Chapter One
Chapter 1

The Congregation of the Mission and the French Revolution

At the dawn of the French Revolution, a seminal act of violence took place in Paris beginning in the early hours of 14 July 1789. Three days earlier, on 11 July, Louis XVI had dismissed his popular finance minister, Jacques Necker, and appointed several conservative ministers. By noon the next day, word of the king’s actions reached the capital. The atmosphere in Paris grew tense. Rumors spread that the king was planning to use foreign mercenary troops to disband the National Assembly.¹ During these next tumultuous days, royal and municipal authority in the city all but disappeared. The opposition party that had formed around the duke of Orleans, now played a leading role in the unfolding of events.²

The afternoon and evening of 13 July saw sporadic violence throughout the city. At 2:30 A.M., on 14 July, “a furious band armed with rifles, swords, and torches” massed in the narrow streets of the faubourg Saint-Denis.³ This group, which included members of the Gardes Françaises, attacked the main gates of the clos Saint-Lazare.⁴

⁴The Gardes Françaises were royal troops stationed in Paris. Many went over to the revolutionary cause influenced “by public agitation and liberal expenditure by the Palais-Royal.” See Rudé, The Crowd, 51.
This was a vast enclosed complex of buildings and property that served as the mother house of the Congregation of the Mission. Its members were known popularly as the "Lazarists." The gates held against the assault for a quarter of an hour. This delay allowed time for raising the alarm within. The four hundred hastily roused inhabitants thus had a head start on their escapes. They left with little more than the clothes on their backs. As the intruders streamed through the gates they shouted, "Bread! Bread!" The house procurator, Christophe-Simon Rouyet, and the superior general, Félix Cayla de la Garde were there to meet them. The two Lazarists offered food and money. However, these gestures did not distract the intruders. Rouyet and Cayla de la Garde then joined the other Lazarists who already had fled.

The party of the Palais-Royal orchestrated this first phase of Saint-Lazare's sacking. The justification they gave, "under the pretext of the national interest," was the search for grain, weapons, and money.

---

1 The priory of Saint-Lazare possessed a long history stretching back at least to the ninth century. Originally founded as a leprosanum far outside the medieval city walls, it fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Paris. Over the centuries, as one of the premier ecclesiastical seigneuries in the Paris region, the priory received many royal favors including the right to administer "high, middle, and lower justice." In 1515, the bishop of Paris, Étienne de Ponchier, entrusted the priory to the Canons Regular of Saint Victor who followed the rule of Saint Augustine. By 1630 no lepers were in residence and the number of monks had dwindled to nine. The prior, Adrien Le Bon, arranged to turn the property over to Vincent de Paul and the newly founded Congregation of the Mission. On 8 January 1632, Vincent transferred the mother house of his congregation from the Collège-des-Bons-Enfants, near Saint Victor's gate, to the priory of Saint-Lazare. See Jean Parrang, CM., "Saint-Lazare," Petites Annales de S. Vincent de Paul, 4 (1903): 13-30. See also, Simone Zurawski, "Saint-Lazare in the Ancien Régime: From Saint Vincent de Paul to the French Revolution," Vincentian Heritage 14 (1993): 15-36.


3 According to Antoine-Adrien Lamourette, "The household of Saint-Lazare ordinarily was composed of some four hundred persons. Of this number, two hundred were ecclesiastics—priests, novices, or students in philosophy or theology; eighty were lay brothers, and the remainder pensioners." Cited ibid., 276-77.

4 Jean-Joseph-Félix Cayla de la Garde (1734-1800) was the tenth superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. He was elected in 1788 to replace the late Antoine Jacquier. For a short biographical sketch see Circulaires, 2: 192-203. Until 1968, the superiors general served for life.

5 Rude, The Crowd, 50.

6 Cayla de la Garde, Circulaires, 2: 222.

7 A contemporary account noted that "These Fathers of suffering humanity were subject to the audacious and infernal calumny of being called grain hoarders." See Pierre d'Hesme d'Auribeau, Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la persecution française, (Rome: 1797), 257, cited in Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., "La Congrégation de la Mission pendant la Révolution d'après l'abbé d'Auribeau," Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission, 74 (1909): 367.
Although the group found no weapons, they did find large stores of grain. They loaded the confiscated goods onto fifty-two waiting wagons and transported them to the city's central market.13

The organized band efficiently finished its work after several hours and then departed the now defenseless complex. The destruction and looting that followed were the work of a mob consisting of as many as 4,000 “common people.”14 These were the poor laborers and tradespeople who lived in the neighborhood surrounding Saint-Lazare.15 They all would have been well acquainted with the institution and their neighbors the Lazarists.16

The mob had free reign of Saint-Lazare until late in the afternoon of 14 July. At this point, the city’s hastily organized citizens’ militia restored order.17 The looters had pillaged each of the complex’s buildings. A contemporary account described what happened.

The noise of destruction could be heard everywhere. All the window panes, sashes, doors, cupboards, tables, chairs, beds, and mantelpieces were reduced to rubble by these madmen. Simultaneously, thieves of all ages and both sexes plundered the rooms. They carried off, with inconceivable avidity, all the furniture and everything else in sight. They entered every room, pillaging even objects of the smallest value. Not a piece of clothing, of bed or table linen, not a kitchen utensil or other household article escaped the insatiable rapacity of this ferocious multitude. They were not satisfied simply stealing everything that they could carry. They went farther, and in their destructive fury they made the whole house uninhabitable. They threw beds, chairs, and tables into the courtyards. They ruined mattresses, defaced woodwork, even shattered the cornices of the walls...Nothing was left intact. They subjected everything to their fury.18
The mob also invaded the attached fields and gardens. They destroyed crops, killed livestock, and set fire to the farm buildings.

It was a small group of these same looters, however, who reverently carried the large silver casket containing Saint Vincent de Paul’s relics to safety. The reliquary found a haven at a nearby parish church.\(^{19}\) A Lazarist also removed the reserved sacrament and the sacred vessels to the same church.\(^{20}\) Outside the chapel many other sacred pictures, relics, and statuary, were not spared from destruction or theft.\(^{21}\)

Directly across from Saint-Lazare stood the complex of buildings that comprised the mother house of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.\(^{22}\) The location of these sisters and their headquarters in close proximity to the church was more than a coincidence.

\(^{19}\) The church of Saint-Laurent.

\(^{20}\) Stafford Poole, C.M., citing contemporary letters from Philippe-Bernard Adam, C.M., to Louis Jouselme, C.M., the procurator of the house at Lyon. The originals of these letters are in the Archives du Rhone, Fonds Lazaristes, Carton 28. \*A History of the Congregation of the Mission: 1625-1843 (Santa Barbara: Congregation of the Mission, 1972), 350.

\(^{21}\) This included the room where the relics of Saint Vincent’s personal possessions were kept. The missionaries later recovered many of these items from the piles of debris strewn in Saint-Lazare’s courtyards. See Perboyre, \*Annals, 14 (1907): 284.

proximity to Saint-Lazare was not a mere coincidence. From its foundation in 1633 by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, the Daughters of Charity had enjoyed an indirect but special relationship with the Congregation of the Mission through the person of its superior general. With his election, the Lazarists' superior general also automatically became the superior general of the Daughters of Charity. Although the two communities were juridically separate, they were spiritually linked in the person of Saint Vincent’s successor. Together, they thought of themselves as constituting the “Double Family of Saint Vincent.”

At this time, residing in the mother house were the superioress general and her council, fifty other sisters, and fifty aged and infirm sisters. The house also contained ninety-eight young seminary sisters (the equivalent of novices) between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Awakened by the rioting, these sisters watched with horror what was taking place across the street.

At 5:30 A.M., a Lazarist arrived to celebrate mass for the sisters. He was unable to leave afterward because of the dangerous conditions. At 7:00 A.M., some looters arrived carrying an aged and infirm Lazarist to safety. This group reportedly told the sisters that they had nothing to fear from them, “because we have not been paid for you, but for Saint-Lazare.”

Later that morning, a larger group of “brigands” demanded to be admitted to search for grain and flour. The superioress general and the seminary directress accompanied the intruders. After finding no great hidden stores, this delegation departed. In the afternoon, the sisters endured yet another search of their buildings. Later that night, forty troops from the national guard finally arrived to protect the complex.

21 Louise de Marillac’s great concern was that without a juridical dependency on the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity would fall under the jurisdiction of local bishops. These bishops had a tendency to frown upon the concept of unclerced women, and she feared they would intervene to restrict their mission of direct service to the poor. For more information on the relationship between the superior general of the Congregation and the Daughters of Charity see Miguel Pérez-Flores, C.M., “The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity,” Vincentian Heritage, 5 (1984): 1-41, and Luis Huerga, C.M. Una institución singular: el superior general de la Congregación de la Misión y de los Hijos de la Caridad (Salamanca: CEME, 1974).


23 Ibid., 48.

24 Ibid.
Cayla de la Garde called on the Congregation’s other houses to make all possible sacrifices. He hoped that these might provide enough resources so that the mother house could “by practicing the most austere frugalities continue to exist, while preparing for the eventual resumption of all its activities.” That hoped-for day would never come.

Félix Cayla de la Garde served as a clerical delegate in the National Assembly. He thus witnessed the rapidity with which legislation destroyed the Ancien Régime’s Church and state polities. Over the next six months, “the thousand-year edifice of the Gallican church would come crashing down, wall after wall. The national assemblies of the clergy were destroyed, and with them the entire system of benefices and tithes.” The Assembly next suppressed the religious orders. Because of their secular status, the Lazarists and Daughters of Charity temporarily escaped dissolution.

In his circular letter written at the beginning of 1790, Cayla de la Garde reflected on the events of the previous six months. “Placed as a witness in the middle of the most disastrous revolution, and almost having been a victim to popular fury, I again sigh at the remembrance of the past while realizing that our future prospects are not very consoling.” The superior general did take consolation, however, from the conduct of those who were sharing with him the uncertainties and the hardships amid Saint-Lazare’s ruins.

