

# The Three Evangelical Counsels in the Common Rules

by Jaime Corera Andía, C.M.

## *The state of the issue*

The word “vows” is never mentioned in the text of the Common Rules (CR). This omission is deliberate, simply because, as St. Vincent says, “communities like ours never mention them in their common rules.”<sup>1</sup> The vows and their juridical aspects, particularly the vow of poverty, are treated thoroughly in earlier documents by the pontifical authority, the Diocese of Paris, or those of the Congregation of the Mission.

This makes one characteristic about the text of the CR very clear. They are not a juridical document, but above all, they are written as a manual that defines the spiritual character of the Congregation, so to speak. While a number of the chapters are of a disciplinary style, there is no juridical character in any of the norms.

The treatment of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the CR, is predominately spiritual-ascetical but in no way juridical, an aspect that would be inevitable if the CR were to treat the vows. For this reason, although they do not employ the term anywhere, the CR use the title of “the evangelical counsels” and not the three “vows” which are used in the monastic tradition and that of religious congregations in the Catholic Church.

The CR never mention *stability*, as a vow nor as a counsel, although St. Vincent, who spoke many times to his missionaries, without a doubt saw that the CR are written for men who remain in the CM for life in response to the call of God, a call which is not temporal, but rather, of a stable or permanent character.

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<sup>1</sup> SV XII, 367.

### ***The structure of Chapters III, IV, and V***

These three chapters that deal with the Evangelical Counsels have the same structure as is found elsewhere, except for chapter II. Here the title “Gospel teaching” is used and in practically all 18 paragraphs where Jesus Christ is evoked. All of the other chapters propose Jesus Christ as the model for the themes treated in the first paragraph, and then proceed to unpack different aspects of the content in the remaining paragraphs of each chapter.

This is done as well in Chapters III, IV and V that deal with poverty, chastity and obedience. Chapter III is made up of 9 paragraphs, which propose Jesus Christ in the example of poverty; Chapter IV presents Jesus Christ in 1° as our model of chastity, with four paragraphs that follow, but chapter V, the longest of the three chapters, presents Jesus Christ as the model of obedience followed by 15 paragraphs.

The structure of the chapters, which we can call “internal,” is similar and simple in nature. By internal structure we find the content in the three chapters as follows:

#### **Jesus Christ model of the missionary**

- Of poverty: 1 paragraph (chapter 3, 1°)
- Of chastity: 1 paragraph (chapter 4, 1°)
- Of obedience: 1 paragraph (chapter 5, 1°)

#### **Relating the Counsels to the Mission**

- Poverty: 1, 2
- Chastity: 1, 4
- Obedience: 1

#### **Counsels and Common Life**

- Poverty: 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- Chastity: 4
- Obedience: 5, 6, 8, 9, 13

(All of the paragraphs in chapter V refer to common life, but always through intervention of the superior. The same could be said of the paragraphs that deal with poverty, except 7° of chapter III)

#### **Ascetic Content**

- Poverty: 1, 2, 7, 10
- Chastity: 1, 2, 3, 5
- Obedience: none (but see the note at the end of this section)

**“Disciplinary” Content**

- Poverty: 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
- Chastity: 4 (?)
- Obedience: all paragraphs<sup>2</sup>

(The 16 paragraphs on obedience could also have been included in the previous section on asceticism, as a great ascetic capacity is required to live the spiritual life as described in the paragraphs on discipline. This pertains to the references on discipline in the other 2 chapters as well. When we speak of “content” or “style” or “character” of discipline we are referring to the style as written in the concrete paragraph, not the intention of the editor, which of course he had in mind. Apart from the disciplinary aspect of content is a true sense of the virtue of obedience. However, beginning with the rules of Pacomio, it is not always easy to discover the “spiritual” intention of the different norms which are written behind the façade of discipline. The same could be said of some of the norms of the CR. Take, for example, (perhaps the extreme situation) how it was considered very important to the vow of obedience in following Christ for an assistant brother to request permission of the Superior General to learn to read and write. This surprising norm is even more so when one considers that the Superior General who wrote it held the brothers in very high esteem, to the point as to have them as his personal secretaries. Nevertheless, in the past, this norm of the CR was read over and over for centuries, creating a less than flattering vision commonly held about brothers which was not that of our founder, expressed clearly in the passage cited in note 2)

This simple classification of content within the internal structure of the CR is helpful to highlight some interesting facts:

- Explicit references of the content to the gospel and following-imitating Christ are infrequent in the chapters about the evangelical counsels (in reality they are very rare in all of the other chapters, except in chapter II, as was said above).
- Also rarely mentioned is the explicit relationship between the counsels and the missionary vocation.
- At first glance, numerous references of the relationship between the counsels and common life stand out. This impression is rather deceiving. However, in almost all of the paragraphs that mention some aspect of common life in relationship to a specific counsel, they are made to call upon the intervention of the superior (as was referred to above) and not specifically to address common life.
- That content which we have classified as ascetic — chapter IV, which deals with chastity — is the richest, with four of the five paragraphs dedicated to it.

