

“C.M.: Put Out into the Deep” (“Duc in altum”)

Or the Creativity of the Congregation of the Mission
is not Exhausted in Its Mission of Forming the Clergy:
“Ecclesiasticos Adjuvare”

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FOCUS

1. *A joyful intuition*

- I do not know who wrote the Pope’s message, but his final words had a noticeable echo in the General Assembly 2004. So much so that at the beginning and end of the final document of the General Assembly the words of the Pope are repeated: “*Duc in altum! Put out into the deep!*” (Lk 5:4). *Do not be afraid to venture forth, to put out the nets for a catch. The Lord himself will be your guide!*
- Even the FEAR of the Congregation of the Mission is an interesting fact that I will mention later.

2. *The discourse of the Pope offers us a FORMULA TO CONTINUE TO LIVE THE FULLNESS*

- This formula leads me to ponder the roman god Janus (the god who had two faces, who looked at the past and the future):
 - ◆ *Do not be afraid to venture forth.....*
 - ◆ *These two aspects* (evangelization of the poor and the formation of clergy) *continue to be central.*
- Boldness in creativity beginning with an unchangeable nucleus: this is the wonderful formula that I see in the message of the Pope: *Responding generously to the needs of the Church in his day, Saint Vincent de Paul placed the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy at the centre of his vision for your Congregation. As you have grown in number and spread throughout the world, your apostolate has naturally taken on many new forms, but these two aspects remain central.*

3. A challenge for the future that WAS NOT STATED, in the final document of the General Assembly of 2004

- Even in the Pope's discourse there were three challenges which during a year and a half, through the initiative of the Preparatory Commission, the whole Congregation had been praising, and these were presented to the General Assembly, with the infinite variety of personal spirituality, geography and psychology of each missionary.
- With the title **HOPEFUL** (a hopeful look at the future) the commission that prepared the final document presents these three challenges to the General Assembly:
 1. **revitalize** our vocation,
 2. **strengthen** our apostolic work,
 3. **renew** our community life.
- And the **FORMATION OF THE CLERGY**:
 - ◆ which was so clearly presented to us in the Pope's message
 - ◆ as something that Saint Vincent PLACED in the CENTER of his vision for the Congregation and as something that continues to occupy a central place in the Congregation of the Mission is hardly mentioned in the final document when it very easily fit into any one of or even all three of the challenges.
- I hear the voice of the Pope as the crying out of the **COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE** of the Congregation that shakes us and urges us TO TAKE UP ANEW the formation of the clergy as one of the bold CHALLENGES and to impregnate this challenge with the creativity that in the final document fills out the other face of the Congregation of the Mission: the evangelization of the poor.

4. As a sign of my faith in the fact that the creativity of the Congregation of the Mission continues to live as it fulfills the end that was given to it by its founder ("ecclesiásticos adjuvare") I present this study in three parts

1. **Tensions from the time of birth**
2. **Tensions at the present time: change of eras**
3. **Welcome the changes... as long as we do not lose the way**

I will end with a CONCLUSION: Always be missionaries: nothing more, nothing less.

1. TENSIONS FROM THE TIME OF BIRTH

● *Despite the wise foresight of M. Vincent*

- ◆ Our Founder not only made very clear what the only end of the Congregation was and its three inseparable dimension: 1) seek our own perfection, 2) evangelize the poor, 3) assist ecclesiastics (Common Rules 1:1).
- ◆ In the same first chapter of the Common Rules Saint Vincent establishes what are the works that the Congregation of the Mission (composed of clerics and lay members) must be engaged in to fulfill the ONE end which he had just mentioned.
 - He mentions EIGHT tasks (munus):
 1. traveling around through towns and villages (oppida et pagos), as Christ and the disciples did, sharing with them, the little ones, the bread of the divine word, preaching and catechizing;
 2. urging and hearing (suadere et excipere) the general confessions of their entire lives;
 3. settling quarrels and disputes (jurgia et lites);
 4. establishing Confraternities of Charity;
 5. staffing seminaries which have been set up in our houses for diocesan clergy and teaching in these seminaries;
 6. giving retreats;
 7. organizing meetings (apud nos) of priests in our houses;
 8. including any other ministry which is supportive of those mentioned.
 - The laity have only one task: to ASSIST the ecclesiastics in all the ministries mentioned.
- ◆ I believe that the task pointed out in no. 8 to the ecclesiastics encompasses a formula that is meant to prevent conflicts:
 - The Congregation of the Mission can engage in other works (alia munia).
 - That are supportive of and in conformity with (deservientia et coinformia) those mentioned.
 - These other works should be done in passing (obire), that is, we should not install ourselves in these works as though dealing with something that is substantial for the Congregation. N.B. I believe that here there is a light that can heal the obsessive-compulsive need of the Congregation with regard to DIRECT SERVICE of the poor.