---

28 Ibid.
30 The Assembly outlawed monastic vows on 28 October 1789 and suppressed the kingdom’s religious orders on 13 February 1790. Ibid., 1: 48.
In the midst of the greatest privations and bloody outrages, not one word of complaint has come from them. They have lost without regret what they had possessed without affection. Consoled by their consciences and by their Lord, they pay no attention to the public's unjust judgments and their insane rhetoric. They respond to curses with blessings, to persecution with invincible patience, and to injuries by increasing their prayers... Our misfortunes also have produced precious advantages; piety has been reborn, and zeal is increasing. I have seen a holy desire for the good come into being. This has given me the most gratifying hopes. Our house is smaller in terms of the number of its subjects, but it has grown noticeably in its spirit. In this it should be a model... My joy would be perfect if our misfortunes would produce the same effect in all our houses, and our temporal losses should become the source of our renewal.32

Seeing all this, the Lazarists knew that the Congregation's legal existence also was in peril.33 Cayla de la Garde admitted that he "did not yet know with perfect certainty what will be our fate."34 He hoped that the Congregation could hold itself together against the ravages of "the trouble, the inquietude, the spirit of independence, and the weakening of discipline."35 If the community could do this and continue zealously with its works, he thought that it might still "merit public confidence" and survive.36

32 Ibid.
33 When the clergy of Paris elected their six delegates to the Estates General, Cayla de la Garde was the first alternate. When one of the delegates resigned at the time the Estates became the National Assembly, Cayla de la Garde took his place. He spoke in the Assembly to oppose the spoliation of Church properties and the suppression of the religious orders. He remained a delegate until 4 January 1791, when he refused to swear the required oath supporting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. He then was expelled from the Assembly. See Gabriel Perboyre, C.M., "The Congregation of the Mission during the Revolution: 1788-1800," Annals, 14 (1907): 411-13.
34 Cayla de la Garde, Circulaires, 2: 724.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
Following the prohibition of Pius VI, the Lazarists almost unanimously refused to take the required oath supporting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.37 The establishment of a Constitutional Church caused a national schism between the juring and nonjuring clergy. Constitutional priests came forward to take over the parishes of Paris.38 The “good priests and fervent Catholics” began celebrating mass in the chapels of institutions including Saint-Lazare.39 The Lazarists thus identified themselves as enemies of the Revolution and helped seal their fate.

In his circular letter of 1 January 1791, Cayla de la Garde betrayed the terrible strain he felt in holding the community together. “I have been asked about the possibility of the Congregation’s total destruction a thousand times... I would not be honest if I did not tell you that we are in a critical position. Our alarm is not groundless... Everyone is writing me asking desperately for news. I cannot find fault with such an understandable response, but it must be kept within bounds. Trust that I am always watching out for your interests. I am using every means possible to prevent the misfortunes that even the thought of fills me with bitterness. I will keep you informed.”40 According to the superior general, his last hope was that “our tears will touch the God of Saint Vincent de Paul, and he will come to our aid.”41 Cayla de la Garde told his confreres, “Whatever our fears, and whatever the probability of our suppression, our obligations do not change. We will be missionaries until the last moment. Because we are missionaries, we must continue to observe our Rules and not put them aside.”42 The general encouraged superiors to “redouble their zeal and vigilance in maintaining order and discipline in their houses.”43

37 The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was adopted by the National Assembly on 12 July 1790. Its purpose was to reorganize and restructure the Catholic Church in France. It was called a civil constitution because its authors insisted that it affected only the temporal status of the clergy and not the Church’s spiritual dimension, which was in the care of the papacy. The Civil Constitution’s supporters insisted that they had simply suppressed the flagrant abuses and inequities of Church under the Ancien Régime, thus making possible one that was administratively effective and morally and spiritually regenerated. Its opponents replied that the Civil Constitution went beyond legal reforms to usurp powers that belonged to the pope. See Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1: 190-92.

38 Jean-Jacques Dubois, who was a member of the Congregation before the Revolution and later pastor of Sainte-Marguerite in Paris, testified that only eighteen of the community’s 508 priests took the oath supporting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Cited in Perboyre, “The Congregation of the Mission during the Revolution,” 370.

39 Ibid., Perboyre citing Pierre d’Esmivy d’Auribeau.

40 Cayla de la Garde, Circulaires, 2: 229.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 2: 230.

43 Ibid.
M. Cayla, Jean Félix
X° Supérieur
Élu le 2 Juin 1788. Mort le 12 Février 1800

Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde, C.M., superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, 1788-1800
At the beginning of 1792, Cayla de la Garde reported that conditions had worsened. The government had confiscated most of the Congregation's houses and properties. The displaced priests and brothers had gathered in the few remaining community houses. They found themselves continually harassed. Since the government forbade them from exercising any ministry, they had no means of support. Some families disowned their relatives who were nonjuring Lazarists. Given the situation, there was little left for Cayla de la Garde to say. "Our misfortunes are aggravated by our fear, that unfortunately is very well founded. We must expect our suppression. Only the hand of the all-powerful...can stay the blow that now menaces us. I must express my thanks to the confreres of foreign countries who have so often written me expressing their sorrow at our troubles. They most kindly have invited me to take refuge with them. I do not know the fate to which Providence has destined me, but I will never cease to watch over the Congregation's interests."\(^44\)

On 6 April 1792, the members of the National Assembly heard a motion to suppress the secular communities of priests and sisters. After months of debate, the Assembly finally approved the measure on 18 August. The first article of the decree read: "All congregations known in France under the title of Secular Ecclesiastical Congregations, such as the priests of...the Mission of France or of Saint-Lazare...and generally all religious corporations and secular congregations of men or women, ecclesiastics or laymen, even those devoted solely to the service of the hospitals and care of the sick, under whatever name existing in France, whether they comprise one house or several houses; moreover all societies, confraternities,...and all other associations of piety or charity, are extinct and suppressed from the date of publication of the present decree."\(^45\) Later that same day, officials from the Comité de Faubourg Poissonnière entered Saint-Lazare. They sealed the archives and the other rooms of the house. The inventory ordered by the Assembly's decree then took place. Earlier in the month, anticipating the coming suppression, workers

\(^44\)Ibid., 2: 236-37.
\(^45\)Actes du Gouvernment François concernant la Congrégation de la Mission dite de Saint-Lazare, fondée par Saint Vincent de Paul: Supplément (Paris: Maison-Mère de la Congrégation de la Mission, 1902), 4-10.
had begun transforming the complex's main buildings into a prison.46

The decree of suppression had stipulated that the members of the communities should vacate their houses no later than the first of October. However, on 26 August, the local revolutionary committee ordered the community of Saint-Lazare to leave the following day. The officials told them, however, that if it were absolutely necessary they "could temporarily occupy designated quarters."47

On 1 September, a small group of Lazarists gathered in the mother house chapel. With the permission of Monsieur Devitry of the "Commune de Paris, Commission de l'administration des biens nationaux, Bureau de liquidation," they removed the relics of Saint Vincent's bones from their silver casket. The officials then inventoried and confiscated the reliquary. The missionaries placed the saint's relics in an oak box. This box remained safely hidden during the revolutionary period.48

On the following day, the September massacres began in Paris. The slaughter started with those priests and religious interned at the convent of the Discalced Carmelites. On the morning of 3 September, at the Congregation's seminary of Saint-Firmin [the old Collège-des-Bons-Enfants], more than sixty priests died. Included in this number were several Lazarists.49 On the day that the massacres began the superior general went into hiding. When it was safe, he left Paris never to return. Cayla de la Garde fled to Amiens, remaining there for several months.

By 4 October 1792, officials had inventoried and confiscated the remaining movable possessions of Saint-Lazare. The last of the missionaries departed. The Congregation of the Mission thus ceased to exist in the kingdom where it had been founded.50

---

47Ibid., 430.
48This account is found in Mandement de Monseigneur l'archevêque de Paris... de la Translation solennelle du Corps de Saint Vincent de Paul, et qui publie les Proces-Verbaux dressés à l'occasion de cette Solennité (Paris: Adrien Le Clerc, 1830). 14-15.
49For an account of the Lazarists who were martyred during the French Revolution see Félix Cayla de la Garde, "Notes sur les Missionnaires victimes de la Révolution," Circulaires: Pieces Justificatives, 2: 601-24.
50The Daughters of Charity left their mother house on the 23 August. They were not able to recover the relics of Louise de Marillac until 1797. They purchased them from the new owner of their former property who was about to tear the buildings down.
The Congregation of the Mission and the Ancien Régime

Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Mission in 1625. He created an apostolic community to evangelize the spiritually abandoned among the great masses of the French provinces' rural poor. This systematic evangelization took place by means of lengthy parish-based catechetical and sacramental missions. Highly mobile teams of experienced missionaries conducted these missions.

Vincent de Paul quickly discovered that the quality of the poorly-trained diocesan clergy hampered the long-term success of this parochial evangelization. These same conditions among the clergy also hampered the French Church's long-delayed Tridentine renewal. In response to episcopal requests, the Congregation expanded its primitive mission to include the formation and spiritual renewal of the diocesan clergy. This mission used the following means: the reform of preaching, ordination retreats, continuing education conferences, support groups, and eventually the direction of Tridentine-style diocesan seminaries scattered throughout the kingdom.

Largely because of the strong prejudice against religious orders, the Congregation took shape as an innovative form of apostolic com-
Community life. The community consisted of secular priests and laymen (lay-brothers) who took simple private vows. As finally approved by Rome, the Congregation enjoyed pontifical exemption in all matters that dealt with its internal life and governance. However, in the exercise of its external ministries, the community recognized the jurisdiction of diocesan authorities. The Congregation limited itself to exercising its evangelistic mission in country parishes. It would not accept any benefices that had a cure of souls attached. The community also offered all its ministries freely, without receiving any compensation.