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<sup>2</sup> SV III, 319; SV XI, 109.

- The chapter on obedience does not have any paragraphs which could be said to be purely ascetic. While all of the paragraphs in this chapter are of a highly ascetic quality, as stated above, they appear as disciplinary norms in the CR, structured as disciplinary norms. This means a member of the CM could follow most of the norms found in this chapter and never really have a true “spirit” of obedience; it would be sufficient to be a disciplined man. Discipline, as such, is not to be scorned in any way, but it lacks the same inspiring principles or the same demands as that of the virtue of obedience.
- Disciplinary content, which is found rarely if ever in the chapter on chastity, is found predominately in those chapters which refer to poverty and obedience.

What is the cause of this apparent anomaly? The overly clear and almost scathing predominance of the disciplinary norms, on this theme called the evangelical counsels, in the Rules written by a profoundly spiritual man as Vincent de Paul? This question brings up a problem which has been known for many years, that is, the dependence of these Rules on previous religious institutions.

### ***The sources of inspiration of the CR of the Congregation of the Mission***

So as to better understand what is about to be said, we will affirm from the beginning that the CR of the Congregation of the Mission could only have been written by a man such as Vincent de Paul (though it be told that after many years of collaboration with many members of his congregation).<sup>3</sup> This means that the CR taken together reflect very well the true spiritual style of their author. Although it will be easy to recognize some of the sources that inspired their writing, including in some cases even the literary wording, the final product as a whole belongs entirely to him. So much so that Vincent de Paul could say, in spite of what will be said later, that “our Rules are not taken from any order in the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

It is relatively easy to recognize the dependence of some of these sources, most especially in the field of the norms which are of a disciplinary character. Coste has pointed out one concrete source: the

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<sup>3</sup> SV II, 138; SV VI, 366; SV XIII, 291; SV XIII, 356.

<sup>4</sup> SV XII, 373.

Rules that St. Ignatius gave to the Society of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Here the dependencies are numerous, especially those which refer to obedience. What Coste did not realize is that many of the norms in the SJ are also taken from previous Rules,<sup>6</sup> making it difficult to ascertain the exact source from which Vincent borrowed our very own.

In the oldest monastic Rule that is known, that of Saint Pacomio, founder of the Cenobitic life, ideas and norms are found that have inspired a variety of Rules for centuries (those of St. Basil, St. Benedict...) to the point of not knowing which filters have led to the CR of the Congregation of the Mission. We can point out some ideas in the Rule of St. Pacomio which appear in our Common Rules. Among the evangelical counsels, we can point out those which refer to poverty and obedience, which by their nature easily lend to norms which are expressed as the disciplinary type as needed in the every day living out of common life:

- The abbot is the only distributor of necessary things.
- One can not own anything without the permission of the abbot.
- Conform yourself to what you have been given; do not give anything away without permission.
- Do not lock your cell door.
- Do not move anything from one house to another without permission.
- Only the Superior can reprimand somebody.
- Do not enter the work area of another without permission.
- Do not eat outside of the indicated schedule without permission.
- Do not enter the room of another without knocking.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from the rules above, St. Vincent also availed himself of other sources, not as easy to identify, except in the case of the ideas taken from the Rule of Perfection of St. Benit of Canfield, making his own changes and adaptations,<sup>8</sup> regarding the diverse aspects of

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<sup>5</sup> P. COSTE, *Le Grand Saint de Grand Siècle*, Paris, 1932, t. II, p. 13; *The Great Saint of the Great Century*, CEME, Salamanca, 1990, vol. II, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Obras completas de san Ignacio de Loyola*, BAC, Madrid, 1952, p. 566.

<sup>7</sup> The rule of St. Pacomio can be found easily on the internet through a good search engine. It is enough to write in the search word "Rule of St. Pacomio." The rule has four parts. All of the above is found in the first part.

