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Actual Ecclesiology in the Life of the Congregation of the Mission.
## CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION**

**IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE REDACTION OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS:**

A) The CM is a community within the ecclesial community .............................. 2
   A-1) The ecclesial community as the People of God .................................. 2
   A-2) The charismatic structure of the Church .......................... 6

B) The CM is an organic part of the Body of Christ ............................... 9
   B-1) The Church is the Body of Christ ................................. 9
   B-2) The CM as a Christian community has a relationship to the kingdom of God .......... 13
       1. Description of the Kingdom.............................. 14
       2. Relationship between the Church and the Kingdom.......................... 15
       3. Consequences.................................................. 18

C) The CM is a community that finds its place in the world .......................... 21
   C-1) The mission of the Church in the world ....... 21
   C-2) Relation between the Church and the World .................................. 21

**ECCLESIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE CHAPTERS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS:**

A) De fine congregationis .............................................. 25
B) De actuositate apostolica ......................................... 26
C) De communione fraterna et de spiritu orationis ......................... 27
D) De praxi consiliorum evangelicorum ............................... 28
E) De formatione .......................................................... 28
F) De regimine .............................................................. 29
G) De bonis temporalibus .................................................. 29
REMARKS ON THE TEXT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF SOME PRINCIPLES OF MODERN ECCLESIOLOGY

I. De Fine C.M. .................................................. 30
   1. Application of Some Ecclesiological Principles ................................ 31
      a) Charism of St. Vincent ........................................... 31
      b) The Mission of Christ and of the Church .......................... 32
      c) The Church of the Poor ......................................... 33
   2. The Problem of Article 2 ........................................ 34
      a) Clarification of the Purpose .................................... 34
      b) Personal Perfection ............................................. 35

II. De Actuositate Apostolica ....................................... 42
    1. The Mission of the Congregation .................................. 43
    2. Evangelization .................................................... 44
    3. Ministries and Ministerial Responsibility ......................... 47

III. De Communione Fratrena et De Spiritu Orationis ... 49
     1. The Church as "Communion" ..................................... 50
     2. The Church as Eucharistic Community ............................ 51

IV. De Formatione .................................................. 53

V. De Praxi Consiliorum Evangelicorum ............................ 54

VI. De Regimine .................................................... 55
     1. Communio fidelium ................................................. 56
     2. Communio episcoporum .............................................. 58

VII. De Bonis Temporalibus .......................................... 59
     1. Opinion of the Church Concerning Temporal Goods .................. 60
     2. Temporal Goods and the Church of the Poor ...................... 62
     3. Temporal Goods and Eschatology .................................. 63

Requests to the Provinces ......................................... 65
ACTUAL ECCLESIOLOGY
IN THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION
OF THE MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The life of a Religious Institute cannot be understood in its totality if it is not integrated in the life of the Church, in which it finds its meaning and from which it has its origin. The second Vatican Council, aware of this fact, devoted the second chapter of the Constitution on the Church to the religious life. Although the CM, according to the will of its founder, is not to be strictly considered as a religious order, it is, nevertheless, a Christian community within the Church. It is reasonable, therefore, to take into account the fundamental lines of Ecclesiology at the present time in order to better understand our congregational identity.

After Vatican II, a more biblical, dynamic and realistic concept of the Church was born, even if it might not be an ecclesiology which is altogether qualitatively distinct. This renewed ecclesiology must impregnate the fundamental directives of the new Constitution of the CM, if the desired renewal is to be achieved.

In this work, we do not intend to give a complete vision of the Church, but only touch on some points which are of interest for the redaction of the new Constitutions. It is merely a work of initiation. No doubt, experts in theology
in the CN, can and may broaden and retouch or leave out some of the aspects indicated herein.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE REDACTION OF THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

We intend to point out the ecclesiological principles which are to be given primary importance in the redaction of the Constitution of the CN.

A) The CN is a community included in the ecclesial community, in which the Vincentian charism sprouts forth. Consequently, two fundamental dimensions of the Church have to be taken into account:

A-1) THE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Lumen Gentium dedicates the 2nd chapter to this ecclesiological category and gives it a maximum importance. Since then, this term has become one of the most meaningful to indicate one of the fundamental structures of the Church. Furthermore, it has been made one of the theological slogans so frequently used that it runs the risk of losing its proper meaning.

The image of the people of God, although found abundantly in the S. Scriptures, is of very recent usage. It has been recovered during the decade from the '30s. Until then, and even later, it was eclipsed by the other image of the Body of
Christ. Today, after the Vatican II, it has in Catholic theology a great ecclesiological significance.

Laying aside scriptural proofs, the theological content of this image may be summarised as follows:

a) The people of God was the people of Israel, the people chosen by God over the other nations in order to be the vehicle of the promises of salvation. With the coming of Christ, a new people of God has arisen which appropriates for itself the promises and the titles of the old. Between the two there is a continuity. But, at the same time, the new people of God which arose from the death and resurrection of Christ assumes a radical newness— it is a new creation. Therefore, we may admit a continuity with regard to Israel, and at the same time a discontinuity, based on the preaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. The new people of God is the fulfilment of the promises made by God to the Israel of old.

b) The people of God, by virtue of being church, is a community of elect. It is based on the fact that it has been chosen by God. That is, the origin of this people did not come about through the decision of the human spirit. It is a holy race, a consecrated nation, and is constituted by religious bonds. It does not suppose or require an ethnic continuity or cultural and social ties with any people. It is open to all kinds of nationalities.

c) The law that governs this people of God is the fundamental equality of all its members. There can be no class or caste within the people of God which is the Church. Everyone
is equally the holy people of God. Everybody is called by God, redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. Each one is equally invited to holiness, to faith, to obedience and to total surrender of oneself for love. However, this fundamental equality does not exclude diversity and plurality of services and functions within the Church.

d) The Church as people of God is a community of men who embraced the faith by a human decision. From this point of view, the Church is a social, visible and human institution. It is subjected, naturally, to the defects which every human undertaking carries along with it. The Church is not an entity above men, but is men; everyone forms the Church.

e) As the people of God, the Church is a pilgrim people. One of the more important discoveries of actual theology has been eschatology which has been applied to all theological sciences. This application to ecclesiology is centered principally in the concept of the people of God. In this way, the dynamism of the ecclesial community which lives in time and is at the same time oriented to the future has been rediscovered. The Church finds herself in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet", between possession and hope. It is a church which is always on the way, in continual search of herself, and therefore, it requires a continuous reform of her members. It is a church which is holy and sinful at the same time. It is holy and indefectible by reason of its close relationship with Christ, yet sinful because it is made up of persons who are subject to weakness and to sin.
f) This image of "people" discovers and manifests the anthropological value of the church—through the dimension of the people of God, the Church has discovered the "human" in herself. It is a people that marches on its way towards the ultimate fatherland through the desert. Weakness and tribulation mark the being of the Church. She constantly needs, like the people of Israel, the divine mercy in order to be able to persevere in her being and in her identity. The way towards the parousia is long and arduous. The fight and the discouragement persistently assail her. She needs the intervention of God. She is a people subjected to the cross and humiliation; but, through this experience she discovers the God-man, Jesus Christ.

g) Functions in the people of God:

- The people of God has for its fundamental function—
to give testimony to the presence of Christ in the world. It is a need that comes with baptism, the possession of the spirit and the consecration to God.

- From the image of the people of God comes out the common priesthood of the believers, as a participation of the priesthood of Christ.

- From this common priesthood in which all participate, the reality of the people of God stands out; a reality understood not as power and dominion, but as service.

- The prophetic function of the people of God stems also from the common priesthood. This function is translated in terms of testimony of Christ in the life of faith and charity.
"The Christian is a prophet influenced by the word of God; before this word becomes efficacious in a world strange such as ours, he has to give testimony to the good News in order to make others understand that the absurd conditions of life-class struggle, wars, ideological wars, hunger, etc.—have their meaning in Christ Jesus" (GC, p. 212).

A-2) THE CHARISMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The Constitution on the Church (no.10), makes reference to the charismatic structure of the Church. It can be said that this is one of the innovations of contemporary ecclesiology. Since Vatican II, this aspect of the Church daily commands more importance since it is an aspect which has long been forgotten due to the legalism and clericalism which have for centuries dominated the concept of the ecclesial community.

That the ecclesial community has a charismatic structure can be deduced from Pauline theology. The term, charism, in spite of its frequent abuse and consequent triteness, has when correctly understood, a profound theological and ecclesial meaning.

Charism should not be considered as an extraordinary, miraculous and sensational phenomenon. If such were charisms properly so called, then we could point to expulsion of demons, cures, miracles, etc. as examples of them. Although charisms of this kind do exist and in fact, did exist in the primitive Church, their extraordinary character is not essential. On the contrary, charism has to be considered as an ordinary and daily...
phenomenon in the whole christian community.