Within its first few years, the territorial focus and the legal authorization for exercising the Congregation's "mission" expanded rapidly. The community's first authorization limited it to the extensive provincial lands belonging to its noble lay patrons. Then, the archbishop of

---

57 One source of the French "general scorn" toward the religious orders was their pontifical exemption from episcopal authority. Another was that they were considered to be unwelcome ultramontane enclaves within the Gallican church. The French unfavorably judged their spiritualities as "charismatic mysticism in which sensibility predominates over reason, and the heart commands the mind." Gallican sensibilities judged their prayer as "redundant lyricism, with a tendency to pious exaggeration, garish manifestations, and formulas of edification." The French found it particularly objectionable that these orders "obeyed a superior who resided in Rome, and who ordinarily was Italian." They also did not like the fact that they always had many foreign students studying in their houses in Paris. See Georges Aimé-Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme de Bossuet* (Paris: Cerf, 1953), 113.


59 The decision for the members of the Congregation to take vows, even private and simple ones, was very controversial among the first missionaries. For the details of this controversy see Coste, *Life and Times*, 1: 479-89. Along with the three traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the members of the Congregation were to take a fourth vow of "stability." This vow promised a lifelong personal commitment to the Congregation and to its evangelistic mission.

60 Urban VIII approved the new congregation in the bull *Salvatoris Nostri* of 12 January 1633. Its understanding of the nature and meaning of its vows was approved by Alexander VII in the bulls *Ex comissa nobis* and *Alias nos supplicationes* of 22 September 1655 and 12 August 1659, respectively. *Acta Apostolica*, 3, 11, 16, 23.

61 Urban VIII granted the Congregation, in perpetuity, all the canonical rights and privileges enjoyed by religious orders. See *Collectio Privilegiorum et Indulgentiarum qua S. Sedis Congregacioni Missio benigne concessit* (Parisiis: In Domo Primaria Congregationis Missionis, 1900), 10.

62 In 1627, the pastors of the Parisian parishes expressed their opposition to the Congregation's approval. This was done "for the sake of the peace and tranquility of the Church and the State." They demanded "sure guarantees... that the new congregation would not pose a threat to their rights, privileges, and authority." The Congregation made these guarantees. For the text of the protest lodged by Etienne de Tonnellier the syndic for the Parisian pastors see Coste, *CED*, 13: 227-28.


64 The contract of 1625 that founded the Congregation of the Mission was made with the influential Gondi family. This devout family wished to provide for the spiritual welfare of the people who lived in the villages that dotted their vast provincial lands. Vincent de Paul had been chaplain to this family. He had a long and close association with Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, the General of the Galleys, and his pious wife Marguerite. Vincent always considered the Gondi's as the true "founders of the Congregation." For more information on his relationship with this family and how it led to the foundation of the Congregation see Coste, *Life and Times*, 1: 60-71, 95-131, 144-59. For the text of the foundation contract see Coste, *CED*, 13: 197-202.
Paris authorized its activities in his jurisdiction. 65 Finally, national legal recognition enabled it to function in all "other places of the kingdom of France that are subject to the Most Christian King's rule." 66 This expansion took place before 1628 when the community first sought papal approval and contained only a handful of members. 67

A natural element of the Congregation's modus vivendi was a reverence for the king's sacred person. One means of expressing this reverence, as modeled by Saint Vincent, was by an exemplary obedience to royal authority. 68 From the very beginning, under Louis XIII and Anne of Austria's regency, the Congregation enjoyed the favor of the Bourbons. 69 When the young Louis XIV reconfirmed the community's possession of Saint-Lazare he stated what would be the consistent royal attitude toward the Congregation until the collapse of the Ancien Régime.

We are fully informed of the probity, capacity, life, and good morals of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. We also are aware of the great, good, and notable services that they have continually rendered to the Church and public by the instructions that they give to young ecclesiastics in seminaries, ecclesiastical retreats, and ordination retreats. We also have noted the blessings that God gives to their country missions and their foreign missions of the Indies. We know that they employ and consume their own goods and revenues, their health, and their life without receiving any salary. They hope for no other recompense, other than that which comes from God. We therefore desire to assure and perpetuate the continuation of these holy exercises, so useful and so necessary to the Church and to the public. We thus testify to our

---

65 For a survey of the texts of the civil and canonical approvals received by the Congregation during this formative period see Coste, CED, 13: 202-67. It also is of interest to note that during the lifetime of Vincent the bishopric and archbishopric of Paris were held successively by members of the Gondi family. This connection was to the Congregation's great benefit.
66 Vincent de Paul to Urban VIII, 1 August 1628, Coste, CED, 1: 59.
67 Vincent de Paul to Urban VIII, 1 August 1628, ibid., 1: 47-53.
68 In his 1664 biography of Vincent de Paul, Louis Abelly described the saint's reverence for the king and his loyalty to the crown at great length. See, for example, book 2, chapter 13: "Monsieur Vincent's service to the King in the Council of His Majesty and elsewhere during the time of the Queen Mother's Regency." See also sections 9-12 of this chapter which are entitled: "Various other activities of Monsieur Vincent while on the Council of the King," "Monsieur Vincent always preserved an inviolable fidelity to the king and a constant devotion to his service, even during the most perilous and difficult times," "Monsieur Vincent served the King with an entire disregard for all personal self-interest," and "Monsieur Vincent's prudence and circumspection in his service to the King." Louis Abelly, Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul, trans. William Quinn, F.S.C., 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1992), 2: 372-400.
69 One proof of this royal favor is the fact that crown entrusted the Congregation with the coveted royal parishes at Versailles, Fontainebleau, Rochefort, Les Invalides, and Sedan, as well as the chapel at the palace of Versailles. Although it was against the Congregation's Rules to accept this type of benefice, it accepted these parishes in obedience to royal commands. See Actes du Gouvernement Français concernant la Congrégation de la Mission dite de Saint-Lazare fondée par Saint Vincent de Paul (Paris: Congrégation de la Mission, 1901), x.
well beloved, the said Vincent de Paul, superior general, and the other priests of the said Congregation of the Mission, the intent that we have of maintaining, conserving, and augmenting the graces and privileges accorded and conceded by us in favor of their said Congregation.70

Between 1627 and 1789, the crown recognized the Congregation’s various works and institutions in a series of more than 120 patent letters.71 In return for this favor, the crown expected that the Congregation would be an obedient “tool” in supporting its policies. The Bourbons would find no reason for dissatisfaction with the Lazarists’ corporate response in this regard.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Congregation of the Mission established its initial relations with the Holy See within the parameters of the French religious modus vivendi. Vincent de Paul contributed his own reverence for the Roman pontiff. He also insisted on an unquestioning obedience to the Holy See’s and Roman Curia’s authority.72 Vincent stated his relative ultramontanism unambiguously in the Congregation’s Common Rules.73 The chapter dealing with obedience notes, “We will in the first place faithfully and sincerely render reverence and obedience to our Most Holy Father the pope.”74 Later, in a conference that he gave commenting on this provision, the founder explained:

---

70 “Lettres patentes de Louis XIV, confirmant et approuvant l’union et incorporation de Saint-Lazare à la Congrégation de la Mission,” ibid., 32.
71 Ibid., ix.
72 Vincent de Paul’s respect for the Roman Curia was uncharacteristic in terms of his times.
73 Ultramontanism is an ecclesiological movement emphasizing papal authority, Roman centralization, and uniformity in the Church. The conciliar movements, beginning in the fifteenth century, heightened the debate over the nature and extent of papal prerogatives. During the succeeding centuries, with the growth of nationalism, absolutism, and alternative ecclesiologies, such as Gallicanism, strong and effective opposition to ultramontanism emerged among the Catholic European monarchies. During the nineteenth century ultramontane ecclesiology finally became dominant within Catholicism, leading to a great exaltation of the person and power of the Roman Pontiff and the authoritarian, centralizing tendencies of the Roman Curia.
74 Common Rules, chapter 5, §1, 122.
Our Holy Father the Pope, is the Common Father of all Christians, the Church’s visible head, the vicar of Jesus Christ, and the successor of Saint Peter. We owe him our obedience. Part of our mission is to instruct the people, by our own example, in the obedience that they too owe to the universal pastor of our souls. We also honor God when we promptly obey and faithfully receive what comes from his authority. It is to him, in the person of Saint Peter, that our Lord said, “feed my lambs, pasture my sheep,” and to whom the Savior gave the Church’s keys. He is above all others. We must also see Our Lord in his person.75

After Vincent’s death in 1660, given the changing nature of the national relationship with the papacy beginning under Louis XIV, the Congregation in France redefined its papal allegiance more narrowly. This shift mirrored the recast national-absolutist-Gallican modus vivendi. Naturally, this changed prioritization occurred at the cost of papal displeasure. This stance was also problematic to the Congregation’s non-French provinces and the rulers of other European Catholic kingdoms where the community functioned.

However, one cannot imagine the reverse situation taking place, namely the Congregation in France risking royal and parlementary displeasure by stating an ultramontane preference for supporting papal authority against specific Gallican interests.76 This would have been a violation of the national religious status quo. In this situation, Rome could have done little to protect the French Lazarists against the consequences of the crown and parlement’s wrath.77 The unenviable experiences of the French Jesuits during the middle of the eighteenth century provided evidence of this reality.

An Ongoing Gallican Domination and the “vice of nationalism”78

Between 1625 and 1670, the contemporary forces of absolutism, Gallicanism, and nationalism shaped efforts to establish the
Congregation’s internal modus vivendi. During the first years of the Congregation’s existence Vincent de Paul, as founder and first superior general, governed on the basis of a simple organizational structure. Initial royal and episcopal approvals ratified this arrangement. The Congregation’s growth required that the community eventually define the elements of its identity to form the basis for its definitive approvals by the Holy See and the crown.

In 1632, Vincent de Paul requested papal approval both of the Congregation’s mission and a basic set of six constitutional “ordinances.” The founder also asked the pope to “grant apostolic recognition, and allow the superior general of the aforesaid Congregation and his successors, for the greater progress of this Congregation, to enact any other statutes, beyond the aforesaid ordinances...May they also be allowed, according to the nature of the circumstances and times, and as often as it will be appropriate, to change, alter, modify, limit, and correct them, and have the power to issue new norms freely and unrestrictedly, provided the aforesaid statutes, their changes, alterations, modifications, limitations, corrections, and the new norms are first approved by the Ordinary.” In 1633, Urban VIII’s bull of foundation, Salvatoris Nostri, approved this open-ended request.

