

LETTER FROM CARDINAL RODÉ



CONGREGATION
FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND FOR SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

THE CARDINAL PREFECT

Vatican City, 30 June 2010

Very Dear Father, dear confreres,

A very cordial remembrance to all of you who take part in the 2010 General Assembly. My prayer and my brotherly affection accompany you during these weeks of reflection. Celebrated 350 years since the death of Saint Vincent de Paul and of Saint Louise de Marillac, it is an occasion to analyse the present situation of the Congregation and to plan its future in fidelity to the charism of the Founder.

Permit me to share with you my feelings coming from my experience as Prefect for the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life. In the six years of my service in this dicastery of the Holy See, I believe I have acquired a certain knowledge of consecrated life and of its actual situation which might be useful to you.

In the course of my numerous journeys over the world, I have noticed with surprise the absence of the confreres from the great current projects of the Church. Also the absence of experts and specialists of the Congregation in different domains of spiritual, theological, pastoral learning. Other Congregations smaller than ours have them in greater number.

What is the cause of this? Since the 2nd Vatican Council and the troubles which followed, we suffered like other Congregations, losing a good third of our numbers. In 1965, we were 6030 members.

In 2005 we were 4049. But the great problem is not the number. Our problem is absence from the great projects of the Church, due to a certain weakening of our works. Traditionally, the Congregation of the Mission had as works missions to the people, the foreign mission (ad gentes), spiritual direction of the Daughters of Charity, and, on the other hand, the formation of the clergy. All this is well summed up in the collect of the mass of Saint Vincent de Paul: "Ad salutem pauperum et cleri disciplinam." For centuries, a good number of the confreres were assigned to teaching and to the formation of the clergy. These confreres were intellectually and spiritually prepared for this task. So there was on the Congregational level, a certain complementarity and a certain balance between teachers and missionaries, between intellectuals and pastoral men, each exercising a benign influence on the other.

After the 2nd Vatican Council, this balance was broken. The intellectual, the man of wisdom, the teacher has, in large measure, disappeared from our ranks. And it is a loss for the whole Congregation, and probably one of the causes of its actual stagnation.

This reality is, in my opinion, the sign of an infidelity to the charism of the foundation and to the secular tradition of the Congregation of the Mission. The general Assembly has the opportunity to reflect on the problem and to remedy it.

This is all the more urgent since the formation of the clergy is one of the major problems of the Church at the dawn of the 21st century. This is so clear that there is no need to insist on it. Saint Vincent would be aware of the problem, as he was of the crisis of the clergy in his time.

Dear Confreres, a correction in the choice of our works is called for, a balance must be restored, a great tradition taken up again. It is in fidelity to its charism that the Company of the Mission will recover the vigour of its finest hours and its place in the Church.

May the Lord, through the intercession of Saint Vincent, help you in this task.

With all my brotherly friendship,



Franc Card. Rodé, C.M.

Prefect