the poor. Poverty is also linked to obedience, since members are to rely on superiors for their needs. Additionally, in Common Rule VII, 1, Vincent urges, “each of us should love poverty as a mother, cherishing it and embracing it in all its forms.”¹⁹ Such language reflects not only a theological but also a deeply affective spirituality of poverty, wherein the Vincentian is invited to love and embrace poverty as a condition that brings one closer to Christ and to those they serve. It is also intended to preserve humility, foster dependence on God, and avoid scandal that might arise from possessions or luxuries.

Further, in Common Rule VII, 2, members are warned against all forms of ownership, no one should ever take or use anything as his own, however small it may be, without permission.²⁰ In this context, the idea of owning things for oneself is clearly not allowed. It’s stated that even small items must be shared for the benefit of the group and with the permission of those in charge. The poverty followed by the Congregation is both something each person chooses and something that is part of the whole community. It is practiced every day in how they live and work together. Ultimately, living in poverty according to the Common Rules is not just a promise it’s a lifestyle that reflects the spirit of Vincent de Paul. It shows a willingness to serve others, to be ready to help wherever needed, and to live without personal attachments. This choice is made to follow the example of Christ and to fully depend on the Congregation, living in harmony with its mission.

1.13 Poverty in the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission, which were approved in 1984 and later revised following the Second Vatican Council, offer a fresh yet true understanding of St. Vincent de Paul’s vision for missionary work among the Vincentians. These documents give deep meaning to the vow of poverty, showing how it connects Vincentians closely with Christ, who came to help the poor. The Constitutions

¹⁸ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, Translated by Joseph Leonard (Dublin: Vincentian Publications, 1963), Rule III, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Rule VII, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Rule VII, 2.

explain that taking a vow of poverty is not just about giving up material things, but about living in a way that follows Christ's example, as he "who was rich became poor for our sake." (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). In Constitution 28, §1, poverty is described as a form of radical discipleship and availability, "by the vow of poverty we commit ourselves to follow Christ who became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich through his poverty. We renounce the right to dispose of and to use goods without the permission of the competent superior."²¹

This poverty is communal, not individualistic. It encourages simplicity of life and total dependence on the Congregation. Furthermore, in Constitution 28, §2, the link between poverty and apostolic availability is emphasized, by living poorly and working to be in solidarity with the poor, we give a prophetic witness in the world of the poverty of Christ, and we fight against the sin of poverty and the structures that cause it."²² So, poverty in the Vincentian tradition isn't just about being poor in a spiritual sense; it's about being actively involved in helping others, living with and supporting the poor, and working to change society for the better. This kind of poverty is different from just not having enough; it's about taking action and being missionary in spirit.

Constitution 29 further elaborates on the spiritual and communal dimensions of poverty, "we should lead a life of real poverty, depending on divine providence, and living in simplicity, taking care not to let our possessions get in the way of our mission."²³ This statement matches closely with the Vincentian way of life, where things like money and possessions are put aside to focus on helping others and serving people. The Constitutions also ask individuals and communities to look honestly at their own use of resources and to live simply and fairly, especially when there is a lot of unfairnesses in the world. Finally, in Constitution 30, practical aspects of poverty are outlined, "the community must provide for the personal and apostolic needs of its members, but it must also be a sign of evangelical poverty by sharing its goods with the poor and by prudent management."²⁴

Poverty is not just about living simply on your own, but also about taking care of others in the community and being kind and generous. It shows the presence of God's kingdom. The rules of the Mission Congregation say that poverty is a promise made to follow Christ, to work together as a group, and to carry out a mission. This idea comes from the spirit of St. Vincent but has been updated for today's world. It asks members to act like Christ, stand with those who are poor, and use what they have to spread the good news and fight for justice.

1.14 The Practical Expression of the Vow of Poverty in the Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission

The Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission are guidelines that help explain how the Vincentian way of life is lived out in everyday community and mission work. Based on the teachings of St. Vincent de Paul and the Church's tradition, these Statutes show how the vow of poverty should be lived, handled, and protected in today's world. They give clear direction on matters like owning and using possessions, managing money, and helping the poor, making sure that the commitment to poverty is truly followed in every province and local group.

²¹ *CONSTITUTIONS AND STATUTES OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION* (Rome: Congregation of the Mission, 1984), 28, no.1.

²² *Ibid.*, 28, no. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

In Statute 28 §1, the text reinforces the spiritual and missionary intent behind poverty, “the vow of poverty does not prevent the Congregation or the provinces or houses from having goods, but it requires that their use be regulated by the norms of the Constitutions and Statutes, always in the service of the mission.”²⁵ This statement shows that even though owning things by institutions is allowed, it always comes second to the mission. Vincentian poverty isn’t about being completely poor, but rather about caring for resources in a fair way, so they can help those in need.

Statute 28 §2 adds, “the use of goods should reflect simplicity of life, transparency in administration, and solidarity with the poor.”²⁶ This guideline calls for ethical financial practices, simple living, and a visible witness to the Gospel. In line with St. Vincent’s example, Vincentians are to live humbly and responsibly, ensuring their lives and institutions reflect the values of poverty and justice. Another important directive is found in Statute 29, which addresses the practical lifestyle of members, “our houses and lifestyle should reflect evangelical poverty: they should be modest, functional, and in keeping with the needs of our apostolate.”²⁷ This rule shows that Vincentian communities must not just teach the Gospel to the poor, but also live it by standing with them. Keeping homes simple and living modestly in everyday life is a clear way to show their commitment to poverty, and it helps build trust in their mission.