Charism has to be described in this way:

a) Charism is not the same as natural aptitude or talent, as for example, the aptitude to study mathematics or music. It is, rather a grace-motivated vocation to serve the others and not oneself. It is, therefore, a service in order to build up and be useful to the community. In other words, it is ordered to the community.

b) Charism is a gift of the Spirit who breathes when and how he wishes. That is, it is the manifestation, concretisation and individualization of the power of grace which takes hold of man to impel him to serve. This revelation of grace is manifested through and by means of the Spirit: "It is the revelation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12,11). Charisms are therefore, pure gifts of God.

e) The most important charism is Charity (1 Cor. 13, 4-8).

d) We may venture a definition of Charism from what has been said above: "It is a call of God to an individual for a definite service of the Church, which enables him at the same time to carry out this service".

There exist principles which govern the charismatic structure of the ecclesial and christian community:

1) Variety of charisms. Charism is not given through ordination or an office within the community. Charism cannot be institutionalized. Uniformity goes against the wealth of charisms which are found in the Pauline letters:
- 1 Cor. 12,28: apostles, prophets, teachers, gift miracles, healing powers, gift of assistance, gift to rule, diversity of tongues.

- Rom. 12,6-8: gift of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, liberality, seal, mercy.

- Eph. 4,11: Apostles, prophets, preachers, pastors, teachers.

2) Universality of charism. Charisms are not limited to a group of persons in the ecclesial community, they are given to each and every Christian; everyone has his charism (I Cor. 12, 7; 7,7; 1 Pt. 4,10).

3) There is a hierarchical order of charisms (I Cor.12, 28-31). The first in the order are the Apostles, the second are the prophets; then come the teachers, followed by the directive functions. However, this hierarchy of order has to be understood as an order of importance in service in the ecclesial community and of functions exercised within it.

4) Charisms are subject to one law: the law of charity. That is why the greatest charism is love. Charity is the model and it enriches the others, without it, the rest would be of no value.

5) Charisms in their diversity and universality serve for the building up of the Church (I Cor. 14,12; Eph. 4,12ff). No one may appropriate it for himself, nor make use of them for other ends which may not serve to build up the church.
B) The CH is an organic part of the Body of Christ, with internal ties and a hierarchical order.

Hence, we have to take into account one of the most important dimensions of the Church:

B-1) THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Lumen Gentium (no. 7) speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, although it gives less importance to this image that to that of the people of God. Nevertheless, it is one of the images more commonly used in ecclesiology in order to show the bond and unity of the members between themselves and with Christ.

This image does not appear in areas of S. Scriptures other than in St. Paul and is developed in I Cor and Romans and finds its full expression in Col. and Eph.

Quite apart from getting involved in theological discussion over this image in St. Paul, it is convenient to underline the following points which sum up the doctrine of the Church on the Body of Christ.

1) Christians form one body. Paul wants to put into relief the unity of christians among themselves. He therefore resorts to the image of a body in order to induce them to live in unity and mutual assistance. Christians are closely bound together like the members of the human body. Two texts give us the key to this idea: I Cor. 12,12-26; Rom. 12,4-5.

2) Christians are the Body of Christ: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor. 12,27).
This text clearly shows that christians are the members of the concrete and specific body of Christ. Verse 13 declares how the christian comes to form part of the body of Christ: by participation in the one Spirit.

3) The bodies of christians are members of Christ:
"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I, therefore, take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?" (I Cor. 6,15). This affirmation strongly accentuates the relationship between Christ and the christians. Even their bodies are members of Christ; if they are defiled, Christ himself is also defiled.

4) The Body of Christ is the Church. This affirmation is deduced from what has been previously said. If christians are members of the body of Christ, and the christians are the Church, this is the body of Christ. Besides, Paul himself has explicit texts which affirm that the Church is the body of Christ: Col. 1,18; 1,24; Eph. 1,22; 5,23-24.

5) Christ is the head of the body which is the Church. The primacy of Christ over the Church appears with all clarity in the letter to the Colossians (Col. 1,18). The term "head" can be interpreted in a hierarchical sense as well as vital principle. Christ is head of the Church because of his authority over her, because of his creative and vivifying activity in her and because of his command to her to remain faithful until the eschatological time.

The letter to the Ephesians is the great exposition of the
doctrine of the body of Christ. Paul reaches the height of his theological reflection by comparing the union between Christ and the Church to the union existing between husband and wife. Christ relates himself to the Church by loving her, sanctifying her and purifying her. All these expressions indicate the primacy of Christ with regard to the Church.

6) The Spirit is the soul of the body of Christ. Scripture does not affirm expressly that the Spirit is the soul of the Church, but, by reason of the functions he performs he is equivalent to the vital principle in as much as he is the giver and dispenser of supernatural life of the Church. The Spirit is the ordinator and promoter of all the activities of the members of the Church. It is he who assists and preserves her until her definitive union with Christ the Lord (Rom. 8,23; 2 Cor.3,18).

7) Christians are incorporated to this Church which is the Body of Christ through Baptism. "For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (I Cor. 12,13).

By baptism we are incorporated into the Church. By baptism, neophytes are pardoned of their sins and are admitted as saints into the Church. By baptism the christian is given the Spirit and forms part of the spiritual edifice which is the Church. By baptism, he becomes a sharer in the death and resurrection of Christ and is incorporated to the paschal congregation of those who believe and love. Because of all these, baptism signifies admission into the Church.

The entrance into the Church through baptism is not made
by personal decision or by virtue of one's personal faith. No one is born in the Church. No doubt, man has to decide to enter into the Church, but this decision is only possible as an answer to the call of God himself. He is attracted and sustained by the grace of God.

By baptism, the Christian, besides becoming a son of God (Gal. 3,26), is clothed with Christ: "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3,27). This means that the believer has experienced a new communion in the Church where all natural differences disappear: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3,28).

8) The Supper of the Lord as center of the Church.
For St. Paul the Supper of the Lord is intimately related with the Church as the Body of Christ, to the extent that it unites the community intimately with Christ and the members among themselves: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10,16-17).

The Supper of the Lord is communion, koinonia. Now, this communion is shown in twofold sense:

a) The Supper of the Lord signifies communion with Christ. The believer is called to a union with Christ. This
is expressed by St. Paul in various ways: to live with Christ (Rom. 6,8), to die with him (2 Cor. 7,3), to be buried with him (Rom. 6,4), to rise with him (Col. 2,12), etc. How, this communion with the Lord is shown in a special way in the Supper of the Lord. This union between Christ and the Church is real and effective in the sharing of the body and blood of Christ.

b) This communion with Christ leads to communion among christians. That is why the Supper of the Lord is also a communion between the members and the Church. By eating the same bread, the different members form one body (1 Cor. 10,17), that is, they are united to one another through Christ.

9) Conclusions

- The Church finds her center in the Eucharist, she finds herself, her proper identity, her proper being.
- The Church is essentially a communion with Christ and a communion of christians among themselves, that is, in community of God.
- The Supper of the Lord reflects, in a very clear way, the mysterious reality expressed by the Pauline image of body of Christ. In the Eucharist, the Church is manifested as the body of Christ.

B-2) The CM as a christian community has a relationship to the kingdom of God by reason of its charism, that is, it is not centered on itself. Hence, it is convenient to develop certain points about the relationship between the Church and the kingdom of God.
Although Lumen Gentium (no.5) makes reference to the relationship between the Church and the kingdom of God, it does no more than introduce the theme, leaving it in embryo, without further development.

After the Council theologians have broadened and developed the theme which is now considered fundamental in understanding the Church. Ecclesiology can be of one sign or another according to the attitude one takes about the kingdom. We shall not enter here into discussion which exists between theologians and exegetes, but we shall limit ourselves to enunciating the fundamental principles about which Catholic theologians are in agreement.

1) Description of the Kingdom.

Following Hans Kung (Church, pp. 61-70), the kingdom of God as it appears in the preaching of Jesus has the following characteristics:

a) The kingdom of God does not mean according to Jesus the universal sovereignty of God, but the kingdom of the eschatological God, that is, it is realised fully and definitively at the end of times, and as an event, "It is near at hand" (Mk. 12,32); "has come upon you" (Mt. 12,28); "comes" (Mk. 22,18).

b) The kingdom of God which Jesus preaches is an event due to the powerful and sovereign action of God that penetrates into history and does not depend on the answer of man. No one can conquer the kingdom of God; God alone is the one who invites (Lk. 12,32; Mt. 10,15).
e) The kingdom of God is not a temporal, earthly or national, but a religious sovereignty. Consequently, all ambition for power and honor remains out of place. The kingdom of God is strictly of a religious dimension (Mk. 8,31; 10,35; 14,17; Lk. 19,11ff).

d) The kingdom is an event of salvation and pardon for sinners, hence a message of joy, of friendship, of peace and of grace. It is a good news, not a message of threat, of damnation or condemnation (Mk. 1,15).

e) "Jesus" preaching of the kingdom of God does not expect from man the adherence to a moral law that has been amended and enlarged. Jesus demands that a man decides radically for God. The choice is unequivocal: God and his sovereignty or the world and its sovereignty. Nothing should hinder man from making this radical decision between God and the world" (Hans Kung- Church, p. 67).

f) Paced with this, the response of man must be an attitude of humility, of respect and of obedience to the omnipotent sovereignty of God who has already intervened in the human history.

2) Relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God.

The great majority of catholic theologians and exegetes do not identify the kingdom of God with the Church. This distinction appears clearly if we consider the existing relations between the members of the Church and those of the kingdom:
The community of the elect, those who form part of the kingdom of God in the final epoch will not consist exclusively of the members of the Church, but also of those who never belonged to it (see Mt. 25, 34-40).

Even some who belonged to the ecclesial community will be rejected (see Mt. 7, 21-23). There will be persons in the Church who will be excluded from the kingdom, as may be seen from the parable of the cockle (Mt. 13, 41-43).

This means that the mere incorporation into the Church is no absolute guarantee of entrance into the kingdom. Furthermore, the fact that one is ignorant of the kingdom does not imply that he is excluded from it. In other words, the incorporation into the kingdom at the final age and the membership to the Church are subject to distinct categories.

At the same time, however, there exists a close connection between the Church and the kingdom:

The Church is the continuation of the message of Jesus. For indeed, Jesus preached the kingdom of God and this message is His. Consequently, the Church ought to preach and announce his message. In this manner, she also shares in the future promises which are bound up with the kingdom of God.

During his ministry, Jesus sends his disciples to exercise functions similar to his own; he guarantees them and the effects of their preaching are similar to his: the blind see, the sick are healed, etc. If the activities of Jesus are directed for the kingdom of God, so also are those of his disciples.
All the powers and prerogatives given by Christ to the Church are oriented to the future kingdom of God: the power to bind and to loose granted to the Apostles; the faculty to teach; the forgiveness of sins; the destruction of the kingdom of darkness; the practical application of his command "love one another".

The Eucharist manifests in a special way the inter-relationship between the Church and the kingdom. Paul says to the Corinthians: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11,26). It is evident that the Eucharist is, for the Christian community, an anticipation of the kingdom of God.

From what has been said above we can draw the following conclusions:

a) Everyone admits that the dominant idea or content of the preaching of Christ is the kingdom of God, a kingdom which is near at hand. Mark testifies thus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1,15).

b) The Church is distinguished from the kingdom of God.

Hence, it is not proper to speak of the Church in terms of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is eschatological, that is to say, a reality of the future. On the other hand, the Church is a present reality, provisional and not definitive. Ignoring this distinction would lead to the glorification of the Church, and consequently, to excessive triumphalism and
the denial of her pilgrim nature, and a further denial of the fact that she is a community that both possesses and expects the kingdom of God at the same time.

e) At the same time, however, the connection between the Church and the kingdom is affirmed; without this, the community of the Church would remain without a goal and there would be no link between her and the message of Jesus.

d) The mission of the Church consists in giving testimony to the kingdom which is none other than to give testimony to the redemptive action of Christ which is both past and future.

e) The Church is the instrument of the kingdom of God.

Her mission is to be at the service of the kingdom, to be its handmaid. Both the primitive community and the disciples of Jesus were fully conscious not only of being the announcers of the kingdom, but also of being its instruments and servants (St. 10,8; Lk. 10,17).

f) From this point of view, we may affirm that the kingdom of God, although it is a future reality and essentially eschatological in nature, has already come into the present; it has already begun. It is expressed by the phrase "already" but "not yet".

3) Consequences:

a) The first and fundamental consequence is that the Church is the handmaid of the kingdom of God.

Therefore:
- If the kingdom of God is eschatological and a future reality, the Church cannot constitute herself as an end in itself. She is rather, something transitory, provisional and intermediate.

- If the kingdom of God is the work of the power of God, the Church cannot create the kingdom; she can only give witness to it, placing absolute trust in God.

- If the kingdom of God is essentially religious in nature, the Church cannot let herself become a power in this world, she cannot be a political ideology. She is not an empire, a human power, but a servant to men, a diaconia of spiritual nature.

- If the kingdom of God is an event of salvation for sinners, the Church has to be a messenger of peace, of joy, healing, pardon and salvation.

- If the kingdom of God demands from man a radical decision for God, the Church finds herself faced with this option: either God or the powers of the world. She is required to make a continuous conversion and transformation of herself, that is—she is obliged to a constant metanoia. In this context, we must understand the axiom: "ecclesia semper reformanda".

b) Mission of the Church.

The service to the kingdom of God is based on faith in Jesus. The mission of the Church is to believe in Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, the Church is a community of believers in Christ Jesus: a part of humanity that has made the Lord
Jesus the ultimate reason of its existence. Since Jesus is the God-man, faith in Christ gives rise to faith in man. God has faith in man and is confident that man can fulfill himself, and that his political, social, cultural and religious perfection is possible in Christ.

In this context, the Church is, in a way, responsible for the humanization of the world and of man, and no task that is related to and concerns man is foreign to her. This means that the Church must oppose all kinds of injustice, slavery, oppression and transgression of human rights, not because of political ideology, but from the Gospel and the kingdom of God. The Church is not a political ideology, but a gospel.

From the perspective of faith the Church has to maintain a critical attitude towards the attainments and achievements of human progress lest they become idols or absolutes in themselves. Since human progress must be oriented to the kingdom of God, it is the faith of the Church which purifies, spiritualizes and relates the scientific and technical progress of man to the future.

e) From the perspective of the kingdom, the ecclesial community is a community of hope.

The basis of hope is faith, especially because the Church hopes for the realization of the kingdom of God. The proper object of hope is Christ who became incarnate for the redemption and liberation of man, and so all human reality is included in the hope of the Church. The Church is, therefore, a community
of hope which proclaims to the world a total humanisation that is radical and authentic.

d) From the perspective of the kingdom of God, the Church is a community of love.

The fundamental law of the kingdom is love which can also be expressed as universal fraternity. The Church must inculcate this law of love in herself so that universal fraternity will be realised as far as possible. Otherwise, how can the Church, the handmaid of the kingdom, give witness to the fact that the kingdom of God has broken into the world and is already present?

C) The Church is a community that finds its place in the world.

Man's response to God in the process of history takes place in this world as its center. It is convenient, therefore, to discuss two important points from the ecclesiological point of view.

C-1) The MISSION of the Church in the World.

This point has already been discussed in the last part of the former section.

C-2) Relation between the Church and the World

a) Basic features of the world of Today:

- interpersonal character of man.

Man is a person and is conscious that he can only
realize himself as such when he relates with the others and with the things that surround him. To be a person one has to open himself to others and to things. This opening constitutes him as a personal reality.

- Considering that the world is a society and a framework of relations which man establishes with others and with things, it is thereby a product of man.

- Nature does not appear as a reflection of the divine, but as a reality which man can dominate through science and technology. Man has discovered its secrets in such a way that he appears, in reality, as its lord and controller.

- Granted that man is in the center of the modern world, we cannot, however, regard it as a static reality, or as a stage where events are repeated, but we should rather consider it in constant evolution, development and progress. The world is an historical process.

From this point of view, the world is oriented to the future. All systems, political and philosophical, give priority to this important moment of time.

- We are faced, then, with a totally secular conception of the world. The sacred, the divine have ceased to be something immediate. What is immediate is creation, production and the dominion of man.

b) Attitude of the Church about this world.

- The Church brings to the world divine salvation, that is to say, salvation and liberation of man. She is the
presence of God in the world, or in other words, the disclosure of God to the world. This presence is realized:

. by the proclamation of the word
. by the administration of the sacraments
. by the practice of love in the diakonia.

- The Church makes her message credible by being a community of love. Firstly, this love has to be shown in the concretization within the Church of the love of God. By mutual love the Church shows herself as the community of those who love God. This love is not limited to the ecclesial community, since love is expansive and diffusive, and the love of the Church must be open to all the world; it is a love that embraces everyone. This is why the Church is the instrument of salvation for the entire world, the Church is open to all the world.

- This love should not be shown as the ecclesialization of the world. This is one of the constant temptations for the Church. For in this case it would not be generous and altruistic, but egoistic. It would be against the practice of love itself.

- But at the same time she must avoid becoming worldly herself. To become worldly is to let herself become subject to power and all its manifestations. This is a negation of love and the embodiment of egoism. The Church is in the world, but she cannot subject herself to it, using the same means and criteria of the world in order to bring about her mission: power, money, honor. Love is the absence of power,
By practising love which is the absence of power, the Church shows herself poor and disinterested. "By being poor, the Church realises the form of salvation by Christ: Christ brought about salvation by identifying himself in the kenosis with everyday reality and by renouncing power.... The poverty of Christ which the Church has to practise is love; which amounts to the renunciation of all desires for ownership and possession— which makes man powerful— thus acquiring the infinite power which comes with the absence of power" (MS IV/1, p. 313).

By means of this kind of poverty, the Church can give witness before the eyes of the world to the power of love, a witness which is the only source of credibility in the secularised world.