- ◆ There still exists a way to resolve the tensions in the community, a way that was contemplated by Saint Vincent.
 - Here we are dealing with the PERMISSION OF THE SUPERIOR.
 - Not even the eight tasks mentioned in the Common Rules 1:2, for example the third task, settling disputes and quarrels, none of these can be done without the permission of the superior “so that charity is well ordered through obedience.”
- ***An explicit tension and a pragmatic solution***
- ◆ Despite so many cautions, the tension was present and Saint Vincent addresses this in the Common rules 11:12:
 - ministries toward ecclesiastics...
 - or missions.
- ◆ By the language of no. 12 it seems that the MISSIONS are BEING JOINED to the other domestic ministries.
- ◆ The Founder is uncompromising in putting things in their place: *Confreres, individually and collectively (omnes et singuli) are to understand that the plea of missions should not mean neglect (negligi) of the ministry to clergy.*
 - He settles the question citing the wisdom of the millennium: “Haec oportet facere et illa non omittere” (it is necessary to do this without omitting that).
 - If someone has a hidden resentment (perhaps he himself is unconscious of this) he adds: *Though our preference is for missions, giving them should not mean omitting (fere aequaliter) our work for the clergy.*
- ◆ Is it sound thinking when there is an obvious negligence with regard to the formation of the clergy in the final document of the General Assembly of 2004, and the absence of the phrase “haec oportet facer et illa non omittere”?

2. TENSIONS AT THE PRESENT TIME: CHANGE OF ERAS

- ***An impressive and bold CREATIVITY***
- ◆ The final document of the General Assembly of 2004 is impressive and bold in its creativity when confronting the challenge of being “evangelizers of the poor”:

- for example, to engage in the mission together with the Vincentian Family, to accept a new style of community life in function of the mission and to do this with the laity.
- What is placed before us as questions could pass, I believe, as a beautiful utopia.
- ◆ But the challenge of **FORMATION OF THE CLERGY** is almost absent. In the document it seems to me as though it is a tourist lost on a strange road.
- ◆ Really,
 - Was the creativity of the Congregation of the Mission exhausted when it assumed the challenge of the evangelization of the poor and therefore there was no creativity left for anything else?
 - In reality, has the Church no need for us in our mission as formators of the clergy?
 - Or is it that we ourselves do not believe in the words that the Pope reminded us about: *Saint Vincent de Paul placed the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy at the centre of his vision for your Congregation?*
 - Why does the Congregation refuse to look directly at this part of its history and life and its very reason for existing in the Church?
 - Is it so difficult for the Congregation to project into the twentieth century that which it did at the time of its birth, for example, offer its houses and its missionaries to the diocesan clergy in order to assist the local church in their need, even if this is simply a fraternal acceptance in critical moments, moments that so frequently are experienced by the diocesan priests today?
 - Is it impossible for a province or a region to create an organization of assistance to the diocesan clergy, to offer this assistance to the bishops of a nation or region, with ourselves accepting financial responsibility for such projects as we are doing for example with the international missions?
 - What has happened to the Congregation of the Mission and this legacy of its founder to form the clergy?
- ***Do not be AFRAID***
- ◆ The fear of the Congregation of the Mission, which is referred to in the Pope's discourse has not come about by some mysterious chance.

- ◆ Rather we are dealing with a real fear that is within us.
 - But, what is our FEAR?
 - What is the root of this fear within us that the Pope himself asks us not to live in function of this fear but rather to take risks despite the fear?
 - Is it so risky for the Congregation of the Mission to create NEW FORMS of assisting the clergy, without leaving aside the traditional forms of ministering in diocesan seminaries, as we have done since the time of our foundation?
 - Are we afraid of our own lack of preparation in attempting something new in the Congregation of the Mission?
 - But are we so lacking in such a specialized formation, for example, preaching retreats to the clergy, that we cannot even assume to take on this work?
 - Or has the self-esteem of the group become so diminished that we begin to think that the Church does not need us in the area of formation of the clergy?
 - Is it more risky to create new ways of helping the clergy than to carry out our ministry of evangelizing the poor?
 - Or are we afraid to fail believing that to preach to priests, hear confessions of women religions, etc. is an impossible mission?
 - Or are we only attracted by that which will give us a good image in the present world, for example, living in function of the poor, “adore the poor as if they were a god, as the in-thing in the first world?”
- ◆ In any case there is a reason why, at the same time, we have looked for a catharsis of our fear and the Papal “excorism,” duc in altum.

