

7-2000

## Identity of the Congregation According to Articles 1-9 of the Constitutions of 1980

Antonio Elduayen C.M.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Elduayen, Antonio C.M. (2000) "Identity of the Congregation According to Articles 1-9 of the Constitutions of 1980," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 44: No. 4, Article 10.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol44/iss4/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentiana by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact [digitalservices@depaul.edu](mailto:digitalservices@depaul.edu).

# IDENTITY OF THE CONGREGATION ACCORDING TO ARTICLES 1-9 OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1980

*By Antonio Elduayen, C.M.  
Province of Peru*

## INTRODUCTION

"The Constitutions, in as much as they are an expression of our identity, starting from and keeping in mind numbers 1 to 9 (Vocation), are the object of this article.<sup>1</sup> The focus will be **historical** and **analytical**, centered in articles 1 to 9. Some information about the history of the text, in particular its origin, will help to analyze and to understand better the content and scope. The Constitutions of an Institution are many things at the same time. They are its "Magna Carta", its backbone, the center of its substance, its basic legal body, its Rule of Life, its way to perfection...

At this time in history, they interest us as an expression of the identity of the Congregation. Our Constitutions show the makeup and reason for being of the Institution by the way they preserve, encourage, express, and communicate our identity (inner) and our identification (outer). Leaving aside what is peripheral, our interest lies in distinguishing in the Constitutions what is the **essential component** or its **integral element**.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the Constitutions of 1980, there is in VINCENTIANA, between 1980 and 1985, the following articles and studies: "36th General assembly of the Congregation of the Mission" p. E. Antonello, (XXIV, 1980, 6, pg. 334-354); "The New Constitutions of the C.M". p. C. Braga, (XXV, 1981, 1-2, pg. 63-82); "Commenting on the New Constitutions" p. J.O. Baylach, (XXV, 1981, 3, pgs.222-227 and 5.6, pg. 383-409; "Saint Vincent's signature in the revised Constitutions of 1980" p. J.M. Cavanna, XXVI, 1982, 3-4, pgs. 135-146; "Comment on the Constitutions" p. Miguel Pérez Flores, idem. pg. 147-187; "The Constitutions and Statutes of 1984" p. J.O. Baylach, XXIX, 1985,1, pg. 83; "From the Constitutions of 1980 to those of 1984" p. Miguel Pérez Flores, idem., pg. 84 - 146. There are many other references, not to the whole group but only to some concrete topics of the Constitutions. With regard to them, they refer to the Encounter of Visitors that took place in Bogotá (1983), the Vincentian Month in Paris (1984) and the GA 1986, 92 and 98, especially that of 1986. Although, in honor of the 20 years that are celebrated, I refer always to the Constitutions of 80, in fact I keep in mind the one of 84, promulgated and presented by the Superior General with date of September 27,1984, and that includes the changes that were necessary to make so that the SCRIS approved (7/29/1984) the Constitutions 1980. Cf. study mentioned done by P. Miguel Pérez Flores: "From the Constitutions of 1980 to those of 1984."

<sup>2</sup> To keep in mind and be consequential with this distinction is fundamental. To ignore it or to pass over it has been and continues to be the cause of many wrongs. It has been at the level of Church, when she confused its essential constitution - (Jesus Christ as Good News) - and their integral constitution - (the option for the poor, the Social Doctrine, etc.). It has been also at the level of the Congregation, (when she confused its End with the institutional means or ways to reach that end, such as missions or work with the clergy).

With regards to its identity/identification, it seemed that the Congregation suffered from ambiguity right from the start.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, precisely from its origins, which could seem like its weakness, there is in the community a great innovative force that comes from its founder's charism. The Congregation appears in the Church and in the world like a great innovation (one might even say - a Revolution). Without a doubt this gift of the Spirit and the awareness of its special conscience, lead it to a permanent and at times anxious search for its identity/identification, which is how to locate itself among the poor today. It knows, although it seems sometimes to have forgotten, that its Identity is dynamic, not static; organic and alive, not inert.

