

Preamble

A number of global and ecclesial developments in the post-Vatican II era have affected the life and ministry of the Congregation. Changes in theological and philosophical thinking have led to an emphasis on inductive reasoning and experience, where individual circumstances and contexts carry greater weight in determining truth, meaning, and responsible action. There has been a shift toward collegial authority that relies more on communication, dialogue, and shared decision-making. A fuller recognition of the interdependence of individuals, communities, and nations has generated more sharing of ideas and a greater diversity of strategies. A more positive view of creation and humanity gives greater value to the person and the promotion of one's individual gifts.

While these are constructive movements, they also have engendered instability and confusion within society, the Church, and the Congregation. These include: a tendency toward relativism and a questioning of the possibility and value of making long term or life commitments; a mistrust of authority, especially where communication, dialogue, and shared decision-making have not been forthcoming; and a failure to recognize weakness and sinfulness as dimensions of human reality.

In light of these developments, this *Ratio* presents a vision and a plan for the formation of our members for the 21st Century. The commission charged with the task of preparing the *Ratio* engaged in a threefold process. First, it consulted the multiple provincial plans of formation which the provinces had sent to the General Curia. This was helpful for recognizing and respecting cultural diversity within the Congregation. Second, it carefully reviewed the publications of the Church. These were helpful in offering comprehensive views of the various stages of formation. Third, it consulted a variety of studies to enhance the theological development of some of the themes most relevant to the 21st Century. The commission does not intend to present the only or the final word regarding formation; rather, it offers a guide to the provinces as they work out a *Ratio* particular to their own circumstances and cultures.

The *Ratio* has eight chapters. The first is comprehensive and considers the overall purpose, goals, multiple dimensions, and contemporary challenges which touch on Vincentian formation at every stage. The second through eighth chapters present reflections and guidelines for each of the specific stages of formation. *Chapter 2* treats the stage of vocational inquiry; *Chapter 3*, pre-internal seminary formation; and *Chapter 4*, the internal seminary. *Chapter 5* considers an internship

year, which may be appended either to the internal seminary or to post-internal seminary formation. *Chapters 6 and 7* treat post-internal seminary formation specifically orientated to brotherhood and priesthood, respectively. Finally, Chapter 8 offers guidelines for the ongoing formation of confreres after their initial formation has been completed.

The *Ratio* presents Vincentian formation as a lifelong and integrative process, where the beginning envisions the end and the end grows out of each earlier stage. The *Ratio* offers formators a coherent and integral set of guidelines directed to the precise stage of formation with which they are entrusted. In this sense, this document can be viewed as comprising seven *Rationes* with one introductory chapter rather than simply one *Ratio*. A formator will find the basic information and the assistance he needs simply by reading Chapter 1 and the chapter which treats the specific stage of formation which he serves. Beyond this, he will find further assistance by subsequently focusing upon, and sharing with other formators, the manner in which the objectives, strategies, and expectations of a given stage develop from one another.

The commission's hope is that this effort will assist each confrere and the Congregation as a whole, living in the spirit of St. Vincent, to grow in communion with Christ and his mission, for the good of the Church and for the well-being of the poor.