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The Vincentian History Project

Progress Report

by John Rybolt, C.M.

Province of Midwest, USA

20.VII.2004

1. In 1992, the first volume of a projected five-volume series on the history of the Congregation of the Mission was published simultaneously in Spanish and Italian. The authors were José María Román Fuentes and Luigi Mezzadri. This volume was subsequently translated into French and Polish, and probably into other languages. It covers generally the history of the Congregation in the 17th century.

In 2000, there appeared Volume II/1 in Italian, written by Luigi Mezzadri and his collaborator Francesca Onnis. This volume basically copied another volume by the same two authors, published the year before, *Missione e Carità. La Congregazione della Missione nel Settecento* (Rome, 1999). This was projected as the first of two volumes. To complete this work for Volume II of the general history of the Congregation, the authors added a section on the missions “ad gentes” of the Congregation in the 18th century.

To complete Volume II [II/2] there is still needed an account of the extensive history of the Congregation in Poland as well as the beginning of the Congregation in Spain.

2. At the death of Fr. Román, the project was suspended. Fr. Mezzadri asked for volunteers to help continue the project. When asked, I responded that I was interested, but only after I finished the CIF program in 2003. It was finally agreed that I would continue to work with Luigi Mezzadri. At the same time, the Superior General and his council agreed to provide an annual budget for the costs of research, if requested.

3. I began my work in 2004, with the support of my Visitor and with the support of De Paul University in Chicago, where I am stationed. I met with Fr. Mezzadri and we outlined the tasks facing us. The first thing that I decided was necessary was to develop an outline of the entire work. This was not too difficult, since I had already been teaching the history of the Congregation during the CIF program for several years. The outline has been completed,

along with a preliminary bibliography. My intention is to have the outline translated into Spanish and French and put on the FamVin website, in order to invite comments and suggestions from the Congregation. My conviction is that if this project is to be a history of the Congregation, then the Congregation should be invited to participate in it.

4. We have projected six single volumes. They are: Vol. III: From the French Revolution to 1843; Vol. IV: 1843-1878; Vol. V: 1878-1915; Vol. VI: 1915-1984. We conclude at 1984 as the year of the approval of the new Constitutions.

5. Each volume will have two major sections: (1) the general government of the Congregation: Superiors General, Assemblies, legislation, relationship with the Holy See, etc.; (2) the provinces of the Congregation, including the major figures of the Congregation (saints, blessed, and other confreres of importance for their sanctity, achievements and reputation, whether good or bad). Each century will also have a special chapter dedicated to a general analysis and evaluation of the Congregation: its style of government, exercise of authority, influence, theology, formation, spirituality, recruitment, finances, lifestyle, and the like.

6. Fr. Mezzadri and I will divide the work about the general government of the Congregation and its major developments. He is a trained Church historian, and I am not, so I look to his expertise especially here. I have prepared an outline in Spanish, French and English of the kind of information we hope to receive from each province. During the rest of this Assembly, I hope to meet with the Visitors or representatives of each province to speak about the project and to ask your help in gathering the information.

7. As of yet, we have not written one word of these projected volumes. Fr. Luigi Nuovo, of the Province of Turin, has already agreed to help with the research and writing of the period of the French revolution. I hope, however, to begin this task of writing when I return to Chicago. Meanwhile, I plan to continue research in Paris and Rome, and possibly in other provinces where the information is as yet not easily accessible. I wish to thank at this point the Visitors of several provinces who have already welcomed me as I began this task. They are the Provinces of Colombia, Central America, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia, in addition to the Eastern Province for Panama. Over the last several years, I have already had the opportunity to visit many of the provinces of the Congregation and, together with the information shared by the participants in the CIF program, I believe that I have at least a basic understanding of the development of the Congregation in its many provinces.