This identity/identification that the Congregation looks for, has its origin fundamentally in what we call its End, Nature and Spirit, (Vocation in the Constitutions-80). There are times when certain elements (works) are presented with conviction for a prolonged period of time, such as the work of the missions or of the clergy, but they do not constitute its fundamental Nature/end.<sup>4</sup>

The end, nature and spirit are the essential constituents of the identity of the Congregation.<sup>5</sup> Of the three, the End was the most difficult to clarify and to accept as an identifying factor in the Assemblies 68-69, 74 and 80. It was also the one that occupied most time in debate.<sup>6</sup> It is for this reason that, to ask what the Constitutions-80 express about our identity, is to ask what is its end.

The postconciliar search for our identity/identification began with the Superior General, Fr. William M. Slattery, when he convoked the Extraordinary General Assembly of 1968.<sup>7</sup> He convoked it for the *aggiornamento* of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Without falling in the slanders of a certain black legend, it is certain that our peculiar or atypical personality from the beginnings, causes- and can cause in us -, certain confusion, exaggerated during the course of time. There you have it, among others, the following causes: our many names, our many ends, not being neither religious nor lay, the nature of our vows.

<sup>4</sup> Coste XII, 1-14; 73-94; XI, 133, 135-136. Cf. Fr. Jaime Corera: "Mr. Vincent's Testament" (VINCENTIANA, year 24, 1980, 1-2, pg. 42).

<sup>5</sup> The rest of the Constitutions -arts. 10 to 155 -, are also important for our identity and identification, but always when they don't prevent us to see the main idea and proceed from and lead us to the main idea.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. n.2 of the Chronicles of Assembly-80 that dedicates 13 pg. to the history of the End according to the Assemblies of 68-69, 74 and 80 (beginning), under the title: "Life and Miracles of Holy End of the C.M. and some of the temptations and obstacles that it must suffer before arriving to its canonization and Holiness."

<sup>7</sup> It was done in following through of an Ordinance of GA/CM-1963 and of the Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae (II, 3,6. PC 2,3,4). In the summer of 1967, twenty one specialized Commissions, more than 100 missionaries, prepared this Assembly that was held in Rome from the 8/22 till 10/5/1968. Its

Congregation, but it quickly diverted into the question of a search and definition of our identity starting with the End of the congregation. It is curious to observe how something that was born from the necessity of *aggiornamento* or renovation, is debated among us, from the beginning until the end, in search of the definition of our identity. Could it have been because we were forced to go back the sources?

## THE ADVENTURE OF A SEARCH

With regards to the Constitutions of 1953, what the C&S/68-69 say about the End of the C.M. is a good change, but it is not the spectacular jump that had been expected after 16 years of change in the world and in the Church. Yes, there is a positive change in the sensibility and mentality, but surprisingly there is setback in its vision and the formulation of the End,<sup>8</sup> especially considering the famous Note of art. 5<sup>9</sup> on the Interpretation of the End, in the Constitutions 1968-69

The contents of art. 5 and its note, represents two cultures and two ways of seeing and locating oneself in the Congregation, opposed, not totally, thanks be to God, but easily situated according to geography. To the english speaking groups, it seemed that a very radical and unilateral interpretation was given to the text about the End approved in 68 (art. 5) and they asked the Assembly for a true interpretation. It was said that the unity of the Congregation was at risk. The motion was put to vote and it was approved in its two parts. The Congregation was not split, but, besides other issues, there was evidence of the division and existent polarization in relation to its identity and identification

---

Documentum Laboris, the sadly famous document called the Black Book was simply pushed aside. It seemed that the spirit of the Cultural Youth Revolution of May 68, entered in the Assembly with its scream for the "imagination to power". All was made new... nevertheless this revolutionary spirit and the prevailing liberal pastoral tendencies, promulgated by the C+S, 9/4/69, still without differing completely between Constitution and Statute, were very juridical. Very far from the Constitutions that had been given by the Church (LG and GS) and the Daughters of Charity.