Over the next several decades, work slowly advanced on a comprehensive set of rules and constitutions. The Congregation’s proto-

---

79 Gallicanism was an ecclesiology, with roots already in the thirteenth century, that claimed for France the right to resist all but very restricted forms of papal intervention within its jurisdiction. The French kings had controlled the papacy in Avignon from 1303 to 1377. The subsequent Great Western Schism (1378-1417) was concluded only when the Council of Constance (1414-1417) declared the supremacy of the general councils over popes and removed the three papal claimants. These events encouraged the French church to resist papal interventions. The state courts (parlements), basing themselves on the royal ordinance, the “Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges” (1438), interpreted this right of resistance rigorously.

The faculty of the University of Paris defended a more moderate version of Gallicanism even after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), and under Louis XIV this version was formulated in the four articles of the “Declaration of 1682” of the Assembly of the Clergy of France: (1) rejection of the extreme parlementary position that denied any papal intervention in temporal matters; (2) admission of papal authority but only subject to conciliar supremacy; (3) demands that popes respect the ancient canons and customs of the French church; (4) admission of papal supremacy in matters of faith but denial of papal infallibility apart from the consent of the universal Church.

Gallicanism never proposed schism from the Roman See. Gallicanism became obsolete with the French Revolution, but the restoration of the monarchy in France in the nineteenth century revived its influence until the secular democracy and the conciliar definition of papal infallibility at Vatican I (1870) removed its influence.


For a survey of these texts see Coste, CED, 1: 115; 13: 200-75.

Vincent de Paul to Urban VIII, January 1632, Coste, CED, 1: 144.

Ibid.

Acta Apostolica, 8.
assemblies in 1642 and 1651 refined draft documents. Thirty-three years elapsed, however, between the Congregation's foundation and the founder's 1658 promulgation of the Common Rules or Common Constitutions. These Common Rules addressed only those matters that were the "common" concern of all the Congregation's members.

At Vincent's death, many aspects of the community's juridical structure remained unsettled. Vincent's successor, René Alméras, guided the constitutional era to a close. He did this in a flurry of activity designed to preserve the Congregation's "primitive spirit." Under Alméras' leadership the first two general assemblies finished work on what became known as the Grand Constitutions. The 1668 general assembly gave final approval to this document.

*For an account of the long process of formation of the Congregation's various constitutional documents see Coste, Life and Times, 1: 469-76 and Mezzadri-Román, Historia, 1: 38-41. For minutes of the 1642 and 1651 assemblies see Coste, CED, 13: 287-97, 326-32.

*In his letter promulgating the Common Rules, Vincent explained the long delay:

Here at long last, my dear brothers, are the Rules, or Common Constitutions of our Congregation. You have been very anxious to have them and have had to wait a long time for them. It is now about thirty-three years since our Congregation was founded, but I have not had our Rules printed for you before now. There were two reasons for this. Firstly [sic], I wanted to take our Savior as a model. He put things into practice before he made them part of his teaching. Secondly, delaying their printing has avoided many problems which almost certainly would have arisen if these Rules had been published too soon. There could have been problems about living up to them later on, as they might have seemed too difficult or not so relevant. With the help of God's grace, delaying like this has saved us from such a risk. It has also made it possible for the Congregation to gradually and smoothly get used to living the Rules before having them in print. You will not find anything in them which you have not been doing for a long time already.

Common Rules, 101-02.

*Saint Vincent spent much of his remaining time and energy in providing an extensive and invaluable commentary on the provisions of the Common Rules. For the texts of these classic spiritual conferences see Coste, CED, 12: 70-286, 292-433.

*In the earliest surviving draft of the community's constitutions, the so-called Codex Sarzana (1655), the various elements dealing with the community's identity, spirit, and governance are all combined in one lengthy document. For the Latin text see "Codex Sarzana," ed. John Rybolt, C.M., Vincentiana 33 (1991): 307-406.

*For an account of the Congregation at the founder's death see Mezzadri-Román, Historia, 1: 86-89.

*For a survey of the other actions Alméras took during his generalate to define and preserve the community's primitive spirit see Circulaires, 1: 30-113. See in particular, "Moyens de conserver l'esprit primitif de la Congregasion proposed en l'Assemblee Generale de l'annee 1668," ibid., 1: 97.

*Alméras served as the Congregation's second superior general from his election in January 1661 to his death on 22 September 1672. For a brief biographical sketch see Circulaires, 1: 28-30.

*For the text of this document which remained authoritative until the adoption of the Congregation's 1954 Constitutions see Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum, ac Decretorum que Congregationis Administrationem spectant (Paris: Maison-Mère, 1847), 1-125.

*Generally speaking, the Constitutions provided for a very hierarchical authority structure centered in on the person of a powerful superior general who was elected for life. While the authority of general assemblies was superior to that of the general, these meetings were at most held only every six to twelve years. See Maria Chiara Cervini, C.M., "Il Governo della Congregazione della Missione di S. Vincenzo de Paoli," Annali della Missione 104 (1994): 3-60.
bly also voted to submit a “selection” of twenty key provisions for the Holy See’s approval. These articles dealt with the office of the superior general, the community’s general administration and governance, and the respective roles of the Congregation’s general, provincial, and domestic assemblies. Soon after the assembly ended, Alméras submitted the Select Constitutions for Roman approval. A consistory of cardinals amended and approved them. Clement X added his ratification on 2 June 1670 in the bull, Ex injuncto nobis.

The process of constitutional formation was in every respect a Gallican affair. Although the Congregation had small numbers of Italian, Polish, and Irish missionaries, and a handful of foundations in these countries, most of the Congregation’s members and its houses were French. Correspondingly, the community’s entire leadership, including the first superiors of the foreign European missions and provinces founded in this era, were also French.

At the end of 1642, Vincent de Paul had considered a proposal to move the community’s headquarters to Rome. The founder even considered going there to investigate the ramifications of such a decision. The French Lazarist who made this proposal, Bernard Codoing, thought that this move would ensure papal favor and preserve unity among the community’s emerging national groups. After more than a year of consideration this proposal, which Vincent described as “beset with very serious difficulties,” was quietly dropped. Vincent did not reveal exactly what these “serious difficulties” might entail. However, they could only have involved the perceived impossibility of disengaging the community from its already deep Gallican roots. Moving the generalate to Rome could not have been done while still preserving the necessary favor of the crown, the Gallican church, the parlements, and the kingdom itself.

---

92 See Acta Apostolica, 8. The second general assembly was concerned that this papal delegation might lead a future superior general to seek changes in the constitutions simply by appealing to the authority of the archbishop of Paris. In order to guard against this possibility, and in order to give “greater solidity” to the most important elements of the Constitutions, the assembly resolved to submit these sections to the Holy See for its approval. See explanatory note in De Contentibus tum Generali, tum Sexennali in Congregatione Missionis (Parisis: Congregationis Missionis, 1917), 73.

93 Constitutiones, 126-40.

94 Acta Apostolica, 33-38.

95 Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 25 December 1642, Coste, CED, 2: 324. Bernard Codoing was the French superior of the community’s house in Rome.

96 Vincent de Paul to Bernard Codoing, 10 July 1643, ibid., 2: 409.
While it was not clear, at this point, how extensively the Congregation might eventually expand outside France, it was certain that its future would remain inexorably tied primarily to France, and thus its Gallican identity. Vincent de Paul was aware of the dangers posed by the emergence of nationalistic feelings and divisions within the community. In the Common Rules, several provisions suggest means to keep these problems from arising.97

Vincent de Paul believed that the need for the Congregation's apostolates, its respect for the Roman pontiff and the authority of the Holy See, its secular identity, and its constitutional provisions requiring an unquestioning obedience to all civil and religious authorities, would enable it to operate within any other national modus vivendi in Catholic Europe.98 The founder presumed that foreign foundations and provinces would be willing and able to maintain an identification with the forms of community life, ministry, and devotion as they existed in France, particularly at the mother house of Saint-Lazare.99 This presumption proved very difficult to maintain during the Congregation's development within very different eighteenth-century realities.

The new century was an age of "dynastic Catholic nationalism."100 European Catholic monarchs would not accept the independent presence of any of the supranational congregations or orders in their realms.101 These rulers required these groups to have a nationalistic identity, culture, and governance that always took precedence over

---

97 For example in chapter 8, §14-16, which reads:

No one shall speak against other countries or provinces since much harm is wont to follow from such action. . . . In public conflicts and wars which arise between Christian rulers, no one shall show a preference for one side or another, in imitation of Christ who was unwilling to arbitrate between brothers involved in litigation, or to pass judgment on the rights of civil rulers. He would only say that what belongs to Caesar should be given to Caesar, and so forth . . . Everyone shall hold aloof from conversations about war and the disputes of contemporary civil leaders, and other such talk of the world. No one shall as far as possible, even write about these things.

98 Indeed, this was the founder's experience as the Congregation expanded into Poland and Italy during his lifetime.

99 According to Vincent, the statement "This is the way that it is done at Saint-Lazare" was to serve as the ultimate reference point for all the judgments concerning lived uniformity to the primitive spirit of the rules and constitutions. These were to be practiced in the same manner by every confrere, in every house, in every province, and in every nation throughout the Congregation. See, for example, Vincent de Paul, "Répétition d'Oraison du 28 juillet 1655, Sur la Genuflexion," Coste, CED, 11: 206.


101 For a survey of this history see Jedin, Church, 6: 329-582.
any conflicting demands posed by their supranational ecclesial identity.102

In the eighteenth century, as the Congregation expanded into other countries in Catholic Europe, it experienced internal nationalistic divisions. Many non-French provinces resented the centralized authority of the community’s French superiors, its Gallican ecclesiology and corporate culture, and its identity as a French national institution. All this happened at a time when Catholic Europe resisted any form of French dominance.