- The Church being an eschatological reality, that is, oriented to the kingdom of God, her diakonia in regard to the world has to consist in helping the progress and humanisation of this world, and transforming the world into a better reality. All progress and humanisation of the world is a preparation for the kingdom of God which will have its full realisation at the end of time.

- To sum up, the Church fulfils her mission in this secularised world by giving witness as a community of love; in renunciation and radical poverty— her power is the absence of power, thus contributing to the humanisation of the world in preparation for the kingdom of God in the future.
DE FINE CONGREGATIONIS

1) **The CN is born in the Church through the work of St. Vincent de Paul.**

Therefore, in interpreting the end of the Congregation in the present time, we have to take into account these three things:

A-1) The end of the CN is none other than the vocation of St. Vincent de Paul. This vocation has to be placed within the framework in the process of his religious experience.

A-2) The vocation of St. Vincent has to be interpreted at the present time in the light of the charismatic structure of the Church. That is to say, the vocation of St. Vincent, and therefore, of the CN, is a charism which implies two fundamental elements: **the call of God, for a determined service of the ecclesial community.**

A-3) If we consider that Vincent de Paul felt himself called upon to remedy an urgent need of the ecclesial community in France during the 17th century, that of evangelization of the people in the countryside who were then the most abandoned sector in the community, the CN, from the ecclesial viewpoint, must also feel itself called on behalf of the most abandoned sector both ecclesiastically and materially. It must furthermore, see this call as a genuine service to the ecclesial community, within the ecclesial dynamics of search and detection of new needs and of poverty in the Church and in society.
B) This mission of the CM has to be within the boundaries of the mission of the Church.

The Church is the vehicle for continuing the mission of Christ; she is the animator and the one responsible for universal salvation. Hence, the CM is at the service of the Gospel, that is to say, at the service of Christ and of the will of God, the Lord of universal salvation.

C) The mission of the CM must be within the limits of the Church as the people of God, wherein the fundamental equality among the members is appreciated and practised because everyone has been redeemed by Christ.

D) The mission of the CM has to be interpreted as a mission within the Church to the poor.

DE ACTUOSITATE APOSTOLICA

A) The missionary activity of the CM is a participation in the mission of Christ which has threefold aspect: prophetic, priestly and kingly.

B) The evangelisation of the poor consists in:

1) The proclamation of the word
2) Administration of the Sacraments
3) Humanization of the world and of society
4) Contribution to the building up of the kingdom of God.
C) The Apostolic activity of the CM is aimed at the perfection of the People of God, within the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church.

DE COMMUNIONE FRATERNÆ ET DE SPIRITU ORATIONIS

A) In order to understand the community or communitarian life, we have to take into account the mysterious reality of the Church: the community of the CM is a community called by God.

B) We have to take into account the dimension of the Body of Christ: the Church is a communion. We must also take into account the trinitarian connection, which implies this communion.

C) The Supper of the Lord is the center of ecclesial life. All Christian community such as the CM, must have as its center the Eucharist.

D) Community prayer is nothing but the manifestation of the communion of the Church and the Christian community.
A) The vocation of the CM is included in the vocation of the Christian to sanctity, to which all the people of God are called.

B) The evangelical counsels in the CM are the charismatic manifestations of the flourishing existence and radicality of the command of love.

C) The CM must have a christocentric and ecclesiological view of the evangelical counsels, not an individualistic one.

DE FORMATIONE

A) The formation of our members has to be interpreted as an instrument and as a means to the fulfillment of the fundamental mission of the CM: the evangelization of the poor. Therefore it must be guided by whatever implies the evangelization of the poor and by whatever implies the end of the CM correctly interpreted.

B) Formation must be an instrument of vinculation to the community prior to the attainment of the end of the CM. Hence, it must be guided by whatever the community life implies.

C) The formation of our men must be open to the charismatic gifts of the individual for the good of the community.
DE REGIMINE

A) We must take into account the ecclesial dimension of the Body of Christ: service to the community and to the others.

B) Authority has to be understood as the listening to the word of God and as service and availability. Therefore, the community must never be formed and constituted by the use of authority.

C) Responsibility and autonomy of the members must be harmonised, according to the charism of each one, with obedience. Obedience is interpreted as a service for the common good, according to the different existing functions in the community, in the same way as there are various functions in the Body of Christ.

D) Principle of subsidiarity within the community follows the collegial structure of the Church.

DE BONIS TEMPORALIBUS

A) The use of temporal goods must be exercised in the context of the evangelical counsels.

B) We must take into account the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.

C) We must take into account that the mission of the CN is enclosed within the framework of the Church of the poor.
ECCLESIASTICAL PRINCIPLES APPLIED TO THE CHAPTERS OF THE
NEW CONSTITUTIONS

I. DE FINE C.M.

The new Constitutions (1969-1974) in five articles (1-5, and in the note to art. 5) set forth the purpose of C.M. as the faithful continuation of the charism and choice, made by St. Vincent, of participation in the mission of Christ and of the Church, especially in that which looks to the evangelization and care of the poor (art. 1). This purpose sets the direction for all the activity and permanent reform of the Congregation (art. 4) and remains as a distinctive sign of unity and as an incentive to the apostolate for all the Missionaries (art. 5).

However, the text of the five articles (as well as that of the second and third chapters) has not turned out to be clear and acceptable to all of the Brothers. In fact, the XXXV General Assembly (1974), was called as a result of the requests of the Provincial Assemblies, in order to clarify, by means of the definition of the "vocation" of the Congregation, the most important problem of its identity, which was under discussion "because of a lack of security in the apostolate, because of the loss of the Brothers and because of a loss of communitarian and evangelical sense." The declaration De Fine, Natura et Spiritu C.M. put forth by the General Assembly in order to meet the desires of the Brothers, has not resolved in a clear way the problem of identity, but it
has given a principle for a solution: "to center the activity of the Congregation on the service of the poor within the context of the Church and the world today" (cfr. CID EMILIO, Declaration "de fine, natura et spiritu c.m.", in Vincentiana, 19, Roma 1975, fasc. 3, pp. 114-129).

1. Application of Some Ecclesiological Principles

There are, above all, three ecclesiological elements evident in the articles of the chapter, De Fine: the charismatic structure of the Church (the charism of St. Vincent); the mission of Christ and of the Church (participation and continuation by St. Vincent and the Congregation); the choice of the Church of the poor (the stress on evangelization and advancement of the poor). But these three elements do not seem to stand out in the text with the necessary refinement and clarity.

a) Charism of St. Vincent

The gift of the Spirit, which in the Church is the gratuitous call directed to a specific service in the ecclesial community, this we define as charism. In St. Vincent it is the evangelization of the poor. In the chapter, The Purpose, the charism of St. Vincent is described in art. 1 and it is mentioned in art. 3 (cfr. also articles 8, 20, 35; Declaration "Purpose, Nature and Spirit of C.M.", n.22; Declaration "Apostolic Activity", n. 28; in art. 49 of the Constitutions mention is made of the charism proper to each one, as also in the Declaration "Fraternal Communion", n. 42).

Nevertheless, one seems to note something lacking in the
text, namely the explicit call to the charism of the Congregation, which does not really differ from that of the founder. St. Vincent in his conference of Dec. 6, 1658 calls it VOCATION, "Notre vocation est: evangelizare pauperibus" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 90), and he explains it with words full of life and light. "... il ne se trouve en l'Eglise de Dieu aucune compagnie qui ait pour son partage les pauvres, et qui se donne toute aux pauvres pour ne jamais prêcher aux grandes villes; c'est de quoi les missionnaires font profession; cela est particulièrement d'être, comme Jesus-Christ, appliqués aux pauvres. Notre vocation donc est une continuation de la sienne..." (S.V., COSTE, XII, 80).

In the charismatic structure of the Church today there is not lacking the charism of C.M. coming directly from St. Vincent and which should be made explicit in the Constitutions in the chapter De Fine.

b) The Mission of Christ and of the Church

As was said in the opening paragraph of the Constitution Lumen Gentium, the Church "is a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of the intimate union of men with God and of the unity of the entire human race." The mystery of this union is the mystery of Christ because it is in Christ that man finds his perfect communion with the Father and perfect fraternity with his brothers.

The Church in Christ is a sign and a visible instrument of the mystery of communion with God and with men. Therefore,
the living reality of the Church (and also of its members, taken individually as well as all together) bears the character of a sign with a two-fold mission: first of all, that of sanctifying and bringing back to God mankind and the world, thus performing the redemptive work of Christ and, secondly, that of unifying them as brothers in God the Father, a unification which reaches its fullness in eternity when all men will be with Christ in the Father. The concept of sign thus expresses the true essence and the life of the Church.

Also our Congregation, which belongs intimately to the Church, is and must be a sign of the Church herself and of her mystery, which continues the two-fold mission. It is a specific character of sign, different from that of the religious life, whose multiple value derives properly from the profession of the evangelical counsels (cfr. Lumen Gentium, 44; Perfectae Caritatis, 12 and 13).