<sup>8</sup> In 53 they had the courage to treat the end proposed by Saint Vincent proposed in the Common Rules (art. 1.1), that which was not possible to touch in the GA 68-69 (and with great difficulty in that of 1980). They put forth a general end and another special end, to which was added a third point: "to work in works of charity and education"

<sup>9</sup> I transcribe that Note to be of the maximum importance for the topic that concerns us: "In the 62nd Session of July 1969, the Assembly declared that the following propositions are true interpretations of the text approved on the End of the Congregation: 1) the evangelization and human and Christian promotion of the poor is the predominant end, but not the only end of the Congregation of the Mission. 2) the evangelization and the human and Christian promotion of the poor is criteria sufficient in itself, but not necessary, to choose our works."

The XXXV GA-74<sup>10</sup> was not able to nor did it want to do anything in connection with this Note and its implications on the identity/identification of the Congregation. It deliberately opted not to touch the Constitutions -except for the chapter on regimen. It dedicated itself to evaluate the experiences and initiatives made by the Provinces in connection with the C&S ad experimentum of the 68-69 Assembly and to elaborate some DECLARATIONS.<sup>11</sup>

After presenting "The Way of Saint Vincent" and (D 14-15) and "Our Way" (D 16-18), and taking into account "the change of perspectives in the world and in the Church" (D.19-22), the GA/74 presented what it called "Our Vocation" (D 23-26). The term that becomes the title -and it will continue as title in the Constitutions of 80 -, comes from a text of Saint Vincent de Paúl (Cost II,14) that mentions it and that, in the context of the DD 24 and 25, refers to and is identified with the end:

Passing over the famous interpretive note of C&S/68-69 and mystifying matters a little, the GA/74 presents "**the evangelization of the poor as our end**", our sign, the reason for being of our life and the backbone of everything". Saint Vincent mentions: "This is our peculiar calling, to be dedicated to the poor like Jesus Christ. Consequently, our vocation is the continuation of his vocation..."

"In the light of this end" which is our **vocation**, we will devote ourselves to all the rest: "to form worthy ministers and priests, to work for the most urgent needs of the Church" (D 25). It will direct (D 26) our spirituality, our apostolic works, our community life, the formation, our community organization. In the Constitutions of 80, (art. 9), in this **vocation**, "the end, nature and spirit (will direct) the life and the organization of the Congregation", (in the Constitutions, they are the remaining Parts II and III).

## **THE END OF THE SEARCH. GENERAL ASSEMBLY 80**

In the GA/80 it was desired that art. 9, which the D 26 summarized, would be the hinge that unites Part I of the Constitutions (Vocation) with the other two parts (Life and Organization). But evidently it is much more than a

---

<sup>10</sup> The XXXV GA-74 took place in Rome (8/16/-9/23). Outlined and carried out as an Assembly the Extension and Transition of 1980, which would be the constituent end, it was given 4, of which the 2 principle ones are those mentioned in the text.

<sup>11</sup> The Assembly proposed to illumine, to stimulate and to direct the effort of the whole Congregation and of each of its members" (D.13) and it was promulgated by the Superior General, P. J.W. Richardson, on 9/23/74. They amerce more radical than the Constitutions 68-69, focusing and enriching with new lights the arts. more difficult and more burning. They are much more radical in connection with the evangelization of the poor than the Constitutions 68-69. Cf. DD 17, 22, 25, 29. The evangelization of the poor as End and the End as Vocation appears in the DD 24 and 25, respectively. Vocation is the title under which the Declarations 23-26 are recovered. It will pass as the title of the First Part of the Constitutions 80, gathering up the arts. that refers finally to the END, NATURE and SPIRIT of the C.M.

hinge. It encompasses the logical and moral imperative of directing everything, that is to say, of guiding, focusing, advancing, and arriving at the goals and then evaluating everything in the only light of our Vocation (End-Nature-Spirit) for the service of the evangelization of the poor. And it expresses, with clarity, what is the identity and the identification of the Congregation, "our sign, our reason for being and our backbone" (D 25).