It was the Roman province in the Papal States that first questioned the predominant position of the French.103 The Spanish and Portuguese provinces in turn came into existence via the Roman province during the first half of the eighteenth century.104 Thus, these Roman/French antagonisms also shaped the Congregation’s prerevolutionary history in Spain and Portugal.

A Century of Nationalistic Troubles

An early sign of problems between the French and the Romans came at the general assembly of 1685. At this gathering, the Romans demanded that the fourth assistant general allowed by the community’s Constitutions would be an Italian.105 Given the heightened Gallican atmosphere of the time in France, the superior general Edme Jolly had opposed this concession fearful of Louis XIV’s reaction.106 When the Romans threatened to appeal to the Holy See, the French reluctantly agreed.107

---

102 During this era it was common for these Catholic monarchs to insist that the various international religious orders and congregations in their realms be governed either by a national superior independent of the order’s general, or even that they be declared to be independent entities.

103 In 1651, Vincent sent a representative to reside in Rome in order to guide the Congregation’s approval through the Roman Curia. This soon led to the establishment of the works of the community there and eventually throughout the Italian peninsula. By 1642, the community in Italy had expanded to the point that the houses there were formed into a separate Roman province, the first one established outside France. For a history of the Congregation in Italy see Salvatore Stella, C.M., La Congregazione della Missione in Italia (Parigi: Congregazione della Missione, 1883).


105 Up to this point the Congregation had operated with three assistants general.

106 Edme Jolly was the Congregation’s third superior general. He served from his election in 1673 to his death in 1697. For a short biographical sketch see Circulaires, 1: 123-26.

In 1697, before the opening of the general assembly convoked to elect a successor to Jolly the delegates heard a stunning announcement. Louis XIV sent the archbishop of Paris, Louis de Noailles, to tell the Lazarists that he was vetoing the leading candidate in the upcoming election. The vetoed confrere was Maurice Faure, then the pastor of the royal parish at Fontainebleau. The official reason given for the exclusion was that Faure was a native of Savoy. Through the influence of Madame de Maintenon, Faure and several delegates obtained an audience with the king. Despite their appeal, the royal veto stood. In addition, the king declared that he would never allow the election of a non-Frenchman as the Congregation’s superior general.

When the time came for the delegates to certify the fulfillment of the constitutional requirements for a legitimate assembly, the Roman

---

108 Savoy had not yet been incorporated into France. At the time, relations between the House of Savoy and Louis XIV were strained. Louis XIV told Faure that there was nothing personal about his veto but that it was required as a matter of state policy. However, there is also some evidence that Faure’s exclusion was the result of intrigue by influential figures at court who favored the election of François Hébert. Hébert was the pastor at Versailles. These figures supposedly used Faure’s Savoyard birth as an excuse to prevent his election. In his letter convoking the general assembly, Faure had mentioned the constitutional provisions forbidding electoral intrigues. He also included a copy of a papal brief which he had solicited which reaffirmed this ban. Hébert would later become the first bishop in the Congregation’s history. See Claude-Joseph Lacour, CM., “Histoire Générale de la Congrégation de la Mission,” Annales, 44 (1878): 534-35. The manuscript of this eighteenth-century history can be found in the archives of the General Curia of the Congregation in Rome and in the archives of the Maison-Mère, Paris. There are several significant omissions between the manuscript version of this history, and its published serial form in the Annales.

109 Françoise d’Aubigné, the marquise de Maintenon, was the favorite mistress and later the morganatic wife of Louis XIV. She was a great benefactress of the Congregation.

110 Circulaires, 1: 208. According to Lacour, at the audience, Louis XIV replied that “he had known Faure at Fontainebleau and that he had been very content with him there. But that in this case, it was a question of protecting his royal prerogatives.” Histoire Générale, 292, AGR. Later the king would explain to his ambassador in Rome that,

Since the congregation of the priests of the Mission has its principal establishments in France and few houses in foreign countries, the election of a superior general, has always gone to one of His Majesty’s French subjects. After the death of M. Jolly, the superior general... His Majesty felt that such a situation demanded new precautions to prevent the accustomed usage from being interrupted and a foreigner’s being elected superior general of a congregation of priests to whom he entrusts the care of the parishes and chapels in the places where he makes his principal residence and who, in addition, have the majority of their houses in his kingdom. Thus, when the time of election came, the priests of the Mission were informed that His Majesty had good reason to expect that they would not only choose the worthiest candidate but also that they would be sure not to elect a foreigner.

“Instruction donnée par le Roi à M. Le prince de Monaco, 29 janvier 1699,” Correspondance Politique: Rome, 399: 8. AMAE
Edme Jolly, CM., superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, 1673-1697.
and Polish delegates entered a solemn protest. They said that the assembly was not legitimate since it lacked freedom in the general’s election. The French delegates argued against this position. They observed that the royal veto was no different from the *ius exclusivae* enjoyed by several Catholic monarchs at papal elections. This was a relevant argument since at the time, these kings exercised their veto frequently enough.

According to the French delegates although the royal veto may have been regrettable, strictly speaking, it was only “the accidental exclusion of an otherwise eligible candidate.” In short, the French argument was that “one cannot disobey the king.” The king had told the assembly whom they could not elect but did not dictate whom they must elect. Under these circumstances, the French held that the royal veto did not entail any disqualifying physical or moral violence. Therefore, any subsequent election of an otherwise qualified Frenchman as superior general would be valid.

Facing both an implacable royal veto and the assembly’s French majority, the Roman and Polish delegates settled for the adoption of a declaration reasserting the constitutional principle of the freedom of election. The five dissenting delegates then withdrew their protest. They said that they were doing so “out of charity, for the sake of peace, and for the common good of our Congregation.”

The general assembly went on, with considerable difficulty, to...
elect Nicolas Pierron as the new superior general. The Roman and Polish delegates signed the attestation of the new general's election and the assembly's act. After they returned home, however, "inquietude" about the validity of the election prevailed among many in the Roman and Polish provinces. The visitors of these provinces sent a memorial to the Holy See. This appeal expressed their lingering doubts about Pierron's election.

In September 1698, Pierron sent two representatives to Rome. Their mission was to present his case and ask the Holy See for a ruling on his election's validity. Louis XIV instructed his ambassador in Rome to uphold the French position. In the following year, in the so-called "Brief of Pacification," Innocent XII confirmed Pierron's election. The pontiff also reconfirmed the "inviolable" provisions of the community's constitutions concerning the free election, irrespective of nationality, of an otherwise qualified candidate for superior general.

Relations between the French general and the two Italian provinces

---

118 The assembly found itself deadlocked between two French candidates. Eventually, the choice had to be made by arbitration. Nicolas Pierron won by one vote. Pierron was the last superior general to have entered the Congregation (1657) during the lifetime of Saint Vincent. For a short biographical sketch of Pierron see Circulaires, 1: 208-10.
119 The assembly demonstrated its high regard for Maurice Faure by electing him as the first assistant general and admonitor to the superior general.
121 Stella, Italia, 101.
122 Pietro Terrarosa, the Italian who had been elected as an assistant general by the general assembly declined to depart from Italy for Paris to take up his duties since he had doubts about the validity of the general's election. See N. Pierron to P. Terrarosa, 3 December 1697 and 26 March 1698 in Lettere dei superiori generali, 19 vols. 1: 61-64. ACLR.
123 See Pierron, Circulaires, 1: 217. In his letter to the pope, Pierron argued for the validity of his election on the basis that the assembly's freedom had not been violated; "Ante diem electionis pluries ac multum discussa et cum omnibus libertate a Conventu Generali definita, mihi, quantumvis reluctani imo et flenti... onus Superioris Generalis communibus ac libertis omnino votis idem conventus impusuerat." See Pierron's letter of 15 September 1698, Lettere di particolari, ASV, 87: 313. The pope who was quoted as having told a cardinal that "the French have behaved badly in this matter," in turn referred the question to lhe Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.
124 The full text of the king's instructions on this occasion can be found in AMAE, Correspondance Politique: Rome, 399: 8-10. Luigi Mezzadri points out that on the basis of this instruction the crown's understanding of the Congregation is clear, "it is a French institute which by way of exception happens to have some houses established outside of France." Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 68.
125 Pierron's leading opponents wrote letters of submission. Terrarosa then finally left to take up his duties as assistant general in Paris. Lacour, "Histoire Générale," Annales, 45 (1879): 437.
126 The briefs in question were Quanti Congregationum of 17 March 1699 and Nuper Nos of 21 March 1699. Acts Apostolica, 71-74. At the time of Pierron's successor's election, Clement XI confirmed this constitutional reservation (ibid., 84). Also at Pierron's resignation in 1703, the general received a personal assurance from Louis XIV that assemblies would henceforth enjoy this electoral freedom. Lacour, Histoire Générale, 437.
worsened in the opening years of the eighteenth century. Pierron tried to end the Italian nationalism that he believed would "change the nature and order of our Institute." The superior general stationed French missionaries at the house of Monte Citorio in Rome. One of these priests was to serve as his representative to the Holy See. He was to head off any Roman attempts to outflank Paris by appeals made directly to the Roman Curia. The French representatives were also to keep a close watch on what went on at Monte Citorio, and in the Roman province, and report to the general. The Roman visitor, Pietro Francesco Giordanini, whom Pierron held responsible for "ruining the spirit of our Congregation in Italy," resigned in protest.

Pierron's actions polarized Roman attitudes and stiffened their resistance. Giovanni Battista Vacca, the superior of the house at Ferrara, wrote to Pierron in protest: "The Frenchmen are odious to most of the laity. These people are more inclined to favor the imperial cause [this was during the war of the Spanish Succession]. My personal opinion and that of those who wish us well is that it is not prudent in these times to send a French missionary to transact business in Rome." Pierron, who had his own connections at the papal court, refused to

---

127 With respect to the Italian-French antagonisms, it should be noted that the Italians were not united in their opposition to the French. They were generally split into filofrancesi and antifrancesi factions. These divisions often made for great internecine battles within the Italian provinces themselves, particularly at the provincial assemblies which were held in preparation for general assemblies. See Poole, History, 165, and Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 72-74.