<sup>8</sup> The author who has explained this complex relationship between Canfield's book and the vision of St. Vincent is A. ORCAJO in *Espiritualidad y selección de escritos*, BAC, Madrid, pp. 102-104.

following the will of God. See chapter II and III in the CR for some of the ideas that are known with surety to have been inspired by reading the book of Canfield, which Vincent did assiduously for many years.<sup>9</sup>

### *The beginning of interpreting the 3 evangelical counsels*

Before going into detail of the 3 counsels, such as in the last paragraph on the teachings of Jesus Christ written in chapter II, the CR mention for the first time the 3 counsels, describing them as “weapons” which Christ used to complete his mission on earth (*reestablish the reign of his Father*). These same weapons are to be employed by the missionary today to fulfill the same mission.

This idea is key to understanding the true place that the evangelical councils have in the vision of St. Vincent and the spirituality which was inspired by him. In that vision the evangelical counsels are not mainly a way to grow in holiness, nor are they a way to imitate-follow Jesus Christ, both of which have been a part of the long tradition of religious orders whose fundamentals legitimate a life of the evangelic counsels. Although Vincent de Paul clearly admitted both ideas in his vision of the counsels-vows, he does not consider them as decisive or definitive for his own vision. In the counsels-vows there exists a value that is predominately functional or instrumental, that is, they are ordered to an end, which is to fulfill the same mission as that of Jesus Christ. Aided by the evangelical counsels, the Congregation of the Mission seeks to imitate Jesus Christ the missionary. The mission of Jesus Christ is fulfilled with the same arms which Jesus Christ used: poverty, chastity, and obedience.<sup>10</sup>

It is necessary to read all of paragraph 18 of chapter II before reading the next 3 chapters, and to read it as the key to understanding them well. Not to do so is to run the risk of having a vision of these three which belongs to religious orders that considers the counsels above all as the means for personal sanctification. Without excluding this aspect, but also without considering it as fundamental, the vision which St. Vincent lays out in the CR and in his teaching of the evangelical counsels and the vows are above all the means to fulfill the very mission of the Congregation: My Savior,

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<sup>9</sup> The ideas closer to those expressions of St. Vincent used in the CR and conferences are found in chapters 5, 6, and 8 of the first part of the work cited of Canfield. *La Règle de perfection* published in Paris in 1609, and the latin version in 1610, also in Paris. It was later reedited many times.

<sup>10</sup> SV XII, 376.

you have waited 1600 years to create a Company who has for its express profession to continue the mission that the Father had entrusted to you here on earth, using the same means that you used, giving yourself to: poverty, chastity, and obedience.

This matter has been the frequent cause of confusion in the CM regarding the fundamental theme of our spirituality. The reader who seeks inspiration from the CR as to how to apply the counsels to his own life but limits his reading to the very wording of the CR of these 3 chapters, will be rather confused in as much as any clear reference between the counsels and the mission of his life. That necessary reference is only found in paragraph 18 of the previous chapter, as we have said, a paragraph outside of the chapters that expressly treat the evangelical counsels.

But the main reason for the confusion about the counsels-vows in the Congregation of the Mission, which has often been taught to younger generations, is due to the uncritical assimilation of ideas written by religious about their own vision of the consecrated life. Their vision is not the same as the vision of St. Vincent nor should it be that which belongs to any congregation, masculine nor feminine founded by St. Vincent de Paul.

### *Analysis of each of the 3 Counsels*

#### **POVERTY**

The first paragraph in chapter III expounds, as said above, on the example of the poverty of Jesus Christ, namely, that none of his closest disciples owned any personal property, and as such, were free from the desire of riches, a stumbling block for everyone. Members of the Congregation of the Mission, in their imitation of Jesus Christ, should cultivate the virtue of poverty that is to be an inexpugnable bulwark to guarantee their perpetual conservation.

However, in spite of what this paragraph appears to say, poverty in the Congregation of the Mission has never been constituted in such a way that its members could not own personal property. In fact there is one whole Statute about Poverty with a pontifical referendum which expressly permits ownership, although it is true that it places drastic restrictions on our possible uses of such properties. Here the kind of poverty that St. Vincent wished was not so much to own nothing, as was the case of Jesus Christ, but to submit all of one's possessions to a detailed discipline of permission that legitimize their spiritual use.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> SV XIII, 407.

