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The Congregation of the Mission

by Victor Bieler, C.M.
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I. What is its specific identity within the Vincentian Family?

Often people wonder why the members of this Congregation are called the members of the Congregation of the Mission, or why they are called missionaries. The **identity** of this congregation derives from its **purpose**.

What then is the **purpose of the Congregation of the Mission**?

It is, as the first article of our Constitutions says, to *follow Christ the evangelizer of the Poor. This purpose is achieved when faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively:*

1° *Make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself in order to acquire a holiness appropriate to their vocation;*

2° *Work at evangelizing the poor, especially the most abandoned;*

3° *Help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing the poor (Const. 1).*

What is our spirit?

In order to become capable of realizing that purpose we strive to be filled with a certain spirit. The **spirit of our Congregation** is a participation in the spirit of Christ himself, as proposed by St. Vincent: "He sent me to preach the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). Hence, "Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission" and shall be considered as the center of its life and activity. This spirit comprises those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which our Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to divide providence.

The Congregation therefore tries to express this spirit in five virtues drawn from its own special way of looking at Christ, namely simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal for souls (Const. 4, 5, 6, 7).

How should our work of evangelization be?

As a consequence, our *work of evangelization* should have the following characteristics:

- Clear and expressed preference for the apostolate among the poor, since their evangelization is the sign that the kingdom of God is present on earth (Mt 11:5);
- Attention to the realities of present-day society, especially to the factors that cause an unequal distribution of the world's goods, so that we can better carry out our prophetic task of evangelization;
- Some sharing in the conditions of the poor, so that not only will we attend to their evangelization, but that we ourselves may be evangelized by them;
- Genuine community spirit in all our apostolic works, so that we may be supported by one another in our common vocation;
- Readiness to go to any part of the world, according to the example of the first missionaries of the Congregation;
- Striving to live in a state of continuous conversion both on the part of each individual member and on the part of the whole Congregation, according to the mind of St. Paul, who counsels us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

2. What are our relations with the other branches of the Vincentian Family?

I could mention here some concrete experiences of collaboration, aspirations and hopes with regard to the future in collaboration. I suggest you read the letter of the Superior General as well as the reports of several common projects published in *Vincentiana* (1998/2) and in the *Echoes of the Company* (1998/5 and 6).

2.1 Cologne, Germany: Foyer Rosalie Rendu: residence for women.

Daughters of Charity of the Province of Germany. Participants: Association of diocesan groups of Cologne, diocesan Caritas of Cologne city, Charity conferences in Germany (Fribourg-en-Brisgau), Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Germany (Cologne), Vincentians (Cologne), parishes in the city of Cologne.

Team: 3 Daughters of Charity with volunteers, a number of which have been recruited and formed by them.

Cologne, a city with about a million inhabitants, has a growing number of homeless women. The causes are: strikes, divorce, drug addiction, alcoholism, violence.

2.2 Mozambique: Elderly and abandoned people.

Daughters of Charity, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincentians, Marian Youth.

Place: poor quarter of a parish: Nossa Senhora do Amparo (Matola)

Social context: civil war for 17 years causing dehumanization and disintegration of family life, abandoning the elderly and street children.

2.2 Mexico: Home for terminally ill people: hotel of hope.

Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, Marian Youth, Vincentian volunteers, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and Miraculous Medal Association.

Social context: The city of Mexico has a great number of terminally ill people who have to leave the hospitals because of the few available beds. They have to go home, but often are not received by their families and society in general, because of the economic burden they form.

Purpose: medical assistance, provide a roof for them, spiritual support,

3. Which are the three most important challenges for our Congregation in the third millennium?

- The **new Areopagi**: these are the new fields where the Gospel must be proclaimed, like the world of communication, the natural sciences, international relations. All this is more urgent since the Church tries to establish peace, human development and liberation of nations.

- **New mass media**: there several new means at the disposal of catechesis, homiletics and doctrine. But these means themselves need to be evangelized. These are challenges, according to the Superior General, which are mentioned in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio* are:

- **New forms of poverty**: which demand a revision of our commitment, of our option for the poor.

4. Are there any stimulating signs for our Congregation?

- A new missionary spirit: this is clear from the new efforts being undertaken, the new international missions, and the volunteers for these missions, even for Rwanda.

- A growing number of vocations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, which gives hope that the Vincentian spirit in these continents will be strengthened and refreshed.

- A greater solidarity with the other branches of the Vincentian Family, not only by praying together on the occasion of Vincentian feasts or commemorations but also by undertaking common projects.