128 Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 72-74.

129 In 1642, after years of searching for a suitable Roman house, the Congregation purchased, with the substantial financial assistance of Richelieu's niece the Duchess d'Aiguillon, the former palace of Cardinal Nicolas Baglioni. This house continued uninterruptedly as the headquarters of the Roman province until 1870. At this time, the Italian government confiscated most of it for use by the Chamber of Deputies. In 1913, the government confiscated the remaining portions of the complex still in community hands.

130 The two Frenchmen sent by Pierron were Rene Divers and Antoine Philopald. In 1725, Philopald was among the forty-one confreres (including the first assistant general) who were expelled from the Congregation for their refusal to accept the anti-Jansenist bull, Unigenitus. See Collectio Decretorum, 90, 130-35.

131 Throughout these controversies, both sides were kept informed about the activities of the other. The filofrancesi and the general's agents in Rome kept him informed on the activities of the antifrancesi. The antifrancesi were not above intercepting the general's confidential letters to his Roman agents.

132 Lettere, 1: 103, ACLR. In order to try to remove Giordanini from the volatile Roman scene, Pierron offered him the vacant position as Italian assistant general. Giordanini declined saying that he "had no intention of doing perpetual penance in Paris." Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 73. Pierron considered appointing a Frenchman as the new visitor. See N. Pierron to J.B. Anselmi, 14 November 1701, Lettere, 1: 175, ACLR.

133 The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) was a general European conflict arising from the disputed succession to the Spanish throne after the death of the last Spanish Habsburg, Charles II. Eventually, Louis XIV's grandson was confirmed as Philip V, thus establishing the Spanish Bourbon ruling house.

134 G.B. Vacca to N. Pierron, 20 March 1702, Lettere, 1: 227, ACCR.
M. Pierron, Nicolas, IV Supérieur

Eut le 9 Avril 1697, Mourut le 27 Avril 1703

Nicolas Pierron, C.M., superior general of
Congregation of the Mission, 1697-1703
remove or limit the activities of his agents. He insisted that the pope approved of their presence and activities.\textsuperscript{135}

The elderly Pierron, who had accepted his election with great reluctance, was by now in declining health. He had decided to ask the sexennial assembly, scheduled for 1703, to elect a vicar general to assist him.\textsuperscript{136} The Romans and the Poles maneuvered to increase their influence in this election. Pierron then issued another circular informing the Congregation of his intention to resign. This move automatically transformed the sexennial assembly into a general assembly.\textsuperscript{137}

The Roman provincial assembly met to elect its delegates and formulate its proposals for the general assembly. Under the leadership of the former visitor, Giordanini, the \textit{antifrancesi} carried the day.\textsuperscript{138} The province’s proposals revealed their determination to challenge the Congregation’s Gallican ethos at the coming assembly. The provincial assembly instructed its delegates to insist that the French support the general assembly’s electoral freedom despite any possible pressure from the crown. The Romans also proposed a series of changes in the community’s constitutions. They designed these to temper the Gallican constitutional absolutism, and thus the French stranglehold over the life of the international community.\textsuperscript{139} The Romans proposed to limit the number of French assistants general to no more than two. They proposed that the superior general delegate responsibility for overseeing the governance of the provinces among the various assistants general.\textsuperscript{140} The Romans also wanted an additional Italian province.\textsuperscript{141} They demanded that all officials of their houses be Italians. Finally,

\textsuperscript{135} Poole, \textit{History}, 164.

\textsuperscript{136} The community’s constitutions provided for a sexennial assembly of the Congregation and a general assembly every twelve years or upon the death of a general. A sexennial assembly could be transformed into a general assembly if the delegates thought there were issues facing the Congregation which warranted such a transformation.

\textsuperscript{137} The community’s constitutions provided that at a sexennial assembly there would be one delegate from each province, whereas at a general assembly each province was represented by its visitor and two elected delegates. In the case of the scheduled sexennial assembly of 1703, the Italians and Poles succeeded in convincing the Holy See to issue a brief superseding the constitutions and giving them the right for this one time to send two delegates to the sexennial assembly. For the text of this brief dated 10 April 1703 and entitled \textit{Cum sicut}, see \textit{Acta Apostolica}, 78-79. This move would have increased the relative power of these two provinces against the five French provinces. Warned of this request Pierron, on 2 April, announced his decision to resign and convok a general assembly. For the text of Pierron’s resignation letter see Stella, \textit{Italia}, 130.

\textsuperscript{138} In preparation for the general assembly each province held a provincial assembly which in turn was prepared for by assemblies in each canonical house.

\textsuperscript{139} Mezzadri, \textit{Gallicanesimo}, 77.

\textsuperscript{140} Under the community’s constitutions, the assistants general played a purely consultative role to the superior general and had no direct relations with the provinces.

\textsuperscript{141} At this point, there were twelve houses in the “Roman” province spread across several Italian states.
they wanted the superior general to refrain from sending any more French missionaries in any capacity to Italy. Taken together, these proposals were an unmistakable challenge to the French.142 Pierron, whose own sources had kept him informed of the assembly’s deliberations, felt dismay at this further evidence of Roman nationalism.143 The French tried ahead of time to prevent a divisive general assembly.144

The election of the new general proved to be a peaceful process. As demanded by the Roman and Polish provinces, the assembly reasserted the constitutional principle of its electoral freedom.145 This was a moot point, since the king already had assured Pierron that he would not exercise his veto.146 On the third ballot, François Watel received the necessary votes and became superior general.147 The French-controlled assembly then voted down the Roman postulatum. This revealed what would be a consistent French attitude of intransigence toward even the possibility of the slightest constitutional changes. Only one point from the Roman reform agenda was successful; the approval, in principle, of the province’s division into two provinces. The assembly left it to the superior general’s discretion when to carry out this decision.

In 1704, Watel announced the division of the Roman province. He created a second province headquartered in Turin. In the same letter, however, he also announced that he was creating an additional province in France, the province of Picardy.148 This action negated the gain made by the Italians. With the addition of another province, the French delegates at a general assembly would

142 The minutes of this provincial assembly can be found in Provincia Romana Conventus ac Visitatorum Decreta, ACLR.
143 Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 79.
144 Throughout this struggle both sides had their supporters within the Roman Curia, and both sides appealed to the Holy See to support their position. During the assembly the nuncio in Paris, Francesco Antonio Gualtieri, monitored the proceedings. See G. Appiani to Cardinal Paolucci, 13 August 1703, ASV, Lettere di particolari, 94-96, 173-74.
145 See Conv. gen. VII, sess. 2, anno 1703, Collectio Decretorum, 166. The Holy See confirmed this decree again in 1704. See Acta Apostolicae, 84.
146 Lavaur, “Histoire Générale,” Annales, 66 (1901): 436. By now it was also clear, however, that as long as the French controlled the majority of votes in the general assemblies there was an implicit guarantee of always having a French general.
147 François Watel was the Congregation’s fifth superior general. He served until his death in 1710. For a brief biographical sketch see Circulaires, 1: 233. His epitaph was a fitting one, “difficillimis temporibus Congregationem in fide et unitate servavit” (Stella, Itin., 171).
148 Watel, Circulaires, 1: 241-42.
Monte Citorio, headquarters of the Roman province of the Congregation of the Mission, as it appeared in early nineteenth century.

still outnumber the non-French by more than two-to-one.\textsuperscript{149}

Watel thus chose to begin his generalate with a strong counterattack. He instructed his agents to head off the “predictable offensive” of the disappointed Roman missionaries.\textsuperscript{150} The superior general knew he could remove the leaders of the Roman opposition from all positions of authority. He went as far as to consider establishing a French-controlled internal seminary at Turin. Watel also considered appointing Frenchmen as superiors of Italian houses, including that of Monte Citorio, and sending additional French missionaries to Italy.\textsuperscript{151}

If the French accused the Romans of being guilty of the vice of nationalism and upsetting the Congregation’s peace, the Romans re-

\textsuperscript{149} In his manuscript, Lacour had this to say with respect to the division of the Roman province: “The general did not think that he could refuse to divide the province, but he feared that with the multiplication of foreign provinces that the number of foreigners having a deliberative voice in the assemblies could eventually equal or even surpass those of the French and that this would be the cause of difficulty. He therefore created another French province.” (\textit{Histoire Générale}, 334, ACCG). It should also be noted that the French majorities in the general assemblies were supplemented by the votes of the vicar general, three of the assistants general, the secretary and procurator general (those last two were appointed by the superior general and were also always French), all of whom were voting members \textit{ex officio} of an assembly. This automatically added an additional five to six votes to the margin of the French majority.

\textsuperscript{150} Mezzadri, \textit{Gallicanesimo}, 81.

\textsuperscript{151} Mezzadri points out that in Watel’s mind these were the means of returning to the “perfect harmony” between the Romans and French that supposedly characterized the primitive era of the community’s history (ibid., 82).
turned the same charge against the Gallicanism of the French. What the French defined as the virtue of preserving the sacred deposit of the Congregation's "primitive spirit," the Romans and the other "foreign" provinces viewed as the vice of French nationalism. They felt that Gallicanism wrapped itself around them like a constitutional straight-jacket and distorted the Congregation's true "primitive spirit."

Since the French used the constitutions to sustain the Congregation's Gallicanism, the Italians first had tried to use constitutional means to effect change. However, when this strategy failed, they sought the support of apostolic authority to temper the unbridled Gallicanism of the French. Throughout these nationalistic controversies, the Holy See faced French superiors general supported by the French crown. The king always demanded that Rome uphold the status quo of the Congregation's constitutional authority, thus tacitly maintaining French domination and the Congregation's Gallican identity. The Holy See also faced vocal ultramontane Romans who usually demanded more support than it could provide, even if it may have wanted to do so.152

Rome always had to be concerned with maintaining the best possible relations with the French crown. As a matter of policy, therefore, it tried to maintain unity and peace in the Congregation of the Mission. This policy required turning away direct Roman challenges to Gallican constitutional authority. Given its limited maneuverability, the papacy could only sternly warn the French Lazarists of the untoward consequences of their Gallicanism, while unconvincingly threatening future punitive action if conditions did not improve.