Moreover, Statute 30 ensures accountability, “each province should establish guidelines for the financial accountability of members and communities, respecting both the vow of poverty and civil legal obligations.”²⁸ In this context, the vow of poverty is connected with real-world management. The Statutes make sure that each province keeps everything clear and follows the law when dealing with money, which helps build trust within the community and encourages responsible use of resources. The Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission offer a clear plan for living out the vow of poverty in a way that is true to faith and works well in practice. They ensure that poverty is not just something a person promises to follow, but something the whole community shows by using all their resources to support evangelization, help others, and stand with those in need.

1.15 Poverty in the Traditions of the Society

According to the Congregation of the Mission’s traditions, poverty is a conscious decision to live modestly and share all belongings with others, just as Christ did. Members give up personal property, put their faith in God’s providence, and use resources only to further the cause and help the underprivileged.

In line with the traditions of the Congregation of the Mission, poverty is seen as both a promise and a good quality. Members choose to give up owning things themselves and live simply, modestly, and share with others, following the example of Jesus, who chose to live in poverty. Any belongings a member gets, whether from work, gifts, pensions, or other benefits, belong to the Congregation. The leaders decide how to use these things based on need, not on what someone wants. Each member’s room should be open and plain, without locks or safes, showing they live like a poor person. Members should avoid all luxury, stand with the poor, and use resources for their mission work instead of for themselves. This

²⁵*Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, 28, no. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28, no. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

way, they show the world that our real treasure is in heaven and that God's care, not money, is their true protection.²⁹

The paragraph explains that the Congregation of the Mission sees poverty as both a promise and a good quality. They focus on living simply, sharing with others, and not being attached to what they own, just like Jesus did. They choose to avoid comfort and things that provide security, so they can be close to the poor and show that real value is found in heaven.

1.16 Fundamental Statute on Poverty of the Congregation of the Mission

The Fundamental Statute on Poverty of the Congregation of the Mission permits members to retain ownership of immovable goods or simple benefices, but strictly requires that any income from these be used for pious works, particularly for the service of the poor and evangelization. Personal accumulation or use of such income is forbidden unless explicitly allowed by a superior. Even when ownership is legally retained, members cannot freely use their goods; all use must be subject to the authority of the superior, reflecting the communal nature of Vincentian poverty. This statute ensures that while members may technically own property under Church law, their lifestyle must reflect simplicity, accountability, and a commitment to the mission of serving the poor.

According to the Fundamental Statute on Poverty of the Congregation of the Mission: members are permitted to retain ownership of immovable goods or simple benefices as sources of income (yield), but they are obliged to apply the yields of such goods to pious works and to the evangelization of the poor; they may not keep or accumulate such yield for personal benefit (a negative norm forbidding capitulation of wealth) except when permitted by the Superior for defined purposes; moreover, the member's use of their goods is not free but must depend on the superior's authority, reflecting the communal dimension of Vincentian poverty.³⁰

In short, the Fundamental Statute on Poverty does not impose absolute material poverty (as some orders do), but it sets clear restrictions on how property and income can be used. Ownership is possible, but use is controlled, and personal enrichment is strictly forbidden. Everything is oriented toward the mission, the community, and the service of the poor.

1.17 Poverty in the Norms of the Congregation of the Mission

The Statutes of the Congregation include norms such as Statute §17 requiring that “the provincial assembly should adapt its norms concerning the practice of poverty to the Constitutions, and to the spirit of the Common Rules and of the Fundamental Statute on Poverty.”³¹ Also in the Statutes, Statute §17-2 says that provinces local communities should periodically review ways of observing evangelical poverty, noting that poverty is “not only a rampart of the Community but also a condition for renewal and a sign of progress in our vocation.”³²

²⁹ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission* (Rome: General Curia, 1984), nos. 31-33; Cf. Congregation of the Mission, *The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, trans. Joseph Leonard (Philadelphia: Vincentian Press, 1943), Book II, nos. 2, 8, 18.

³⁰ CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION, *Fundamental Statute on Poverty*, in the *Interpretation of the Fundamental Statute on Poverty*, especially section (A) “Contents of the Statute” items 1-5; found in *The Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, Chapter “Interpretation of the Fundamental Statute on Poverty.”

³¹ Statute no.17.

³² Statute no. 17-2.

1.18 Conclusion

The Vincentian vow of poverty, viewed through Canon 600, transforms poverty into a mission-centered way of life rooted in solidarity with the poor rather than mere renunciation. St. Vincent de Paul redefined it as active engagement with the world, using simplicity and shared resources for evangelization and service. In today's consumerist society, this vow stands as a prophetic call to justice, compassion, and transformative love lived in community with the marginalized.

1.19 Recommendation

Vincentians should renew and live the vow of poverty as active solidarity with the poor, rooted in Canon 600 and expressed through simplicity, communal sharing, and advocacy for justice making their poverty a prophetic and credible witness of Christ's mission in today's consumerist and unequal world.

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