The value of sign, in some way, is mentioned in the Constitutions in connection with mission, but above all in connection with community life (cfr. art. 38; Declaration "De communione fraterna", n.43). It would be more complete and more theologically efficacious if it were mentioned in the Constitutions more explicitly than in art. 5, also in connection with the participation in and the continuation of the mission of Christ and of the Church.

c) The Church of the Poor

The words of this expression are not found in the texts of the Council but the content is; it is an ecclesiological dimension rediscovered and deepened, and which truly is in
full harmony with the experiences of St. Vincent and the
tradition of the Congregation.

The poor Christ (cfr. Lumen Gentium, 8, 12; Presbyterorum
Ordinis, 17; Perfectae Caritatis, 13) announced the good news
to the poor. It is necessary that the Church follow the same
road followed by Christ in preaching the gospel to the poor
(cfr. Ad Gentes, 8; Lumen Gentium, 8, 38, 41; Gaudium et Spes,
1, 63, 69, 81, 88, 90, etc.).

As has been said above, St. Vincent and the Congregation
have continued and are continuing the mission of the Church;
it is their specific charism and vocation. Therefore, whatever
element which could bring either confusion on this point or a
deforming of the charism of St. Vincent and of the Congregation,
should be clarified. For example, the note to art. 5, which is
not wholly satisfying.

2. The Problem of Article 2

The XXXIV General Assembly of 1968-1969 in the editing
of the chapter "The Purpose" was preoccupied with maintaining
the thought of St. Vincent (Reg. Com. I, 1) and also with
holding firm to the regulation of Ecclesiae Sanctae (II, 6),
"in order that the purpose, the nature and the character of the
Institute may be respected."

a) Clarification of the Purpose

In art. 2, which endeavors to determine with precision
the purpose of the Congregation, there are included ad litteram
the words which are read at the end of the first article of the
Common Rules and which St. Vincent explained especially in his conference of Dec. 6, 1658 (S.V., COSTE, XII, 73-94); therefore, according to this article the purpose of the Congregation consists in: first, applying oneself to personal perfection; second, preaching the Gospel to the poor, especially those of rural areas; third, helping ecclesiastics to acquire the knowledge and the virtues demanded by their state of life.

As has been indicated, after 1969 it seemed that also art. 2 of the new Constitutions, as well as other articles, did not give a full answer to the identity of C.M. and did not sufficiently take into account the development of ecclesiology along with the further changes of society and the Church in recent times.

This is the reason why in the Provincial Assemblies which were held in preparation for the General Assembly of 1974 there was the request to clarify the identity of the Congregation. The Assembly of 1974 limited itself to drafting the Declaration "De Fine, Natura et Spiritu C.M.", as has been said, deferring to 1980 the eventual, new editing of the text of the Constitutions.

b) Personal Perfection.

This aspect of the purpose of the Congregation is fundamental according to the thought of St. Vincent and it is so for two reasons: first of all, for a personal reason, that is, because of "the vocation to a state of life so important as that of serving God in the ways in which we serve him," and in the second place, for an apostolic reason, that is, because
we are the mediators to reconcile men with God" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 78).

St. Vincent emphasized that working for one's own perfection is an invitation that comes from the Gospel "in which priests and all Christians find a rule of perfection... similar to that of the Eternal Father" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 76). "But since not all Christians are preoccupied with this, God noticing the negligence of the greater part of people, raises up by marvelous ways some who consecrate themselves to the divine majesty in order to seek with the help of his grace to perfect themselves and to bring others to perfection" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 76).

The theology of Vatican Council II (cfr. Lumen Gentium, 39-42) has brought a deepening in the understanding of the universal vocation to holiness in the Church. The life of the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, is a continual striving toward perfection, toward personal and collective sanctification. Many texts of the Council say clearly first of all, that sanctity is a gift that Christ gives to his spouse, the Church, and therefore that it is a charism and then that the obligation of sanctification (and hence, of using this charism) according to the express will of God is common to all the faithful, from the Supreme Pontiff to the Bishops, the priests, clerics, religious and laity in the various states and social offices. Sanctity is possible to all because God has called all and to all he gives light and grace (cfr. also the discourse of Pope Paul VI, Nov. 1, 1976, in L'Osservatore Romano, Nov. 2-3, 1976, p.2).
In the past, especially in Religious Institutes and also in our Congregation, the basis of Christian life was oriented toward the conviction that sanctity was rather a conquest of man, a detachment of man from the things of this world, the moral obligation of man that he live in a way corresponding to his vows, rather than the conviction that sanctity is, above all, a gift of Christ to his Church and to each baptized person, as the doctrine of Vatican II repeats to us. Moreover, in the past, religious life was defined as a "state of perfection" or "perfectionis acquirandae", relegating in some way, at least implicitly, the rest of the people of God to a level of inferiority (cfr. GUTIERRE A., De nomines quo apte designentur Instituta quae consilia evangelica amplectitur, in Commentarium pro Religiosis et Missionariis, 56, Romae, 1975, 37-59, 143-150, 225-232). With respect to this, it is interesting to reread the conference of Nov. 7, 1659 which St. Vincent gave about the vows, and, in particular, the page where he speaks of the diverse states of perfection (S.V., COSTE, XII, 369).

The theology of sanctity according to Vatican II is a little different from the of the time of St. Vincent, and therefore also from that of the Common Rules and of art. 2 of the new Constitutions, dependent on the same Common Rules. Therefore it would be opportune to reflect upon and to update the expression: "propriae perfectioni studere, nitendo scilicet pro viribus virtutes exercere, quibus Christus nos verbo et exemplo instituere dignatus est".
Without a doubt in the Constitutions, as before and even more than before, there will be a need to express and to clarify the vocation and the obligation to the personal and collective sanctity of the Missionaries. But it is necessary to take into account the theological perspective of Vatican II, particularly of the vocation to sanctity in connection with the practice of the evangelical counsels. This theological direction was also well known to St. Vincent: "On entre en cet état de perfection par la pauvreté, chasteté et obéissance, car Notre Seigneur dit: 'si vis perfectus esse, vade, vende omnia quae habes et da pauperibus' (Matt. 19,21). On renonce aux biens, aux plaisirs, aux honneurs" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 369).

Furthermore, "propriae perfectioni studere" being the personal obligation of every Christian as a result of baptism, seems that it ought to be retained as the objective of every Missionary more by reason of baptism itself, rather than as one of the aspects of the specific purpose of the Congregation.

a) The Evangelization of the Poor and Help to the Clergy

Another two aspects of the purpose proper to the Congregation, according to art. 2, are the evangelization of the poor, especially those of rural areas and help to ecclesiastics for acquiring the knowledge and virtues demanded by their state in life. St. Vincent also explains these two aspects of the purpose of the Congregation in the conference of Dec. 6, 1658 (S.V., COSTE, XII, 79ff and 83ff.).

The evangelization of the poor, according to St. Vincent, consists not only in the proclamation of the good news but also
in making the Gospel effective (cfr. S.V., COSTE, XII, 84), and he adds: "...s'il s'en trouve parmi nous qui pensent qu'ils sont à la Mission pour évangéliser les pauvres et non pour les soulager, pour remédier à leurs besoins spirituels et non aux temporels, je réponds que nous les devons assister et faire assister en toutes les manières, par nous et par autrui...

Faire cela, c'est évangéliser par paroles et par oeuvres, et c'est le plus parfait..." (S.V. COSTE, XII, 87-88; it is interesting to compare these texts of St. Vincent with some recent documents of the Church's Magisterium, as, for example, Octogesima Adveniens, May 14, 1971, AAS, 63, 1971, pp. 412-413; Evangelica Testificatio, AAS, 63, 1971, 506; Evangelii Nuntiandi, Dec. 8, 1975, nn. 18, 20, 24, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33).

Moreover, St. Vincent advises the Missionaries against "esprits de contradiction" and "personnes lâches", "esprits mal faits", who will be able to come after his death and will contradict that which the Congregation does in a spiritual and material way to assist the poor (S.V., COSTE, XII, 89-90). In the evangelization of the poor St. Vincent regards in a special way the inhabitants of rural areas, which he assists especially with the ministry of missions to the people, a practice already carried out with fruit by other apostles, as the Capuchins and the Jesuits. We know that at the time of St. Vincent the people of the rural areas were living in great poverty and in an unbelievable religious ignorance as a result of the negligence of pastors and the flowering of heresies (S.V., COSTE, XII, 80-81).
With the passing of time and with the progress of social life, especially by means of industrialization, in so many countries the social situation of rural areas has progressed while at the same time a change in the means, methods, objectives and programs of the pastoral work of the Church has been seen. Given these real changes it must be asked whether the evangelization of the poor, especially those of rural areas, has the urgency and immediacy as in the time of St. Vincent and also if it has perspective of development for the future. As a result, it will be opportune to take all this into account in the final draft of the text of the Constitutions.