Moving beyond its circumscribed role as a mediator of the Roman-French antagonisms, the Holy See did at times take actions that purposely subverted the superior general's authority. Such actions indirectly supported the Roman position without, however, risking the intervention of the French crown. The Holy See did this, for example, by establishing the Congregation's first Spanish house at Barcelona.153 It also mandated the employment of Italian missionaries at Propaganda Fide's college in Avignon,154 and at the Academy of

152 Ibid.
153 See Paradela, Resumen Histórico, 26-27.
154 In 1704, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide informed the superior general of its intention to confide the direction of the college at Avignon, which was under its jurisdiction, to missionaries of its own choosing from the Roman province. Watel instructed the Roman visitor that he was not to accept this establishment except under conditions which would be acceptable to Paris. The conditions proved not to be acceptable to Watel. He felt that they were incompatible with his authority and with the Congregation's constitutions. Eventually, it took an order from the pope to induce him to drop his opposition. For a brief sketch of the history of this institution see Stella, Italia, 161-66 and Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 85.
Noble Ecclesiastics in Rome. In 1705, the visitor of the Roman province, Lazarro Maria Figari, escalated the Roman-French conflict. He sent a letter to all the Italian houses asking support for an appeal to the Holy See to end the problems with the French. His solution was a division of the Congregation along national lines. This proposal occasioned a flood of correspondence both pro and con to the Cardinal Secretary of State. The pro-French visitor of Lombardy, Giuseppe Seghino, wrote to the pope in the following vein:

With tears in my eyes and bitterness in my heart, I throw myself at the feet of your Holiness humbly begging you to be compassionate toward our poor Congregation. A fierce tempest disturbs us at this time. We are in danger of shipwreck on a sea of unfortunate dissensions and discord. Our ultramontanes are the cause of these. As your Holiness knows, these men have exasperated the house at Rome and the province. They now seek to be separated from their head who, they claim, does not exercise a salutary influence on its members. Nevertheless, if this should happen...I do not think that our little boat will be any more calm or find itself resting in a secure port. I have reason to fear stronger tempests from the violence of the winds that are rising...I foresee grave disorders and great prejudice to God’s glory and the good of the people, if the discord that exists between us and the ultramontanes does not stop.

The key argument offered by the antifrancesi to justify the nationalistic division of the Congregation was the dependence of its govern-

---

155 In 1702, Nicholas Pierron had accepted the administration of the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics in Rome without apparently knowing fully the conditions that had been established by the cardinal founder. Under these conditions, the superior general would have no control over its personnel nor have a right of visitation. Pierron soon regretted his action. He and his French successors found that they had very little room to maneuver. The irregular, extra-constitutional state of this foundation would also cause problems in the future. See Poole, *History*, 141-43.

156 Evidence suggests that this proposal had widespread support among the Italian missionaries. For example out of the nineteen superiors of the houses in Italy only three were opposed to the proposed division. Mezzadri, *Gallicanismo*, 85.

157 "Imprimé Italien concernant les supérieurs général, c.m. et Italie, depuis l'assemblée générale de 1685 jusqu'à 5 mars 1843," *Etenue, Écrits et Documents*, C 40, bas 3, Dossier, B-14, ACMP.
Mr. Watel, François
Vé Supérieur
Elu le 11 Août 1703—Mors le 3 Octobre 1710

François Watel, C.M., superior general of the Congregation of the Mission. 1703-1710
ment on the French crown. The Romans deplored this situation from an ultramontane perspective. They claimed that the community's dependence on the French crown was at the expense of its proper dependence on the Holy See. According to the antifrancesi, consequences of this Gallican dependence included the overwhelming preponderance of Frenchmen in the curia at the mother house, the use of French as the official language of the community's assemblies, and the difficulties experienced in establishing and maintaining the community in countries that were hostile to the French and French influence. In their view, the cumulative effects of years of dissension within the Congregation now made any reconciliation between the French and the Italians highly unlikely.

The antifrancesi requested the Holy See to approve the establishment of an independent vicar general elected by the Italian provinces. This vicar general would reside in Rome and govern the Italian peninsula, Spain, and any other future houses or provinces established outside France. The vicar general would have four elected assistants. This temporary solution was to continue until such time as the superior general moved his seat to Rome. With the general's arrival in Rome, the office of the Italian vicar general would cease. The French provinces could then, in turn, be given a vicar general.

Figari informed the superior general of this proposal. Watel tried to delay matters long enough to counterattack. As always, the first line of defense was the crown. Upon learning of this proposal, Louis XIV

---

158 In 1707, during the War of the Spanish Succession, the Habsburg claimant Charles III issued the following decree affecting the Lazarists under his jurisdiction in Naples and Spain.

But having been informed that the superior general of the said Congregation [the Lazarists] not only is always French but that he even resides continually at the court of Paris, to which the subjects have to gather for its general congregations... and that on the said superior general depends completely the entire government, not only of all the provinces, but even of all the houses and individuals of the provinces, both superiors and subjects, with whom there runs a continuous dependence and communication in each and every single matter, and it being our experience that the Politician of that court [Louis XIV] makes use of everything ecclesiastical for his purposes... Desiring to obviate the great and irreparable harm which could result to our royal service by not avoiding the said communication, declaring the above-mentioned decree and using our royal and supreme authority, by the tenor of these present letters, we order and command that no superior or subject or person who lives or resides or will live or reside in any of the houses whatsoever of the said Congregation, founded or to be founded in Spain, Italy, or other parts of our dominions, ought or is able to have dependence, mediate or immediate, on the French superior general who has resided or will reside in Paris or any other place.

Although this prohibition would be rescinded later in the century, even other Italians were not permitted to work in the kingdom of Naples. In 1788, Ferdinand IV again forbade the Lazarists from communicating with their foreign superiors. See Poole, History, 150, 218.

159 Mezzadri, Gallicanesimo, 86.

160 Ibid.
instructed his ambassador to Rome, Cardinal Emmanuel de la Tour d’Auvergne de Bouillon, to intervene immediately. The cardinal told the Holy See that “if Italian religious could not be subject to a French superior general, then it would be equally impossible for any French religious to be subject to an Italian superior general.”161 Again, the crown’s intervention was decisive.

A special committee of cardinals ruled that the reasons given by the Italian provinces were not sufficient to justify such a drastic separation.162 Clement XI confirmed this judgment and denied the request. He also took the opportunity, however, to issue a warning to Watel in the following letter.

Everyone desires the peace and tranquility of your Congregation. According to information we have received, you now enjoy this state. This has not, as you might think, been established or secured by the decree recently issued by the cardinals appointed for this purpose. Rather, it will happen with God’s help, by your moderate, prudent, and truly paternal administration in a spirit of meekness. In the future, you must have the intention of conducting yourself toward your Italian brothers so that there may not be the occasion, or even the suggestion of an occasion of complaint. If this is not done, you will see that the disturbances caused by past disagreements will reach such a pitch that, as is clearly to be feared, “your last state will be worse than your first.”163 If it reaches this point, We may finally have to judge as necessary, that plan for changing your government which up to now We have not considered opportune. Therefore, We have decided first to exhort you by these Our present letters and even seriously to warn you that, after you have removed from your midst all those things that can in any way give occasion for offense, you use such moderation in exercising your authority that your Italian confreres in particular may find in you not someone “lording it over the clergy”164 and exulting in an apparent victory but someone who desires peace.

---

161 Imprimé Italien, 13, ACMP.
162 The text of the cardinals’ recommendation is short and to the point:

The Sacred Congregation consisting of the Most Eminent and Most Reverend Lords, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, Carpentie, Marescotti, Panciatici, Spada, and Casoni, specially appointed by our Most Holy Father, after having received information from the parties themselves and having discussed the matter at length have decided and declared that there is no reason for division and that the constitutions should be observed in their clear meaning, which indeed is that the superior general is to make use of the advice and service of an Italian assistant in all the affairs of the Congregation in that same way that he makes use of the advice and service of the other assistants and that he admit and house him, together with the others, in his place of residence, and that he treat the rest of his subjects in a loving and charitable way. (Acta Apostolica, 86-87.)

163 2 Peter 2: 20.
164 1 Peter 5: 3.
loves charity, and in a word, is a Father, which is a title of love rather than of power.165

The pontiff commanded Watel to recall the two controversial Frenchmen from Monte Citorio. If necessary, he also was to replace the leadership of the Italian houses and provinces with "men of such character that they will be welcome rather than unwelcome to those whom they must rule. These men are to be prudent lovers of brotherhood, and therefore quite suitable for smoothing over what is left of disagreement and for cultivating every kind of peace."166 However, these appointments were not to be made without prior papal approval.

This appeal for the reestablishment of "peace and tranquility" between the warring national parties revealed an impasse in the Congregation's life. Despite papal hopes and exhortations, the divisive substance and memories of the French-Italian antagonisms remained. This situation adversely affected the Congregation's long-term unity. Throughout the remainder of the century, the antagonisms continued to erupt as the pattern of unresolved nationalistic issues reasserted itself.

The Eighteenth-Century Decline in the Congregation's Vitality

Nationalistic divisions were one factor contributing to the Congregation's decline during the eighteenth century, especially in France. This was a decline that the Congregation sensed as it was happening, that troubled many of its members, and that it seemed powerless to stop. The community itself described this decline as a "relaxation" or as a "falling away from" the Congregation's "primitive spirit." They felt it resulted from accommodations made to the prevailing "worldly spirit" and values of the Age of Reason.167

Vincent de Paul's teaching was unequivocal: if the Congregation lived "according to the maxims of Our Lord," it would be building upon a rock-solid foundation. In these circumstances the community would "continually grow in virtue...while making great progress in its perfection, in its service to the Church, and in its service to the people."168

---

165 Quoted in Stella, Italia, 139-40.
166 Ibid.
167 See, for example, Pierron, Circulaires, 1: 213.
However, if the Congregation followed the “maxims of the world” it would foolishly build its foundation on sand “inviting its... fall and ruin.”