3. WELCOME THE CHANGES... AS LONG AS WE DO NOT LOSE THE WAY

● *Renew yourself or die*

- ◆ At Vatican II the Catholic Church became aware of this primary law of evolution that applies to all living things... from this reality the strength of renewal was derived and for us was crystallized in the new Constitutions of 1980, a renewal that continues to the present time.
- ◆ The final document of the 2004 General Assembly has taken up the invitation to continue the process of renewal, without which life cannot continue. For example:

- In the third section of the final document (“A hopeful look toward the future”), number 2 (“Strengthen our apostolic work”), it is stated: *Faithful to our vocation we are called to use the criteria set down in our Constitution 2 and 12 to review our existing works, to begin new ones, to leave those not in accord with the above criteria and to give new vigor to our present ones.*
 - In the same section, number 3 (“Renew our community life”) this will be concretized by CLAPVI in the following way: *Develop a sense of identification, of belonging and of commitment to the Vincentian ideal in our communities.*
 - In the conclusion of the final document it is stated: *The challenges in this document, framed in faithfulness to our charism are put forward by the General Assembly to be made more concrete in the provinces, vice-provinces and local communities. There are many who have lived that charism fully; their witness spurs us on to the task that lies ahead.*
- ◆ I have highlighted a detail in each of the above references that I will now comment on:
- It is stated that we will initiate other works using as our criteria no. 2 and 12 of our Constitutions
 - From the time that the Constitutions of 1980 removed formation of the clergy from the ends of the Congregation of the Mission (where they had been placed by Saint Vincent), the future of this ministry is ambiguous in the Constitutions.
 - In fact neither no. 2 nor no. 12 of the Constitutions expressly mentions the formation of the clergy... and that is a problem... but formation of the clergy is not excluded... and no. 2 if read with a certain benevolence, could seem then to include formation of the clergy.
 - But if the Congregation of the Mission refuses to initiate new works that involve the formation of the clergy.... I believe that the Congregation would be distancing itself from its reason to exist as established by Saint Vincent. This I believe.
 - I highlight fidelity to the Vincentian ideal or fidelity to our charism
 - Do these words include renewal with regard to the formation of the clergy... or are these empty words... fidelity to the Vincentian ideal and fidelity to our charism.
 - Let us not forget the words of the Pope: *Saint Vincent de Paul places the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy at the center of his vision for your Congregation.*

- ***The CREATIVITY of the Congregation of the Mission, in its mission of “formation of the clergy” IS NOT EXHAUSTED***
- ◆ Some time ago I wrote of study for the students of the Province of Venezuela with the following focus: What future option does the Province of Venezuela want to take with regard to the formation of the clergy?
- ◆ The key statement is this: “The diocesan clergy of Venezuela suffer a special form of psycho-spiritual poverty which the sons of Vincent de Paul, who have committed their lives to the evangelization of the poor, cannot ignore
- ◆ Obviously we are not attempting to describe an epidemic which involves every member of the clergy in the country. This psycho-spiritual poverty in the clergy of Venezuela can be summed up in these six matrices:
 1. intellectual poverty;
 2. the poverty of toxic loneliness;
 3. a poor contemplative dimension;
 4. the poverty of boredom;
 5. the poverty of guilt;
 6. the poverty of interior brokenness.
- ◆ In the same study it was seen that the Province of Venezuela was in a situation in which it could offer (at least for a while) assistance to the clergy who experience the poverty described above:
 1. offer directed retreats in some of our houses;
 2. offer hospitality;
 3. offer spiritual assistance;
 4. offer the use of our libraries, reading rooms, internet and offer at the same time the guidance of one of the missionaries in these different areas;
 5. offer missionaries, especially those who are prepared, to provide retreats, cursillos, workshops, conferences, etc, thus providing a type of formation;
 6. offer formal psychotherapy.
- ◆ In supporting this project our students involved in this study mentioned no. 13 of our Constitutions. There it is stated that
 - the PROVINCES must decide the forms of apostolate that they will assume and
 - it is the provinces, and not necessarily the whole Congregation, that will decide whether a form of providing formation for the clergy is adequate or not for a particular province.