Even though the evangelization of the people of rural areas does not seem to demand the same urgency and priority as three centuries ago, it nevertheless always remains true that the Congregation is destined for the pressing and more forgotten needs of mankind, as St. Vincent said, "...everyone thinks that this group is of God, because they see that it ministers to the most pressing and most forgotten of needs" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 90).

The help of the clergy became an activity of the Congregation only later and as a function of evangelization of the rural poor. As St. Vincent said in 1865, "Au commencement, nous ne pensions à rien moins qu'à servir les ecclésiastiques, nous pensions à nous et aux pauvres... Dieu a permis qu'en nous il n'a paru que cela mais, dans la plénitude des temps, il nous a appelés pour contribuer à faire de bons prêtres,
à donner de bons pastours aux paroisses et à leur montrer ce qu'ils doivent savoir et pratiquer" (S.V., COSTE, XII, 83-84).

In 1650 he wrote to a Brother, "C'est pourquoi nous tâchons aussi de contribuer à faire de bons ecclésiastiques par les exercices des ordinands et par les séminaires, non pour abandonner les missions, mais pour conserver les fruits qui se font par elles" (S.V., COSTE, IV, 42-43). And in the same way he wrote to another Brother Feb. 22, 1654, "C'est mediatement travailler au salut du pauvre de la campagne que d'être employé à former de bons curés et de bons ecclésiastiques, qui par après les vont instruire et les exhorter à une bonne vie; pour le moins nous devons avoir cette intention et cette espérance" (S.V., COSTE, V, 81).

In the area of formation of the clergy there was most noticeable progress after the Council of Trent; so much so that especially in this last century, most dioceses have been able to assume this work themselves, using diocesan clergy, properly chosen and prepared according to the directives of the supreme authority (cfr., for example, Optatam Totius, 6).

Our Congregation at present remains in only a small number of seminaries, which in 1975 were about 30 in number, of which 20 are major seminaries. This fact is due not only to the crisis of vocations and to the consequent closure of seminaries, but also to the fact that in the dioceses at present, more than in the time of St. Vincent, there are priests who are well prepared for seminary direction and who are appointed for this
work by their bishops.

Conclusion

The examination of the articles of the Chapter, "The Purpose," can suggest the updating and the bettering of the text with a more attentive application of the principles of modern ecclesiology. In the light of these principles, the proper charism of the Congregation can be indicated and the specific purpose can be made clear according to the perennial inspiration of St. Vincent, and according to the regulations of Ecclesiae Sanctae. At the same time, article 2, taking into account the direction of the Declaration De Fine, Natura et Spiritu C.M. can be clarified and eventually formulated in a new way.

II. DE ACTUOSITATE APOSTOLICA

In the fifteen articles of the Constitutions (Articles 14–28) dealing with apostolic activity it seems that four elements were put forward, although not with the same importance and clarity: the doctrinal element (articles 1 and 19), the pastoral and ministerial element (articles 16, 17, 20, 21 §2 and 3, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27), the sociological element (article 21 §1), the practical element (articles 15, 18, 28).

The Declaration De actuositate apostolica (1974) itself emphasized in its first part the ecclesiological tendency (numbers 27–32) and in the second part the ministerial tendency (numbers 33–40), at the same time one notes the clear intention to "center the apostolic activity of the Congregation in the
service of the poor and to insert it into the movement for changing the world, according to the documents of the popes" (cfr. CID EMILIO, *Declaración sobre la actividad apostolica de la C.M.*, in *Vincentiana* 19, Roma 1975, fasc. 4, pp. 182-197).

Taking into consideration the doctrinal element it seems that the ecclesiological side is rather limited and in some ways also lacking, although in the text of the Constitutions two elements are opportually inserted: the participation of the Congregation in the mission of Christ and of the Church (art. 14), and the love of Christ, source of all apostolic activity (art. 19).

1) The Mission of the Congregation

The topic of the mission of Christ and of the Church has already been touched upon in the remarks made about the Chapter *De Fine* (p. ). Now it is a question of putting it into a relationship with the chapter *De actuositate apostolica*.

Article 14 contains two doctrinal components: the vocation of the Congregation to participate in the mission of Christ in the Church; the essence and the manner of this participation, namely, the proclamation of the manifestation and realization of the love of God toward mankind.

Without a doubt, Christ is the one who reveals the Father (*Dei Verbum*, 4; *Gaudium et Spes*, 45) and his love for mankind, realized in the plan of universal salvation. But historically, Christ, the Incarnate Word, has fulfilled this function unveiling to mankind the mysteries of God by his presence, by his words, by his deeds (*Dei verbum* 2, 14, 17), calling them from all nations and races so that they unite
together in the Holy Spirit who was sent by Him (Dei verbum, 4), and also that they constitute the new people of God, which is the Church (Lumen Gentium, 9), his mystical body (Lumen Gentium, 7, 48), which will have its completion at the end of time (Lumen Gentium, 2). Christ fulfills this mission, above all, in his office of Prophet (Lumen Gentium, 12, 13, 35), Priest (Sacrum Concilium, 7; Lumen Gentium 5, 13, 28), and King (Lumen Gentium 13, 31), and in this three-fold office he has made all the members of the People of God participants (Lumen Gentium, 31).

In fact, the mission of Christ is continued by the Church in order to communicate to mankind the fruits of salvation (Lumen Gentium, 8). The mission of Christ and of the Church, as has already been mentioned, is two-fold: that of uniting mankind to God and that of unifying them with each other (Lumen Gentium, 1).

Given this basis, it seems that the text of art. 14, already sufficiently meaningful, could theologically better qualify the participation of C.M. in the Mission of Christ in the Church and the mission of the Church herself, if the words, "manifestationem et adimpletionem amoris Dei erga homines" were perfected by means of the second aspect of the mission.

2. Evangelization

Article 14 also seems to limit to proclamation alone ("annuntiando") the participation of the Congregation in the mission of Christ in the Church. It is true that art. 21 § 1 broadens the horizon by speaking of the "evangelizationis opus"
toward the poor and it refers to the experience of St. Vincent.

After the closing of our XXXV General Assembly (1974), the third Synod of Bishops was held in Rome (Sept.–Oct. 1974) and it was dedicated to the topic of evangelization. Pope Paul VI, referring to the reflection and deepening of understanding on the part of the Synod, has given to the Church the beautiful apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii nuntiandi" (Dec. 8, 1975, AAS, 68 Vatican City 1976, 5-76), which marks a moment of synthesis and further deepening with regard to the doctrine of evangelization.

In this document the mission of Christ (nn. 6-13) and of the Church (nn. 14-15) is closely bound with the clear affirmation of the profound connection existing between Christ, the Church and evangelization (n. 16).

During the present time of the Church, it is she who has the mandate to preach the Gospel. This mandate is not fulfilled without her nor, even less, against her. This premise introduces the definition of the complex process of evangelization (n. 17), and then there are described the elements of it which are essential and complementary one to another: renewal of humanity (nn. 18-20); witness (n. 21); explicit proclamation (n. 22); acceptance, adhesion to and assimilation of the proclamation of the ecclesial community (n. 23); initiatives of the apostolate (n. 24).

Then the papal document presents the essential content of evangelization: salvation in Jesus Christ, who reveals concretely to men the love of the Father, in whom all find them-
selves again as brothers (nn. 25-28). It deals with transcendental, eschatological salvation, which clearly has its beginning in this life, but which reaches fulfillment in eternity. In this perspective one must not neglect the strict bonds between evangelization and human advancement (development and liberation), bonds on an anthropological, theological and evangelical level (nn. 31-38). "It is impossible to accept that in evangelization one can or that one ought to neglect the importance of the problems being debated today which are concerned with justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. It would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel on the love of our suffering and needy neighbor" (n. 31).

Then there follow the ways, modes, and means more adapted to evangelization (nn. 40-48) in order to reach those for whom it is destined, all men in every place and in every situation (nn. 49-58), and hence those who work in the preaching of the Gospel (nn. 59-73).

The last part of the papal document deals with the spirit of evangelization, which the workers must carry in this divine work with the action of the Holy Spirit (n. 75), with the witness of authenticity (n. 76), with the power of unity (n. 77), with the worship of truth (n. 78), with the sign of love (n. 79), with the fervor of saints (n. 80).

In the light of so important a document, it seems that not only the doctrinal elements, but also the composition and the structure of the chapter De actuositate apostolica of the
Constitutions, should be reconsidered, while at the same time taking into account the valid elements contained in the articles and also the limits of the activity of our Congregation.

3. Ministries and Ministerial Responsibility

Both the chapter *De actuositatem apostolica* and the corresponding declaration of the Assembly of 1974 speak of the diverse modes or forms of apostolate proper to the Congregation. The text of the Constitutions points out also, although just in passing, ministries (for example, articles 21 § 3; 22; 24), which today, in the light of new ecclesiology and the impelling necessities of the Church, are the object of theological and socio-pastoral studies, even within the Catholic Church.