The XXXVI GA/80<sup>12</sup> was convoked by the Superior General Fr. James W. Richardson on May 28, 1978. Its preparation<sup>13</sup> was intense, putting the whole Congregation in a "state of GA" from 1977. The PCGA-80 and the SCI (Subcommittee for the juridical part of the Constitutions in their relationship with Canon Law, although not published) contributed greatly to it. The Superior General named a commission and a subcommittee in 1975 and 1977, respectively. Their work finished on March 13, 1980, with the elaboration of the *Documentum Laboris*, called by many the Green Book that was a very good work tool, contrary to the sadly famous Black Book of the first Assembly.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and informed and motivated by the Report of the Superior General, Fr. J.W. Richardson, and conscious of their historical role, the 119 confreres in the Assembly began their work. The adventure that had lasted 12 years, that of *aggiornamento* and of the search for the identity/identification of the Congregation **in our day**, finally ended. The "hour of truth" had arrived, the hour to give an attractive, modern and finished "look" to the Congregation, with some definitive Constitutions that Rome would have to approve and whose revision would no longer be possible except after some 5 or 6 more revisions.

For its work, the Commission on the End<sup>14</sup> didn't start at zero nor unilaterally of its own ideas. It elaborated the titled "First Document on the End", keeping in mind, the number and the importance, the reasoning and the options of the Provinces, according to the *Documentum Laboris*.<sup>15</sup> The options of the immense majority was for the evangelization of the poor as the only end, Basing

---

<sup>12</sup> Rome celebrated, In the year of the 150 Anniversary of the Appearances of the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, from 6/16 till 8/8. 54 days! The longest GA in the C.M., with 119 confreres, Median Age 50,91 years (3 years older than that of the 1a AG/68, but still younger than the average age of the C.M.). The Congregation had diminished in 1640 members (28,4%): 743 priests, 181 Siblings and 720 Students. After 12 years of Renovation...!

<sup>13</sup> Cf. VINCENTIANA 24, 1980, 1-2, pgs. 18-29

<sup>14</sup> So, a committee was set up with the Frs. Elduayen (President), Maloney (Secretary), Maside, McCullen, Morin and Dulucq. The elected Superior General, Fr. McCullen, replaced himself in the Commission with the animated assistant Fr. V. Zico. Within the Commission and with regard to the End, in a proportion of 4 to 2, the two mentalities and tendencies were present that polarized the Assembly.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Article of Fr. J.P. Renouard in VINCENTIANA 24, 1980, 1-2, pgs. 25-28

their reasons on the fidelity to Saint Vincent, the call of the Church to modernize the Congregation, and the growing needs of the poor.

Why couldn't the reference with respect to the End of the Congregation be approved before,<sup>16</sup> so that it could have influenced and given direction<sup>17</sup> in the elaboration of The Constitutions-80? Although the Commission, "in its majority", had no doubts about what the Provinces wanted nor consequently on the content of the First Document to be presented to the Assembly, it preferred to be firm in requesting an indicative vote on this "issue of great magnitude": **Does the C.M have one solitary End or more than one?**<sup>18</sup> . The Assembly pronounced absolutely a single End... from this moment on; the Commission on the End began working on the text on Vocation, including the Introduction, despite the obstacles and difficulties

The proposal of the Commission represented **a change in the outline, not of the end.** In terms of the Constitution, it only meant to turn back to the content of the note approved in the LXII Session of the General Assembly of 69. Against that which was then approved, it was now proposed, although in a simpler and more evangelical way that THE END OF THE Congregation is to FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST EVANGELIZER OF THE POOR. In terms of vocation and of identity/identification, the Assembly recognized and it reaffirmed (87 YES and 24 NO in the vote of 7/25), to have **only one END** and that, like