After the founder’s death, the community confirmed that “the spirit of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for souls that Vincent received from Our Lord and which he so desired to be maintained among us...is to be maintained by the observance of the rules that he has given us. The success of our work will be assured if we exercise them in the same spirit, with the same zeal, and with the same purity of intention with which he practiced them himself.”

This spirit was a “sacred deposit” and a legacy to be transmitted with God’s grace “entirely and without alteration” by each succeeding generation of missionaries. Lazarists who were without this spirit “would only have the outward appearance, the name, and the dress of missionaries. While in reality, they would be lifeless bodies without souls who would soon begin to undergo corruption; spreading the odor of death everywhere around them.”

“For the sake of the company’s spiritual advancement,” it was the primary task of each general assembly “to examine if our Congregation has fallen, or if it is in danger of falling away from its primitive spirit, and in what ways.” Once an assembly had determined the nature of the failings that had “crept into” the Congregation, it was up to it to legislate what were the best means to correct these faults. The assembly then issued reform decrees with the “ardent desire that all the Company’s houses would observe them faithfully.”

As early as the general assembly of 1703, the delegates voiced “many complaints that among many confreres, especially the young, it appears that the ‘primitive spirit’ has greatly weakened. This has taken place to the extent that some of these missionaries are not content merely with not following the usages and practices introduced in the time of our venerable father, Monsieur Vincent, but even seem to have scorn for them.”

During the eighteenth century succeeding general assemblies and superiors general noted with alarm and frustration that despite their repeated directives “some members” and “some houses” were stray-
ing farther and farther away from an "exact observance" of the primitive spirit. The deepening of this dilemma was evident in 1736 when the new general Jean Couty detailed the pattern of abuses noted by the recent general assembly. The most troubling of these abuses, as far as the general and the assembly were concerned, was a failure "in some houses" to observe the Congregation's prescribed spiritual exercises. As the assembly noted, "This abuse has the most dangerous consequences since it is the source of all other abuses such as immor­ tification, laziness, dissipation, ... and a spirit of independence and indocility." 179

According to Couty, there were "some missionaries" who spent much of their time and energy in "frequent and useless social relations" with "lay people" and "persons of the opposite sex." 180 These missionaries had begun "to neglect the exercises of the regular life that we have professed... by speaking, acting, dressing, and thinking like men of the world while forgetting the Gospel's teachings." 181 He went on to ask, "Should not our life be holy, innocent, and totally different from that of the world? ... What a disaster it would be for us, if after we have renounced this world's vanities by our entrance into the Congregation, we should by our behavior still give others good reason to believe that the world still lives in our hearts, and that we are searching to please it and conform ourselves to its spirit!" 182 The assembly feared that this "relaxation" would spread. The general reminded everyone that "our rules, our obligations, the sanctity of our calling, and the excellence of our ministry demand that we reform ourselves incessantly." 183

Despite this clarion call to reform, twenty-six years later in 1762 the perception was that conditions had worsened. The newly-elected superior general, Antoine Jacquier, in reporting the directives of the thirteenth general assembly sounded a decidedly apocalyptic note. 184

177 Jean Couty was the Congregation's seventh superior general. He served from his election in 1736 to his death in 1746. For a short biographical sketch see Circulaires, 1: 437-39.
178 Couty, Circulaires, 1: 443-49. It is interesting to note that Couty's circular distinguished between the assembly's decrees that were directed toward the Polish province, the Italian provinces, and the French provinces. The bulk of his circular was concerned with the abuses noted by the assembly as specifically existing in the French provinces.
179 Ibid., 1: 445.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid., 1: 446.
182 Ibid., 1: 448.
183 Ibid., 1: 449.
184 Antoine Jacquier was the Congregation's ninth superior general. He served from his election in 1762, to his death in 1787. For a short biographical sketch see Circulaires, 2: 1-9.
"The seduction of the bad example that has become general in society...seems to conform to Jesus Christ's prediction about the end of time...The danger is too great not to alarm us...One cannot fail to see how the spirit of worldliness, vanity, liberty and sensuality has redoubled its efforts among us to weaken the spirit of our vocation. So, we must redouble our efforts to conserve it...and use advice, prayers, exhortations, threats, and any other means that zeal may suggest to stop the progress of this relaxation." 185

According to the assembly, in some houses "the bad example of superiors and the bad will of inferiors" had created a situation in which these members no longer "had any desire for devotion, for emulation of virtue, nor zeal for personal perfection." 186 In these houses, missionaries conducted the apostolate "without grace, without unction, and consequently without fruit." 187 These men were guilty of a "habitual criminality" leading them to scorn the community's rules and traditions. As a result, their "frequent irregularities cause them to commit grave faults that stain their character, dishonor their vocation...and place them on the road to perdition." 188

Twenty-six years later, in September 1788, the already numbered days of the Ancien Régime and of the Congregation were drawing to their close. It was now less than a year before the sack of Saint-Lazare. Another newly-elected superior general, Félix Cayla de la Garde, wrote an extraordinary circular. In this letter he shared his, and the recent assembly's, views about the state of the Congregation.

Regarding his late predecessor, the new general praised his personal example and virtue. However, he went on to comment, "We must be honest about our faults. The Congregation which grew greatly under his leadership appears, despite his zealous efforts, still to have fallen away from its spirit. How often must not his soul have groaned in sorrow over the abuses that he could not correct!" 189 The new general went on to observe,

Thus, I have begun in difficult times. On one side, I see the immense needs of an abundant harvest with few laborers. If I feel consolation at seeing the regular and edifying conduct of many missionaries there are also a great many, who for me are the source of great pain and sorrow. Alas, you can imagine my feel-

185 Jacquier, Circulaires, 2: 11.
186 Ibid., 2: 13.
187 Ibid., 2: 12.
188 Ibid., 2: 14.
189 Cayla de la Garde, Circulaires, 2: 204.
ings when I learned that some houses hardly practice any of the Congregation’s spiritual exercises. These are houses where the superior is as relaxed as his subjects. He is more culpable than they by having first given the example of irregularity. Other houses contain members who live in idleness. They love to go out in the world and take part in its pleasures. Houses exist where the spirit of worldliness, insubordination, the love of leisure, of comfort, and of the good things of life, have made rapid progress and overtaken everyone with their ravages! Having seen this sad spectacle, I sought consolation by sharing my sorrow with the members of the general assembly. They have shared my pain, and they have shown the greatest zeal to reform these abuses. 190

The abuses addressed by the sixteenth general assembly’s reform directives were wide-ranging. They included such matters as the insufficient screening, formation, education, and supervision of young missionaries, the neglect and decline of the parish mission apostolate, the need for reforms in the seminary apostolate, the presence of a spirit of insubordination, the failure by the visitors to conduct the required visitations of their houses, and their failure to report regularly to the superior general, local superiors who were either too harsh or too lax, financial irregularities, problematic visits by women to houses or to individual’s rooms, the use of gold watches, wigs, silver shoe buckles, silk cinctures, card playing and other violations of the vow of poverty, the collapse of the spiritual life in many houses, and the lack of religious instruction of lay brothers and domestics. 191

On each of these points, the general assembly directed the superior general to take firm steps to end these abuses. One example of the assembly’s directives, as related by the general, was as follows.

The assembly spoke forcefully against the intolerable relaxation that has befallen many houses with respect to the exercise of prayer, spiritual conferences, and annual retreats. It has charged me very expressly to remedy these abuses by all the means that God has made available to me. I hold nothing closer to my heart than this point. I will not have a moment’s peace until I see that all these exercises are again taking place in all our houses. I do not consider any sacrifice too great for me to make in order to ensure that this will happen. Fidelity to this essential duty depends in great part on superiors. I have observed that in those houses where superiors give constant personal examples in this matter everything takes place with edification according to the rule. On the contrary, in

190 Ibid., 2: 204-05.
191 Ibid., 2: 206-08.
those houses where the superior is the first to disperse himself from these exercises, everything degenerates and weakens. I entreat superiors immediately to reestablish the practice of common prayer. I will tolerate no disobedience on this point.¹⁰²

On his own behalf, Cayla de la Garde also stated his view of the task that lay ahead of him. “Charged by my position to execute these directives I will do so zealously. I am not inclined to outbursts or using violent means, but I am also not inclined to tolerate relaxation and irregularity. Charity inspires these changes, and I will first attempt to use all possible means of persuasion. However, if in the end these are insufficient, would you blame me, for the sake of my own conscience and the Congregation’s honor, if I do not have recourse to means that will be more efficacious? . . . I will follow this course of action.”¹⁹³

The comprehensive reform agenda of the 1788 general assembly, and the personal determination of Cayla de la Garde to dedicate his generalate to the renewal of the Congregation’s primitive spirit simply came too late. This decline was not unique to the Congregation but was part of a much larger decline in the vitality, viability, and credibility of the religious and civil polities that comprised the Ancien Régime.¹⁹⁴

As Adrien Dansette has observed, “the union of altar and throne had outworn its good qualities, and only its weaknesses and vices remained apparent. The Church, the papacy, and the civil authority bobbed around like corks as they were carried away by the currents of the times toward the destruction of the revolutionary maelstrom.”¹⁹⁵

The “revolutionary maelstrom” that would destroy the Ancien Régime would also destroy the Congregation of the Mission, at least as it had existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At its restoration and refounding during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Congregation faced the task of recapturing its “primitive spirit” and redefining itself in a way that would allow it again to become a vital religious force in France and in the postrevolutionary world. Not unexpectedly, the Congregation would have to deal not only with the new challenges of the nineteenth century but the legacies, both positive and negative of its past.

¹⁰²Ibid., 2: 207.
¹⁰³Ibid.
¹⁹³Dansette, Histoire Religieuse, 1: 18.
¹⁹⁴Ibid., 1: 37.