Jesus Christ, in order to feed and to cause his people to increase all the more, instituted within the Church various ministries (*Lumen Gentium* 18, 28). The tasks, functions or ministries instituted by the Lord are able to be reduced, according to St. Paul (cfr. Eph. 4, 11ff; ICor. 12, 28-29), to those of the word, of assistance and governing. The apostles and their successors have had from Christ the office of teaching, ruling and sanctifying in his name and with his authority. But also the laity, united to Christ the Head, having been made participants in the priestly, prophetic and regal office of Christ have their personal task in the mission of all the people of God within the Church and in the world (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, 2).
The Constitution Lumen Gentium (n. 10), before it speaks of the functions and the hierarchical organization of the ecclesial community, wished to emphasize the fundamental equality of all the members of the People of God, by virtue of their participation, by means of Baptism and Confirmation, in the common priesthood, distinct and different "essentially and not only in degree" from that which is ministerial and hierarchical, yet still are "ordered one to another, so that each one in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ."

This new perspective redimensions but does not eliminate the distinction between ordained ministers and laity, a distinction which sometimes in the past led to undue consequences, by which the former maintained for themselves almost all the power, and the latter were bound by a rather passive obedience.

The life and the mission of the Church are based on the responsibility of all of its members and on each one in particular. But, notwithstanding this united and "ministerial" responsibility of all of the baptized and confirmed, it is necessary to put emphasis on the specific task of the "ordained minister," with his own unique position for the union of and the relations with the community and with God.

Following these ecclesiological principles, besides retaining the diverse forms of the apostolate of the Congregation, as have been emphasized in the present articles, it is necessary to emphasize in the Constitutions the proper position and importance of the ministries of the priests of the Congregation.
Further, it seems opportune (in connection with apostolic activity and formation) to recall the common priesthood, with the possibility of participation in the ministries and of cooperation from our young men and fellow co-workers, for that which belongs to their personal competence (cfr. for example, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 73).

III. **DE COMMUNIONE FRATENA ET DE SPIRITU ORATIONIS**

Diverse elements come together to constitute the identity of the Congregation. Among these are *fraternal communion* among the members and the community structures for existence, spirituality, development, mission, government and the perfection of this communion.

The Constitutions treat fraternal communion, above all, in ten articles (art. 29-38), and spiritual life, which is tightly bound to it, in twelve articles (articles 55-66). With relation to these articles, the General Assembly of 1974 has drawn up two declarations, *De commumione fraterna* (nn. 41-50; cfr. CID EMILIO, *Declaracion sobre la vida de oracion*, in *Vincentiana* 20, Rome, 1976, fasc. 1-2, pp. 12-25).
if the theological inspiration and the practical form are a little diverse from the time of the Founder. In so far as the ecclesiological contents are concerned, although they appear without a strict connection between them, some elements are emphasized, even if not fully, as for example the content of articles 29 (aspects of fraternal communion), 38 (life as a sign of the presence of Christ), 56 (communion with the Trinity), 62 (the Eucharist).

For a deepening of the text of the Constitutions it seems opportune to recall and to look at some elements of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

1. The Church as "Communion"

The concept of communion, community and community life in reference to the Congregation is expressed repeatedly in the Constitutions and in the two Declarations. But their profound motivations seem to be those put forward at the beginning of art. 29, the will of St. Vincent and the example of the life of the apostles with Christ. Undoubtedly they are good motives but the ecclesiological data of the conciliar documents seem to be stronger.

The universal Church is a People gathered together in the unity of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit (Lumen Gentium 4); it derives its origins from the mission of the poor and from the mission of the Holy Spirit according to the plan of the Father (Ad Gentes 2), and it has the task of making present and visible the Holy Trinity (Gaudium et Spes 21). The Holy Trinity is therefore the model of communion and the source of the unity of the Church (Unitatis Redintegratio 2).
The communion and the unity of the Church are the theological source of the "communion", the "community", and the "community life" of the Congregation which pertains to the life and the sanctity of the Church itself (Lumen Gentium 44). This ecclesiological element should be emphasized in the Constitutions in order to act as basis for the communion and the unity of the community.

2. The Church as Eucharistic Community

Article 62 has a substantial emphasis on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the whole life of the Congregation. It is a text that is theologically of good quality but it seems to be incorporated in the midst of other articles as one of the many important affirmations, rather unconnected one with the other, in the chapter De spiritu orationis (articles 55-66). A similar text is found in the Declaration De communione fraterna (n. 44; cfr. also De spiritu orationis, n. 64).

The ecclesiological principle of the Church-eucharistic community is much more illuminating and compelling. Many council documents express it but it will be enough to take one text from Lumen Gentium: "...in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both expressed and brought about" (Lumen Gentium 3; cfr. also 7, 11, 26; Sacrosanctum Concilium 2 and 47; Unitatis Redintegratio 2 and 15). This means that the point of maximum visibility of the Church is the community, no matter how large or how small, gathered together at the Eucharist.
The Church manifests itself, therefore, to the world not so much as an institution but as a sacrament and as a sign, a sacrament which has its center in the Eucharist; the Church brings about the Eucharist, but in its own way the Eucharist brings about the Church.

This is true also for our community of Missionaries, which has the maximum of ecclesial manifestation not so much in life in common, in the observance of the rule, in the practice of the evangelical counsels, in apostolic work, in service of the poor, as principally that all this is done in connection with the Eucharist. The Eucharist, in fact, brings about community.

The community attains the maximum of communitarian experience in the breaking of the Bread together, in the "fractio panis". And why all this? Because it is Christ who makes of us a community, not the Christ seen only and above all according to the needs of theological faith and Christian asceticism as it was previously taught, but Christ according to his sacramental community.

From the Eucharist the step to a more genuine experience of community will be easier. Therefore, under every aspect, the institutional sense of the Congregation and of the Community as a head and subjects will not predominate, but rather it will be the true community already made fraternal and united by the Eucharist and by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

From these simple remarks one can conclude that the
Eucharist and the Eucharistic life should be placed in greater evidence and connection with all the aspects of community life and spiritual life.

IV. DE FORMATIONE

The articles of the Constitutions which look to the general principles of formation (articles 89-96), the internal Seminary (articles 98-110) and the major Seminary (articles 111-116) of the Congregation, contain, in general, the doctrine and the norms taken from Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis (Jan. 6, 1970; AAS, 62, Vatican City 1970, 321-324; cfr. "Ratio fundamentalis institutio sacerdotalis" in Seminarium, from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 22, Vatican City 1970, I-VIII/517-857), in which according to the present theology and the practical direction of the Church there has been given a "guideline" (as it was called by Cardinal Gabriel Garrone) for the human, spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation of young seminarians and for the completion of formation after the seminary. In the general norms of the Ratio it is stated that the formation of religious priests, with the necessary adaptations, should be inspired by this document (cfr. loc. cit., p. 334, n. 2).

The regulations of the Ratio are mentioned again in a general way also in the Declaration De promotione vocationum et de formatione (1974, n. 85; cfr. CID EMILIO, Declaracion sobre la promocion de vocaciones y la formacion, in Vincen­tiana 20, Rome 1976, fasc. 4, pp. 164-177).
A remark that must be made about the text of the Constitutions is the verification that, both in the general principles of formation and in the articles which look to the internal seminary and the major seminary, it is not explicitly indicated, for that which pertains to spiritual formation, liturgical life and in particular, the Eucharist as the "center of the entire life of the seminary" (loc. cit., p. 357), while at the same time it does opportunely point out many other aspects of human doctrinal and pastoral formation.

V. DE-PRAXI CONSILIORUM EVANGELICORUM

The regulations of the Constitutions regarding the practice of the evangelical counsels (art. 39-54), as also the Declaration De Consiliis evangelicis et de votis (nn. 67-81; cfr. CID EMILIO, La declaración sobre los consejos evangélicos y los votos, in Vincentiana 20, Rome 1976, fasc. 3, pp. 97-115), at the same time leaving unresolved some questions, do develop a theology and a practice of the evangelical counsels, which take into account Vincentian tradition and new theological contributions.

It seems to lack only a clear reference to the ecclesiological element of the universal vocation to sanctity in the Church (Lumen Gentium, chap. V, 39-42). It is true that in art. 55 of the Constitutions there is a mention of the sanctity to which the Missionaries are called, but the reference is in connection with the "practice of the evangelical counsels."

It is enough to recall a text of Lumen Gentium (n. 39), which says, "...this sanctity of the Church manifests itself
constantly and it must manifest itself in the fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful, it expresses itself in various ways among the individuals who by their state of life tend to the perfection of love, building up the others; it manifests itself in a characteristic way in the practice of the counsels which are accustomed to be called evangelical. The practice of the counsels, embraced by many Christians through the impulse of the Holy Spirit, both privately and in a condition or state sanctioned in the Church, bears and must bear in the world a splendid testimony and a magnificent example of this sanctity" (cfr. also 8, 42, 48).