---

<sup>16</sup> The first ones elected in the afternoon of June 19th were also the first ones presented as Commission to the Full Assembly on the afternoon of Monday, June 6th, and the last ones for the approval of the final text, on the next to last day of the Assembly, June 8th. The work of the Commission and its progress were heldup permanently by means of motions, petitions and parliamentary subterfuges. Some of the arguments presented can be summarized this way: 1. the End proposed by the Commission means a change in relation to the foundation of the end proposed by Saint Vincent, not just in its form; 2. It goes against the Tradition and the History of the Congregation that has lived and worked in peace and harmony with the end proposed by Saint Vincent. 3. The formation of the clergy is left aside or denaturalized. 4. The concept of END is ambiguous. In each country and language there are distinct concepts different and many synonyms of the term END. Look for another word or do not speak of End... 5. The proposed End is a personal position, never as acceptable as the one proposed by San Vincent, etc.

Some subterfuges that were rejected, but that took up a lot of time: 1. to change the text of the Document on the End, indeed presenting to the Plenary Session a reconsideration of the approval already given or introducing into it literally article 1.1. of the Common Rules, changing it to conform to the commission; 2. to put into the Introduction the end of the Common Rules. and then seek that that Introduction becomes part of the Constitutions; 3. to place quotes of Saint Vincent in the approved texts...

<sup>17</sup> In the sense of the Declaration 26 or of art. 9 of the current Constitutions.

<sup>18</sup> During the whole morning of the 24th the discussions were very animated, the 7 Groups and 5 members of the assembly, in their own names, exposed arguments, quotations, explanations, definitions, etc., in favor of a single end or of several ends. With a majority vote in favor of one only end, the Commission presented its First Document, the one that 5 Groups (against 2) pronounced in favor, and was voted upon and approved, passing to the Second Document (needed to continue ahead without going back).

Jesus Christ, this end consists in **EVANGELIZING THE POOR**, which becomes an image and sign of that which it can and ought to be.

With this proclamation of the one and only End and with no greater resistances to the contents on the Nature and the Spirit, it was only a question of time, maturation and patience to realize the approval of the final text on Vocation<sup>19</sup> and the Constitutions.<sup>20</sup> Seen in their context (from 68 to 80), what had been accomplished was due to a great effort and marked the end of an adventure. There it was, the new "look" of the Congregation. Its rejuvenated personality, its essence clearly defined, its identity/identification discovered.

## **IDENTITY REDISCOVERED**

After 12 years of search and experimentation (1968-80), the Congregation redefined its **identity** in the Constitutions of 1980 - Congregation, who do you say that you are?, the question was asked by the Church (LG) -, and its **identification** - how do you want to be recognized and what is it that you want to do in the modern world? (GS). At the same time it set down the bases for its location in the CIC.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps it was not perfect, but it was the best thing that, given all the circumstances, we were able to put together. It was sent back to the houses, (this issue had given so much worry to some of the participants in the assembly). Had it been worthwhile to invest so much time, effort and expense.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> The blockage for the final approval of the text on the end was solved by means of a consensual promise on the part of the Italian speaking group: the word "praesertim" was removed and replaced by the word "perficitur". Thus, the text of the Commission on "Vocation" was approved by 109 votes, with 5 against, 3 days before the end of the GA.

<sup>20</sup> The Superior General, P. Richard McCullen promulgated on 9/27/80, the Constitutions approved by the Assembly on 8/8, it was taken to the SCRIS for its approval on 3/8/81. The Constitutions approved by the SCRIS 4 years later, went into effect on 1/25/83.

<sup>21</sup> The CIC would be published on 1/25/83. One of the concerns of GA-80 had to do with our future inclusion in this CIC. It was decided to stay faithful to the patrimony of the congregation, inherited from Saint Vincent, and to await the course of events. IN the end, the CIC opened up, to accommodate us, the Section on Apostolic Life Societies cc.731-746, and the SCRIS approved our Constitutions, thus our situation at least in the juridical sense was improved (VINCENTIANA 1985, 1, p.146)

<sup>22</sup> In general the rich and full content has much value in the Constitutions and, in the Vincentian constitutions, the effort was achieved that they have their own mark and approval. Chapters like those on Community Life (II) and on Prayer (IV) that began being very general (valid for any Religious Institute), finished being quite specific. On the other hand, seen in its context, they had gained much in internal unity and in definition and difference what is the essential make up and what is the whole makeup.



