

▶▶ <i>Introduction</i>	2
▶▶ <i>Prophet</i>	5
▶▶ <i>Objective</i>	10
▶▶ <i>Scripture Reading and reflection</i>	12
▶▶ <i>Conclusion</i>	18

►► **Introduction :**

In this last reflection in the series « **Change with Saint Vincent** », we will be focusing on the theme of being a prophet, which was already latent in the first reflection of this series. We stated in that first reflection that the Superior General, Father Gregory Gay, CM, suggested that, to begin the process of Systemic Change adopted by the Vincentian Family, we should start this stage by focusing on a sentence in the First Letter of St John : 1, 1-3 : « *What existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we contemplated, what we touched with our own hands – this is the Word of life – For life was revealed to us : we have seen it, we bear witness to it and we declare to you this eternal life [...] What we have seen and heard, we declare to you, so that you too are in fellowship with us. Now this fellowship of ours is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ.* »

These words of Saint John encourage us to bear witness, to announce, in a word to be prophets. All baptised people must be involved in the prophetic mission of Christ, which commits us to hear the Gospel in faith, and to declare it through words and acts. It commits us also to speak out bravely against evil.

This commitment is clearly expressed in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* : « *United to Christ, “the great prophet” (Lk 7 : 16), and in the Spirit made “witnesses” of the risen Christ, the lay faithful are [...] called to allow the newness and the power of the Gospel to shine out every day in their family and social life* » (§ 14).

The mission of the Commission for Promoting System Change is to help the members of the Vincentian Family to carry out projects from a systemic perspective, in order to change unjust situations which oppress the poor. It stresses the fact that it is impossible to achieve change if nothing is done to transform the unjust social order, in which the poor are either just figures in cold statistics, or an inconvenience, a hindrance, or they simply do not exist. The last of the strategies to be successful amongst those suggested by the Commission, and which is part of the strategies which are aimed at participation and co-responsibility, also insists on the importance of being prophets, proclaiming the Kingdom, and being messengers of the good news to the poor.

This strategy suggests that we should **have a prophetic attitude : through networking, announcing, denouncing and getting involved in exerting pressure to achieve change.**

In order to direct our reflection, we have taken several ideas from the text « *Being a prophetic force in the world of today* », a text written and presented by Carla Ferrario and Anna Rovetta, former members of the AIC Executive Board, during the 1998 AIC Assembly of Delegates, which was held in Queretaro, in Mexico.



Stained-Glass window of Elijah - B. TIRTIAUX (Belgium)

We are going to begin by giving a clear definition of the word « prophet », pointing out some of its implications :

Prophet in the Old Testament:

- ▶ The Prophet is the one who speaks in the name of God and who announces his message.
- ▶ The Prophet is chosen by God and inspired by the Holy Spirit
- ▶ Sustained by an unshakeable faith in the promises of God, the Prophet accepts freely the mission entrusted to him by the Spirit.
- ▶ The Prophet must walk before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to announce Salvation, to guide the People of God in the way of peace.
- ▶ The Prophet is sent to evangelise the poor, to help the weak, to free the oppressed, to bring down tyrannies and to defend justice.

Prophets in the New Testament :

- ▶ John the Baptist, who was a « *man sent by God [...]* *He himself was not the light, but came to tell about the light. The Word was the real light, shining on all mankind* » (John 1 : 6-8).



Stained-Glass window of John the Baptist - B. TIRTIAUX (Belgium)

- ▶ The apostles spoke and revealed the teaching of Jesus, putting their own lives in danger. « *They called them back in and told them that on no condition were they to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them: “You yourselves judge which is right in God’s sight – to obey you or to obey God. For we cannot stop speaking about what we ourselves have seen and heard.”. So, after new threats, they set them free, as they could not see how they could punish them, because of the people...* » (Acts 4 : 18-21).

Jesus Christ, the Prophet per excellence

Christ is the true light who reveals the truth, and is also the true prophet. He declares this himself, when he says, after reading the text from Isaiah: « *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, [...] He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives*». He adds: « *This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it* » (Luke 4, 18). Jesus proclaims himself to be the Prophet par excellence, the one of whom others are an image, the one who is proclaimed by them. The good news is fulfilled in Him.