We believe that without doing injustice, it can be affirmed that in the history of the Congregation of the Mission, the form of poverty defined in the Statute has been used with relative ease against the intention of the founder<sup>12</sup> by regular and extended practices, even with all the necessary permissions yet where both the spirit and poverty itself are clearly absent. For the reader who perhaps is upset by what we are saying or to whom such claim seems unjust, or who refuses to believe, or thinks that such situations of this kind are generalized, we recommend that the decrees of the general assemblies and the circulars of the superiors general of the XVIII and XIX centuries be read. Here the reader will find this theme taken up more than any other throughout the two centuries, and reports of constant deficiencies in living the vow of poverty, in particular in regard to the use of personal goods.

This fact presents a problem that the Congregation of the Mission will have to face one day. One claim more or less generalized against the Fundamental Statute of Poverty is that the true sense or meaning of poverty is being lost or perhaps is already lost, or that the demands of the Statute have become incompatible with the realities of modern society. In the case that the meaning of poverty has been lost, recognition is required that the Statute must be profoundly revised so that maintaining the true spirit of poverty and the profound intention of St. Vincent with all of its demands not be rendered a practical impossibility.

In light of what has been said above about the counsels as the means for the mission, it is quite the paradox that paragraph 2 of chapter III is formulated in a way that seems to say the contrary, affirming that it is precisely the very style of the ministries of the Congregation that keep it from practicing true poverty.

In spite of this paradox, the affirmation of St. Vincent is inserted into the long history of experience of religious orders, which have encountered the same problem, as seen in a paradigmatic way in the life of St. Francis of Assisi and the order he founded. To live in common, while at the same time, lack all possessions seems to be mutually exclusive. There have been many attempts to resolve this apparent paradox (follow Jesus Christ in his poverty and at the same time have personal property) in the same way that St. Vincent suggests: "Observe the Lord's poverty of spirit affectively, and as far

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<sup>12</sup> "The use of those goods (personal property) is not for the individual; he has no need of them, as the Company cares for those needs", SV XII, 383; "Although some may have possessions, they are not for personal use, although they continue to be the owners of their funds", SV XI, 224.



as possible effectively as well” or rather, appeal to the poverty of spirit while living very soberly. These are the keys to resolving the problem. Nevertheless, in the history of religious orders, frequently when that desire to appeal to the “spirit” has been tested, it has not been sufficient to keep communities away from riches and the accumulation of goods, and only sparingly does the spirit of Jesus Christ, the very one of whom it is said that we want to imitate in his poverty, shine through.

Number three contains a definition of poverty common in all kinds of community life in the church at the time, a definition traditionally also, in the Common Rules; based on the example of the first Christian community of Jerusalem: “*As with the first Christians, all things will be in common for us.*”

The eight paragraphs which comprise the rest of chapter III expressly point to St. Vincent, as in paragraph 2, that missionaries live poverty both affectively and effectively. This is their intention. As pointed out above, the eight paragraphs are more disciplinary in nature than they are spiritual.

## **CHASTITY**

Missionary chastity is also based, as the first paragraph states, on the example of the chastity of Jesus Christ. Two aspects that are pointed out as exemplar from the chaste life of Jesus Christ are that he was born of a virgin mother and that he was never accused of any vices to the contrary. This, however, is all that the CR say about the chastity of Jesus Christ as an example for the missionary, who should be warned, will encounter threats to his chastity precisely due to his missionary work.

All that follows in the remaining 4 paragraphs of chapter IV pertain to what the Constitutions classify as an “asceticism supported by the experience of the Church” (Const. n. 30), a discreet way of referring to what St. Vincent and many of his predecessors, beginning with Pacomio, have not failed to mention in a direct and frank way (not unlike in many cases St. Jerome, in a markedly rude manner),<sup>13</sup> a way that perhaps may seem crude to some readers today: care in dealing with women, strict control over the senses, due care to avoid the excesses of food and drink, care to make sure that nobody in the Congregation be accused of any contrary vices, to pay

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<sup>13</sup> The formation plan proposed for a life of virginity by St. Jerome for the virgin Eustoquio includes exhortations of chastity with precise details that “would make a legionnaire blush”; in *Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne*, by LOUIS BOUYER and other authors, Aubier, Paris, 1966, vol. I, p. 550.

close attention so as to avoid dangerous temptations against chastity (various examples of modesty should be noted here, which are given in chapter VII, for example paragraphs 3, 6 and 7).