With regards to what was the main problem of our identity/identification and *aggiornamento*, what does the new Constitutions say in articles 1-9, VOCATION? Enough, yet not enough. Enough if one thinks of the progress made and in the great clarification and concientization achieved (in missionaries and provinces), to overcome the cultural differences, with faith, good will and a lot of love for the Congregation, Not enough, if one looks at the deficiencies and the incoherence of the rest of the Constitutions with regard to the End.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning with the title of the First Part, the good aspect of the term VOCATION is that it contains a " call " that gives unity and sense of being to the works of the Congregation. It tells us what we have been called to. The bad thing is that it doesn't tell us anything of itself until we read it in the light of what comes next. VOCATION FOR THE MISSION or simply MISSION,<sup>24</sup> as was suggested in the Assembly, it would be much more important to speak of COMMUNITY for THE MISSION, FORMATION for THE MISSION, etc.

Having pointed out to the Congregation its single End, that of following Christ the Evangelizer of the poor is, without a doubt and in many aspects, the maximum achievement of its *aggiornamento* of its identity/identification.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it responds to the charism and intention of Saint Vincent first of all; and, secondly, it makes basic and orients what has to be our life and organization. For the three constituent Assemblies the End was the persistent issue. The successes or mistakes in the 146 remaining articles of the Constitutions come from the way they approximate to a greater or lesser degree the proposed end.<sup>26</sup> By sticking firmly and faithfully to the end we are able to salvage unity (communion) and diversity (in the Provinces with their cultural and traditional differences) and make authentic their diversified apostolates (arts. 2, 11-15, etc.).

---

<sup>23</sup> The evangelization of the poor is present in them, but not omnipresent as it ought to be, that is to say, it doesn't seem to be like a dynamic, uniting, overwhelming and permanent reference. Maybe, as I said already, for not having had from the beginning of the works the definitive text on the End, with its orientation. Cf. the inconsistencies, with regard to the end, of the arts. 11, 12.1, 18, Cf. notice 38.

<sup>24</sup> Mission in the sense of the evangelization of the poor, as it is explained in Saint Vincent and in the tradition of C.M. Mission and non missions that are among us the first institutional mediation to carry out the Mission

<sup>25</sup> To be defined for the proposed end supposes to have solved positively, at least in theory, the two underlying problems to the question on ONE or More ENDS: 1. only the poor or also other, and 2. What poor's class...

<sup>26</sup> Although the text of the End didn't come out until the conclusion of the Assembly it was definitely felt where the majority was headed and the vincentian charism and formation received from seminary days directed this majority. For that reason, the evangelization of the poor is very present in all the Constitutions. Cf. note 35

The proposed End projected light and spontaneously initiated additions and fundamental renovations above all in the ideas of Saint Vincent with regard to the three ends. In turn, these ideas were more capable to obtain the End of the Congregation. Without a doubt Saint Vincent would have left them to us **today** in this way (art. 1.1°, 2o and 3o) with the nuances and additions that they have:

- 1o, "the **personal** perfection to which one must dedicate himself" refers to each one's own spirituality- which ought to be in line with the Spirit that led Jesus to evangelize the poor, that is to say the **personal** perfection of the missionary **true** to the spirit as the actual text states.<sup>27</sup>

- 2o, puts before us the End of the Congregation, that is to say that, for the C.M. missionary, the poor and their evangelization are not an option but a vow that one takes for one's whole life (stability). The option is for the most abandoned poor...; and

- 3o, it duplicates ( better, it multiplies) the Pastoral Agents (clergy and **laity**) that will take care of the poor, because we will have formed them and sensitized them to make an option for the poor.

