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My Experience As Assistant General

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My dear confreres:

As I begin this presentation, let me thank you for your attention to this report that I am about to give about my experience during these past six years as Assistant General.

I. Creating roads through walking

Recuperating from my shock as a result of my unexpected election, my work as Assistant General has consisted, in great part, in collaborating with the Superior General in the task of renewing the vocation and the mission of our Congregation. I have done this through visits to the provinces that were assigned to me. I have attempted to carry out this work with great tact, keeping in mind the testimony of Jesus and Vincent and that wise saying of the philosopher Descartes: *One has lived well if one has remained hidden*. With this in mind I have tried to avoid anything that would appear to be self-serving, or as seeking power, success and prestige (very common temptations in the world in which we live).

The visits to the provinces have allowed me to observe that these last few years have been a time of trial and a time of abundant graces for the Little Company. While some confreres have left the Congregation to serve the Lord in another way, and others have been shaken by the events of these years and lost confidence in the quality of our vocation, nevertheless it is very gratifying to see that the vast majority of the confreres continue to work with great generosity and selflessness in the places where they have been invited to minister. Indeed, many times the confreres serve at great personal sacrifice and deprivation and in some cases suffering even persecution.

II. Proclaiming Good News to the poor

While it is true that during these years we have been purified in the faith that sustains us and have come to a better understanding of our central mission of service, especially to the poor, nevertheless a certain pragmatism and a desire to do many things leads us to run

the risk of losing sight of our primary and fundamental mission — namely, Jesus' mission and the mission of his Church — the mission of evangelization (cf. EN 6-16). For this reason then allow me to share with you some brief reflections, reflections that you might already be aware of, reflections that revolve around the meaning and the scope that evangelization ought to take on in our world today.

1. Evangelization begins with a spiritual experience

In light of the fact that the evangelizing mission of the Congregation ought to flow from the experience of Christ who invites us to unite ourselves to him in the task of proclaiming the Gospel in a preferential way to the poor and the margined and at the same time to prepare the world to be the Kingdom of God in its fullness, therefore it is important that we seek to revitalize, regenerate, adapt ourselves through a life-long journey. This journey is not based on a rule or a doctrine, nor is it based on some structural organization, but rather as stated in the Introduction to our Constitutions, it is based on the spiritual experience and intentions of St. Vincent who focused on the contemplation and the service of Christ seen through the eyes of the poor (cf. *Constitutions, Introduction and nos*, 1-9).

2. Questioned by reality

If we wish to remain faithful not only to the characteristics of our vocation but also of our mission, then it is necessary to reflect on our world in the same way that Vincent examined the world and the society of his time. This contemplation will allow us to hear anew the call of Christ, who died and rose to new life in the midst of the misery and the aspirations of the human race. Today millions of people, with real names and faces, live with poverty and hunger and the unequal and unjust distribution of goods and resources, all of which are consequences of social, racial and political discrimination. Everywhere, human life and the quality of human life are daily threatened. At stake in all of this is the very meaning of human life, its future and its destiny. For this reason it is all the more important to proclaim the Good News with renewed energy so that it might in turn be understood, accepted and practiced.

3. Structural change

Social structures contribute to molding the world and the human person, forming their ideas, feelings and even their most intimate desires and aspirations. As we attempt to transform structures that will offer people spiritual and material liberation, we must realize that this transformation is closely connected to our evangelizing

mission. This, however, never dispenses us from working directly with those persons who are the victims of these unjust structures or from working with those responsible for or influential in changing these structures.

4. Promotion of justice

The promotion of justice and solidarity with those who are voiceless and powerless is a demand placed on us as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ and our mission to proclaim the Gospel. This promotion ought to lead us to inform ourselves about the difficult problems that confront those who are poor and then lead us to recognize and accept our specific responsibilities in regard to the social order.

The Congregation of the Mission has to help each one of its members to overcome the resistances, fears and apathy that prevent him from really understanding the social, economic and political problems that affect towns and cities, regions and entire nations, that affect the international community. Awareness of these situations will help us to see how we can better proclaim the Gospel and participate (concretely and in a way that does not replace other competent persons and/or organizations) in the promotion of justice without forgetting that injustice must be attacked at its roots, that is, in the heart of the human person.

It is true that our work on behalf of justice will cost us personally but this work will make our proclamation of the Gospel more effective and the acceptance of the Gospel easier.

5. Inculturate the Gospel

The “*incarnation*” of the Gospel in the life of the Church demands that Christ be proclaimed and received in distinct ways that are in accord with the diversity of the different nations, the diversity of the human environment, and the spiritual richness that is already present in these situations. Everywhere, in order to be effectively embraced, the proclamation of the Good News demands not only that our lives bear witness to the justice that Christ calls us to, but also that the structures of our theological reflection, catechesis, liturgy, and pastoral action, be adapted to the felt needs of the people we serve. As a result of our vocation and missionary tradition, the Congregation of the Mission has very specific responsibilities in this area. Our work ought to be oriented toward the incarnation of the faith and the ecclesial community into the diversity of the traditions and cultures of the groups and organizations that we wish to serve. In this way, we can lead all Christians to communion in the unity of one faith.

III. Conclusion

Finally, I believe that by walking humbly and patiently with the poor, we will learn how to help them, but only after having accepted first their help. Through humble service we will have the opportunity of leading them to discover, in the midst of their difficulties and their struggles, Jesus Christ, living and acting through the power of his Spirit. In this way we can speak to them of God, our Father, who reconciles the human race and establishes it in a communion of true brotherhood and sisterhood.

Thank you very much!