Later we will speak again about how to better understand the thinking of St. Vincent regarding the evangelical counsels, without limiting our thinking to what is written in the CR. Here it is necessary to read some of his conferences and a good number of his letters. As they pertain to chastity, there are many ideas that seem to have nothing in common with chapter IV of the CR. As was said earlier, what the CR say about chastity as a whole serve to inspire members of the CM only minimally, if not poorly. More importantly, this theme does not expressly look at chastity in regard to the missionary and his mission, except to warn him, with certain realism, that, as was noted above, dedication to the mission can create potential problems with regard to living chastely. Such a lack of missionary perspective could cause a wary missionary to come to think that chastity is merely a personal matter, only a question of morals and conscience that has little to do with his missionary vocation.

## **OBEDIENCE**

This chapter also comes up short in as much as offering an inspiring vision in regard to the obedience of Jesus Christ. Paragraph 1 of Chapter V points out Jesus' obedience to his parents and to those both good and bad in authority. Nothing is said here of Jesus Christ's obedience to the Father, which in reality is the fundamental cause of human redemption (see Hebrews 10:5-10) and the ultimate model of all obedience inspired by Jesus Christ.

The same paragraph enumerates the different persons to whom a missionary owes his obedience, all of whom in this case, belong to the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Note that, except for the Pope, the vow of obedience that the missionary makes does not oblige him to any of the persons cited: bishops, pastors. This is another sign that Vincent de Paul is not thinking of the vows when writing these 3 chapters, as the missionary does not profess vows of obedience to bishops and pastors. Obedience to these persons is purely of an evangelical character, not professed in any vow expressly or silently.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of chapter V list persons in the Congregation whom the missionary is to obey as well as the kind of obedience owed to each. Paragraph 2 has a series of expressions (as the norm of obedience to the bell in paragraph 3) which can be found one by one in many of the previous Rules of St. Vincent:

- A kind of blind obedience.
- Submission to good judgment.
- Believe that what the superior orders is always best.
- Surrender to the decisions of the superior as a file in the hands of a carpenter.

All of these different ways of speaking about obedience have been simply put aside in the actual Constitutions. Without a doubt the reason has to do with what the Conciliar document about the renewal of religious life set forth — “adapt the old rules to the true physical and psychological conditions of the members,” of the religious institutes (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 3). One must sincerely admit that certain ways of speaking in the past are no longer compatible for a (healthy) perception today. Not that today what is desired is an obedience which is more comfortable or less demanding than in the past. (See what will be suggested about a way to present the Constitutions and the theme of the evangelical counsels).

Again it is important to point out how other teachings of St. Vincent in both conferences and letters, as well as his manner of exercising authority and demanding obedience complete, often correcting what the CR say. So much so that by reading only chapter V one would expect a very deficient image, a false one at that, as to how Vincent de Paul expected his missionaries to practice obedience. Unfortunately, this has not been kept in mind throughout the history of the Congregation of the Mission. Teaching obedience to younger generations, as well as the exercise of authority, has been based solely on what is written in chapter V of the CR.

We cannot but point out one more time that the rest of chapter V taken together presents an excessively disciplinary and detailed image of obedience in the Congregation. Furthermore, obedience is only spoken about as it pertains to those who lack authority. The hypothetic reader who lacks caution could get the impression that according to the CR persons with authority in the Congregation of the Mission are above the law and not subject to common obedience.

## **STABILITY**

As was pointed out above, stability is not expressly mentioned in the CR, although it is supposed. As was mentioned above, St. Vincent spoke frequently about stability, never thinking of it in a static way, such as “to be” in the Congregation of the Mission, but rather with a more dynamic meaning to persevere all of one’s life in the Congregation dedicated to the end of following Jesus Christ in the evangelization of the poor and its related works. In the footnote we

find a reference that helps to make clear this point.<sup>14</sup> Note that the conference cited in the note takes place early after our foundation, and Vincent de Paul indicates that from the beginning he was clear about what he referred to as stability of the missionary.

### *Expanding the content of the CR*

It is well known, and has been for a long time, that for many years Vincent de Paul went back and forth and often changed his mind about the vows. To try to better understand the matter, it is important not to look only at a few isolated statements about them, or they could be grossly misunderstood. For a clear understanding of the vows it is necessary to be attentive to this matter. For example, late in his life Vincent employs expressions which had for centuries been used by religious. For example, a little less than a year before he died, he speaks of the vows in the Congregation as “a new baptism”<sup>15</sup> or “perfect holocaust.”<sup>16</sup>