With regard to the nature of the Community, the Commission and the Assembly found that the proposed text was correct and precise and therefore, voted with a YES almost unanimously.<sup>28</sup> **It defined** the Congregation as an apostolic society, secular in its own way, clerical, and enjoying common life. Everything was there. But the SCRIS observed the text, saying that the description was vague and that the term "**secular**" should be removed or explained better... The General Council had to re-do art. 3,<sup>29</sup> it was left as it is in the actual Constitutions: the **pastoral identity** (according to the End) and the **juridical identity** (according to the CIC, 731) were acceptable, but our **secular identity** was weak, being seen only in its historical-pastoral sense.

As to this identity, as the Constitutions (art. 3.2) present it, there is a lack of consistency. Before, our secularity was defined by saying what we were not: We ARE NOT RELIGIOUS... But, what is our secular status, in a **positive description**? Certainly it is much more than the exercise of the apostolate in

---

<sup>27</sup> The GA agreed not to put quotations in the text from Saint Vincent or from other sources. The one who put Saint Vincent's quote in 1.1. didn't choose the most appropriate according to the context and, above all, it was not noticed that the spirit of which one speaks is clearly expressed in the arts. 5-8 on the spirit of the Congregation, especially art. 5.

<sup>28</sup> 31 Provinces over 40 accepted the text of the SCI. In the Assembly this text was approved almost unanimously.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. VINCENTIANA 1985, 1, pg. 92

intimate cooperation with the Bishops" (art. 3.2). That we are secular priests, **we are** of the "religion of Saint Peter"<sup>30</sup> as Saint Vincent would say, contains much more than mere cooperation, even if it be a very profound cooperation..

The **secular identity** of our Congregation and that of the missionaries, means that **it is in the world, it has its roots** (incarnated, in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation), **its way of life** (in residences and not in convents, and in fraternal life in common), **its commitment to God** (through the evangelization of the poor, to which they come to reinforce the vows that we make) and **its apostolate** (autonomous or special concession for better ways to evangelize the poor and the cultures).

The **spiritual identity** of the Congregation is expressed mainly in art. 5. The text on the spirit of the Congregation (arts. 5-8), seems to be a summary of our spirituality which is cristocentric (art. 5), trinitarian, providential, filled with compassionate and effective charity towards the poor (art. 6), missionary and adorned with the missionary's virtues (art. 7), always searching (art. 8). It contains certainly all that, but, in the context of Vocation, it would be sin to limit it to be our life in the Spirit. In terms of identity/identification, it is the very form of the Nature and End of the Congregation.

Having defined the spirit of the Congregation as **a participation in the Holy Spirit**, which anointed and sent forth Jesus to evangelize the poor, what art.5 says is like a resonance to our fundamental charism. It is placed here to be before all the forming spirit of our identity that gives a missionary soul to the nature of the Congregation and urges the missionary toward the end of the congregation.

Most decidedly, with regard to our identity/identification, the Constitutions tell us that we are a Congregation of Christians, priests or lay, but all equally missionaries, that the spirit calls and urges (art. 5) to continue the evangelizing mission of Jesus with the poor (art. 1), from the world of the poor and with autonomy (secularity and exemption, art. 3.2). **To better achieve this end**, we follow the proposal, the way and the style of Saint Vincent de Paul, approved by the Church. That is to say that with sights always on THE MISSION, we join to live fraternally in common life, we take some vows that reinforce and stabilize our vocation-mission, and we give ourselves some Constitutions that rule our life and that guarantee us, if we follow them, our personal holiness. The first part of this description contains the essential make up of our identity/identification; the second part, its integral make up.

---

<sup>30</sup> CEME, Conferencias a los misioneros, n.1110

It is the hope that in the next General Assembly that revises the Constitutions, with the experience of the last 20 years and in the context of the New Evangelization and its Inculturation, the Congregation can give itself Constitutions that are needed to respond to the more globalized world in this century. Constitutions that express, with greater clarity and determination than the current ones, our Vocation for the Mission.

(ARTHUR J. KOLINSKY, C.M., translator)