Saint Vincent de Paul, a prophet of the XVII century

The vision of Vincent is focused on Jesus Christ, the Evangeliser of the poor

- ▶ Christ came to offer freedom to his people, and he came to free them from the slavery of physical and spiritual wounds.
- ▶ The liberation which Christ offered to the poor, according to the vision of Saint Vincent, is a liberation of the whole person (spiritual and physical).



Saint Vincent carried out his prophetic mission with considerable love for justice and also with tremendous love for truth. « *Do not do out of charity what should be done through justice* ». Saint Vincent loved truth; all his life was centred on this, and he qualified the love of truth by the word simplicity. « *Simplicity is my favourite virtue* », Saint Vincent tells us. « *I call it my Gospel* ».

For Saint Vincent, Jesus is the model, and Jesus always speaks with truth. He tells things as they are. His intentions are pure, and he brings all the things in life back to God. Today, just as in the time of Saint Vincent, simplicity means sincerity and transparency.

As a prophet, Saint Vincent also offers an alternative to the world, and he asks us to enter into it. It is a world in which the poor are the masters and in which we are the servants. « *It is the poor who are your masters...* ». It is a world in which the last are first, and the first are last.

It is a world which, in a way, is upside down. Saint Louise had her own expression : « *The poor man is the first in the Church. He is the prince and master, being in a way the incarnation of the poor Christ. We must serve them with respect, without heeding either their characters or their faults. We must love them* » (J. Calvet, Louise de Marillac par elle-même).

Prophets of our time

In this world which is going awry, full of contradictions, the prophets are all those men and women who have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Kingdom, proclaiming the truths of our faith, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near and is promised to the poor, speaking out against all injustices which prevent God's plans being fulfilled.

The uniqueness of the prophetic Mission of AIC volunteers

The basis of our identity is obviously the plan of Saint Vincent, our founder, who decided to serve Christ through the poor, and to respect their dignity as children of God, to love them like brothers and to fight against the injustices which they are victims of. One of the priority objectives of our identity is that we succeed in making our lives be a synthesis of our Christian vocation and our social commitment, that is to say a vital synthesis between the Gospel and the daily tasks of life. That constitutes a prophetic aspect of our mission as lay Christians.

All the implications of being a prophet are intertwined, and it is difficult to draw a line which separates the different aspects of being a prophet, such as peace, liberty, justice, fellowship, forgiveness, welcome and truth.

Objective of the Fifth Session

Reflect on the meaning of being a prophet, and taking on a prophetic attitude as members of AIC and the Vincentian Family.

Let us begin the session with the prayer for Systemic Change :

We praise and thank you,
O God, Creator of the Universe.
You have made all things good
and have given us the earth to cultivate.
Grant that we may always use created things gratefully,
and share them generously
with those in need.
Give us creativity in helping the poor
meet their basic human needs.
Open our minds and hearts so that
we might stand at their side
and assist them to change whatever unjust structures
keep them poor.
Enable us to be brothers
and sisters to them, friends who walk with them
in their struggle for fundamental human rights.
We ask this
through Christ our Lord.
AMEN

As we can see, this prayer, which we say during every session, mentions the essential aspects of being a prophet. The prayer for Systemic Change encourages us to support the struggle of the poor and to defend their dignity, but also to take part, with them and with other organisations, in the struggle to eradicate poverty, but, in order to do this, we will have to promote structural change. Indeed, without this structural change, there will only seem to be peace, because the basis of peace is justice. Several passages of the prophets show us this very clearly. We shall quote as an example the following passages from the Prophet Isaiah :



Scripture Reading.

« Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field, a fertile field which is considered as a forest. Righteousness will dwell in the wilderness and justice will abide in the fertile field. The fruit of justice will be peace, and the effect of justice quietness and confidence forever» (Isaiah 32 : 15-17).

« Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, so that he will teach us his ways and we shall follow his paths. For the Law comes from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will settle disputes amongst the nations, he will be the judge of countless peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again» (Isaiah 2 : 3-4).

Personal and group reflection

What do these verses of Scripture tell us? What are we doing to transform the wilderness into a Garden, to promote justice and peace?

Let us analyse.

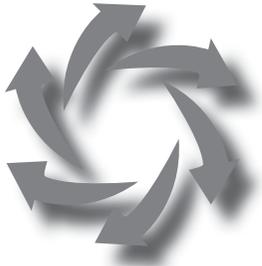
It is in the light of our thirst for justice that we must analyse the strategy for Systemic Change, which urges us *« to be prophets »* :

To have a prophetic attitude : to announce, denounce and, through networking, to become involved in exerting pressure to achieve change.

Let us consider the elements that we have just mentioned:

To announce

Are we always ready to tell the truth, even when our own interests are at stake?



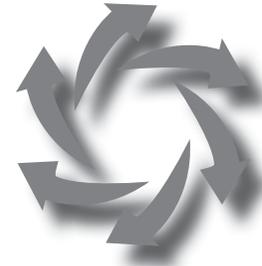
As far as our service is concerned, are our intentions always beyond reproach?

How do we manage in our service to put truth into practice?

Do we proclaim Jesus Christ, who was born and who died to save us, through our actions in the service of the poor? Do we proclaim the risen Christ?

Bearing witness

Do we bear witness to the truth that we proclaim?



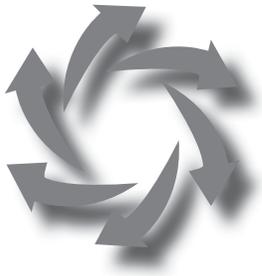
Are we always sincere and do we always give the first place to the poor?

Do we practice truth through actions of justice and charity?

Is there a difference between our service and our words? Are we consistent?

Denouncing

Do we denounce the injustices which the poor suffer from?



Name some of the lobbying efforts that your team has undertaken.

Reflect on the difficulties that you have encountered when you have spoken out against these situations or when you have exerted pressure.

Reflect on the following quote : « Oh! My dear brother, how fortunate you are to find yourself in the state of the beatitude which says blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice. Henceforth I will look on you as the blessed of this world» (SVP Coste IV, p. 81).

Networking

As we said in the previous reflection, it is impossible to successfully achieve change working in an isolated way. We must transform ourselves into multiplying agents, into people who know how to attract others and to defend the cause of the poor. Let us become messengers of the good news, promoters of peace.



Group commitments

Formulate as a group one or more commitments which would lead you to become prophetic members of the Vincentian Family. Set yourselves a deadline to carry out your group commitments.

Conclusion and final prayer

We are at the end of an important stage in the spiritual formation offered by AIC. This journey has been much more rewarding when the Volunteers, the AIC Chaplains – Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity – have worked together.

The shared experiences shared reflection as a team have enriched us and, very often, have enabled us to develop projects together, which were both transforming and more effective.

Let us commit ourselves, once again together, to being prophets, to enable prophecy to happen, to do everything to bring about a new culture of life, a world of justice and fairness.

Let us ensure that lay prophecy, which has the mission of bringing into our lives the warmth of evangelical utopia and spreading it around us, is achieved.

May our love for the poor lead us to remain on this path, which we began to take when we said YES, remaining faithful to our vocation which revealed itself when the Lord invited us to serve him through the poor, through those whom he loves wholeheartedly above everything.

Let us end our reflection with the **Prayer of the Vincentian Family**, asking the Lord to make us prophets of our time, and that we may respect the poor as people, and love truth, justice and peace.



Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor,
give us eyes and a heart directed toward the poor;
help us to recognise you in them -
in their thirst, their hunger,
their loneliness and their misfortune.
Enkindle within our Vincentian Family
unity, simplicity, humility
and the fire of love
that burned in St. Vincent de Paul.
Strengthen us, so that,
faithful to the practice of these virtues,
we may contemplate you and
serve you in the person of the poor
and may one day be united
with you and them in your Kingdom

AMEN