- ◆ It continues to be curious that the final document of the General Assembly of 2004 DOES NOT MAKE REFERENCE to no. 13 of our Constitutions when presenting CRITERIA to review our existing works, to begin new ones, to leave those works not in accord with the criteria and to give new vigor to our present ones.
- ◆ It is clear to me that the CREATIVITY of the Congregation of the Mission with regard to renewing its ministry of formation of the clergy is not exhausted and even less so in the scheme that is presented to us in the Final Document of the 2004 General Assembly.
 - As I remember, this document concludes by mentioning these very precise details: *The challenges in this document, framed in faithfulness to our charism, are put forward by the General Assembly to be made more concrete in provinces, vice-provinces and local communities.*
 - I believe that, at the very least, we are faced with a recommendation in which creativity **has not been exhausted**. Rather there is an **urgency** to continue to be creative in the provinces and the local communities in all of that which pertains to the ministry of formation of the clergy which by nature and the expressed will of Saint Vincent belongs to us as part of our mission.

CONCLUSION: TO ALWAYS BE MISSIONARIES, NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS

1. *“What the legislator wanted to say, he said” (“quidquid legislator voluit dicere, dixit”) is a fundamental principle of law*
- When we read in an official document of the Congregation of the Mission, such as the final document of the General Assembly of 2004: FAITHFUL to our vocation WE are CALLED to develop in our ministry new ways to INTEGRATE the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments with the DIRECT service of the poor;
 - ◆ Something within me protests and cries out: “Saint Vincent is not here”.
 - ◆ Yes, I see Saint Vincent in his demand as stated in the Common Rules (1,2) which I mentioned before: *Their work also includes any other ministry which is supportive of those mentioned.*
 - ◆ But that WE are all CALLED to INTEGRATE the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments with DIRECT

service to the poor... and this is a sign of fidelity to our vocation.

- This is not only something that Vincent did not think but in fact
 - I believe the Saint would be scandalized with such a proposal: How could it enter Saint Vincent’s mind that the general confession that he heard or the sacramental absolution that he gave so that an individual would not be condemned was a service to the poor but not a DIRECT SERVICE.
- If Saint Vincent had wanted the Congregation of the Mission to be a masculine branch of the Daughters of Charity he would have stated this clearly to us in the Common Rules, a work that matured, a work that went on for thirty-three years because the importance of this work demanded such time.

2. **COMMERCIALISM in conscience**

- E. Fromm states (Ethics and Psychoanalysis) that the great disgrace of our culture is:
 - ◆ “where there is no demand there is no value” as proclaimed by commercialism in the world of buying and selling.
 - ◆ with this interjection in the conscience we have destroyed all the ethical values of our world, for example, if truthfulness has no demand then it is so because it has no value, if justice has no demand then it is so because it has no value, if fidelity has no demand then it is so because it has no value, if the human person has no demand then it is so because it has no value.
 - ◆ The great concern of the final document, which I comment on in another study, is to make our values more credible but
 - ◆ If the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments ARE NOT a DIRECT service to the poor, does this not mean that there is a noticeable disbelief, on our part, in these missionary values.
- John 20:21 is a good summary of the whole theology of the MISSION that appears in the gospel: *As the Father has sent me, so I sent you.*
- Saint Thomas offers us the same reality but with more pronounced matrices: *Contemplate the divine things and give to all other things that which is contemplated* (“divina contemplari et

contemplata allis tradere”). This is a synthesis of the whole mission of the Church.

- The great disgrace for the people of Israel was the lack of priests and prophets, but we recite the prophets and the psalms most frequently.

- What does this people need?

Is lack of health more important (more acute) than a lack of purpose in life?

Is providing food to those who are hungry a more **direct** service than administering the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, the Anointing of the Sick, proclaiming the Word of God?

Is having good priests not so much an issue as having good sanitary assistance?

What would Saint Vincent say?

What has happened to the Congregation of the Mission that it has such serious doubts about this, that it has almost forgotten that it is part of the Church to form the clergy?

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.