However, one should not let these expressions lead to the conclusion that Vincent had in mind for us a vision like that of religious. That was not “en absolute” and within the same conference cited in two previous footnotes, other dominant expressions were used to reflect the character of the functional-instrumental “arms” which we see when studying the evangelical counsels in the CR. For example, “Have we renounced everything to *be missionaries?*”<sup>17</sup> Or also “we are consecrated to *continue the mission* of his Son and the apostles.”<sup>18</sup> In this way his vision can be summarized saying that, “although we have vows, the Congregation of the Mission is not a religion.”<sup>19</sup>

It is this very point that Vincent de Paul has the conviction that the vows-counsels of the Congregation are the arms which have a predominately functional character, which he said not only help us to fight against vices that are within us (affirmation of course of an aspect that is shared by religious) but that because of them we are better able to combat the same vices in others,<sup>20</sup> an expression which leaves no doubt about the real vision that Vincent de Paul had about

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<sup>14</sup> SV XI, 107-109.

<sup>15</sup> SV XII, 371.

<sup>16</sup> SV XII, 371.

<sup>17</sup> SV XII, 370.

<sup>18</sup> SV XII, 372.

<sup>19</sup> SV XII, 372.

<sup>20</sup> SV XII, 366.

the place of the virtues-counsels in the missionary vocation of the Congregation.

Ten months before he died, Vincent de Paul dedicated a series of conferences, which would be his last, to explain to his community the content of the three chapters in the CR on the evangelical counsels and the pontifical document “Ex commiss nobis,” which approved the vows of the CM in 1656 and the later “Alias Nos” of 1659, which explained one aspect of poverty, that of personal goods. In those conferences, Vincent elaborated in detail about that which is very condensed in the CR, adding some evangelical-theological ideas, which as has been said, are very scarce in the CR.<sup>21</sup> Truthfully, reference to the theme in these conferences are brief but reading them gives one a better idea of the thinking of St. Vincent on this theme. In the conferences Vincent develops his ideas without distinguishing between the vows and their corresponding virtues, but reveals that most importantly his men, who take the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, really become poor, chaste, and obedient so as to be free from anything that binds them, and dedicate their lives to the mission.

Regarding obedience, here it is noted that in reading Chapter V of the CR one could get the impression that those of authority are not under the demands of common obedience. It is necessary to read what is written apart from the CR, for example, the admirable advice of St. Vincent to Antonio Durand, a young missionary, 27 years of age, named superior of the diocesan seminary, on the exercise of authority.<sup>22</sup> In this letter we find Vincent de Paul at his best, who through his own experience and with help from the Holy Spirit shows us the teachings of Jesus Christ.

### ***The Common Rules for Today***

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission are to be a vignette of the very Rule of the Congregation of the Mission.<sup>23</sup> They are not to be kept in a museum as archeological treasures of centuries of old, that have added to the life of the Congregation, in the same way as the CR which come directly from St. Vincent. In fact, the Assembly which made this point has asked that the text of the CR be included in the volume of the New Constitutions, with a

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<sup>21</sup> SV XII, 365-433.

<sup>22</sup> SV XI, 342 ss.

<sup>23</sup> XXXVI General Assembly 1980, decree 1.

clear intention that the CR continue to be read in our time and for years to come.

But the Constitutions are the attempt to modernize not only the “Rule” but all aspects of life in the Congregation of the Mission, including the theme of the evangelical counsels and the vows in chapter III.

The way to treat the counsels-vows in the Constitutions differs in the CR in some aspects. The Constitutions mention the vows and point out their purpose so as to distinguish the other aspects of the corresponding counsels, aspects that the missionary should have, but which are not necessarily objects of the vows.<sup>24</sup> Another important difference is the express inclusion of the vow-counsel of stability in the last paragraph, 39, in the cited chapter. Logic would require the vow of stability to appear first, since it gives meaning to the other three. Also important are the theological foundations, in comparison, which are scarce.

Our theme has been widely treated here and more said would be to surpass the focus of this article that the title suggests. As mentioned above, the intention of the Congregation of the Mission is to live the evangelical counsels-vows in a way that the Constitutions call us, keeping in mind that which St. Vincent has to say about them in the CR and other places like the Conferences and Letters.

Translation: THOMAS J. STEHLIK, C.M.

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<sup>24</sup> It is well known that the concrete determination of the content of each of the vows did not come from the Assembly that elaborated on the vows in the Constitutions of 1980, but rather the Superior General and his Counsel in fulfilling the recommendations of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, See: MIGUEL PÉREZ FLORES, *De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984*, in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad*, Madrid, 1984, pp. 102 ss. That which pertains to the vows is found on pp. 111-115.