From these texts it is evident that the simple sanctity of the Church can be collective (in so far as regards the Church as the people of God and the body of Christ) and also individual (in so far as regards the individual members, who pursue this sanctity in the various states and offices), as was well understood also by St. Vincent (cfr. Common Rules I, 1). Also the practice of the evangelical counsels in the Constitutions is one of the characteristic forms of sanctity of the Church as has been recalled in connection with the norms that regulate it.

VI. DE REGIMINE

At the beginning of Chapter VI of the Constitutions, there are synthesized the general principles (articles 130-134) De Regimine, which are concerned with only three topics: the members (art. 130); authority (art. 131) and the rapport between members and authority (articles 132-134).
In the redaction several doctrinal elements of Vatican II are put forward, such as collaboration, participation in the government of the Congregation, authority as service, dialogue and cooperation for the good of the Church and the Congregation, subsidiarity, the unity of government, powers and jurisdiction of superiors, exemption (a topic obviously connected with art. 6).

Perhaps it could be emphasized, more than what is mentioned in art. 130, in line with general principles, that which concerns Assemblies and Councils, all of which in their own way ought to be the expression of the participation and concern of all the members for the good of the entire community (Perfectae Caritatis 14). The above-mentioned concepts should be referred to and joined with community life (cfr. art. 29ff.), and the text of the articles of De regimine should be couched in order to put more in evidence the ecclesiological principle of the "Church as communion."

1. Communio fidelium

As the conciliar texts affirm (cfr. especially Lumen Gentium 1) the Church in Christ is a communion with the living God and communion among all men, through which, by means of the action of the Holy Spirit, all of the members, one with the other, give themselves to service, one of the other, according to the different gifts given to them (cfr. Gaudium et Spes 32). The Holy Spirit with its light-giving action, its sanctifying and guiding action (cfr. Lumen Gentium 4) secures the government of the Church among men. In fact, the
continual communion among Christians is not without head and without hierarchy, but is organically structured with its own juridic form and together is animated by love. Christ has established some members as designated (Pope and Bishop: cfr. *Lumen Gentium* 8, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and see especially n. 2; Priests: cfr. *Lumen Gentium* 28, 21 and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 7, 14, 15; Deacons: cfr. *Lumen Gentium* 29), so that this Church (which is a baptismal community through Baptism, a spiritual and missionary community through Confirmation and a Eucharistic community through the participation in the Body of Christ) will continue among Christians.

The theological import of the principle "Church as communion" or "communio fidelium" is reflected within the Congregation and, consequently, demands a new way of existing as an organically structured community. In concrete terms, the authority of superiors, while still remaining firm in deciding and commanding that which should be done (cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis* 14), is to be understood more as service, availability and witness (and therefore, demands greater openness to listening to God and to dialogue with the Brothers); the function of members, within the community and in participation in the apostolic mission, should be considered much more within the responsibility of all, as well as with proper respect and appreciation for the charisms of each one; the active and responsible obedience of all ought to come about as the fruit of human and supernatural maturity, which leads to a carrying out of one's own tasks and to an assuming of
individual initiatives for the service of love and the common good of the Congregation and the Church, according to the distinct and related functions existing in the Community.

2. **Communio episcoporum**

The concept of "communion" in the Church has manifold significances. A second significance is that which is contained in the expression "communio episcoporum" which recalls the "communio fidelium". Both, in fact, are born in the very same moment, that is, at the moment of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended on all the community of believers (apostles, women, Mary, the mother of Jesus and the brothers, Acts 1, 14) in order to establish in that community, from that moment on, a permanent bond of communion, "communio fidelium". At the same time, by virtue of the same Spirit, there began to function within this collegiality the ministry of the apostles for the building up of the community of the faithful: "communio fidelium".

The collegiality of the pastoral office within the Church is not only an association organized by a determined structure (which here does not concern us directly), but is also a spiritual fellowship of many persons in the unity of a magisterium, of a sanctification and of a government of the one Church of Christ. This spiritual solidarity, while at the same time manifesting itself in the form of an organization with the bonds of the college with its head and the head with its college, is, in the deeper sense of its very being, the
fruit of the Holy Spirit, who guides the head and with him the entire college in every truth and who thus, by virtue of their communion of faith with Christ, unites them all together reciprocally into the solidarity of faith in one horizontal communion (cfr. GROOT JOANNES CORNELIUS, Aspetti orizzontali della collegialità, in La Chiesa del Vaticano II, Ed. Vallecchi, Florence 1965, pp. 772-792).

We are able to transfer the theological conclusion of the spiritual solidarity within collegiality in an analogous way to the internal life of the Congregation, which lives its "communio". The spiritual solidarity of the members and superiors in the unity of vocation, sanctification, mission, common life and government is another fruit of the Holy Spirit, which will serve to overcome individualism, fragmentation, absenteeism and dispersion. It is therefore worthwhile to stress this also in the Constitutions.

VII. DE BONIS TEMPORALIBUS

In the formulation of the general principles of chapter VII of the new Constitutions (articles 211-216) one notes the space given to the concrete inspiration and to the practical norms for an efficient and sound administration, possession and use of the goods of the Congregation. Obviously the problem of the administration of the goods is present, but the constitutional principles, following the experience and teaching of St. Vincent (cfr. for example, the Conference of Dec. 13, 1658, S.V., COSTE, XII, 110-111; the conference of Feb. 21, 1659, S.V., COSTE, XII, 132-133, 143ff.), are not
able to forget the theological context in which the Congregation lives and works. Therefore, in the final draft and in the rearrangement of the articles of the Constitutions, with regard to the goods of the Congregation, without forgetting the material already codified in articles 42-46 (which are concerned with goods and personal property), it will be convenient to give a proper arrangement and a precise reference to some ecclesiological principles such as those which we mention here below.

1. Opinion of the Church Concerning Temporal Goods

a) The Church and the World

The Church and the world are two realities mixed together in the history of humanity, distinct but not separate nor exclusive of one another. The world is distinguished from the Church as a complex of values, institutions, competencies and activities of a secular and temporal order, diverse from that totality of supernatural realities to which Christianity refers itself. The distinction between the world and the Church leads to a certain antithesis because of the divine ends, because of a divine methodology of development, because of a diverse conception of some human values, etc.

All of this has weighed negatively in the search for a peaceful rapport between the two, unfolding itself over the centuries with diverse ways, motives and rhythms, which go from the contrast of the first centuries of the Church, to the medieval fusion, to the modern divorce, to the relegation of the Church to a new ghetto and finally to the search for a
dialogue which is in the programs of the present day Church and in the needs of the world of our time.

Dialogue is sought by the Church, also as a result of the rethinking of Vatican II, which has given a new opinion of the world (cfr. Gaudium et Spes 42 and 43; this is a new ecclesiological principle). In fact, the Church looks on the world "with a profound comprehension, a sincere admiration and with an open intention not to conquer it but to serve it, not to criticize it but to see its value, not to condemn it but to comfort it and to save it" (cfr. Pope Paul VI, the discourse at the opening of the second session of Vatican II, Sept. 29, 1963).

Therefore, Christians and especially priests and religious, making use of the world as though they were not using it (I Cor. 7,31) are able to obtain that liberty which redeems from every disordered preoccupation, rendering them receptive to the call of the voice of God in everyday life (Presbyterorum Ordinis 17).

b) Property and the Use of Temporal Goods

The new view of the Church regarding the world implies also a clearer view regarding temporal goods, which the Church cannot and must not seek, but which it does necessarily use in order to reach its own goal.

Created goods are works of God, which he has destined to all mankind and therefore must flow to all according to fair criteria guided by justice and favored by charity. Consequently, no matter what the concrete forms of property might
be, it must be taken into consideration the universal
destination of goods and as a result, that private property
(naturally also that of the Congregation) has by its very
nature a social function (Gaudium et Spes 69-72).

Priests and, therefore, also the missionaries must use
temporal goods only for those ends to which they are able to
be destined in accord with the doctrine of Christ and the
decrees of the Church, and use them with dispositions of
detachment, poverty and simplicity so that all can have easy
access to priests and that no one, especially the poor, is
alienated (Presbyterorum Ordinis 17).

2. Temporal Goods and the Church of the Poor

The reality of the "Church of the poor" suggests the
placing of attention not only on the communitarian form of
evangelical poverty (art. 211 § 1), but above all on the lot
of the poor in need of evangelization. In fact the Church and
the Congregation are turning their attention to these people,
they are opening their hearts and offering their help to
these people.

With such a basis it seems clear that the criteria and
the norms in this matter cannot be just those of internal
administration of the goods of the community, such as patri­
mony of the poor (art. 211 § 2), but also those of individual
and collective practice (cfr. Perfectae Caritatis 13) of the
poverty effective in all our life (recall: "Tamquam pauperi
accomodata", Common Rules, III, 7) and those of care for the
brethren troubled by poverty and misfortune (cfr. articles
3. Temporal Goods and Eschatology

The Church, the People of God, is a pilgrim in the world and participates in its history (Sacrosanctum Concilium 2; Lumen Gentium 8-9, 48-51; Gaudium et Spes 45), walking, as the new Israel, in search of the future and permanent city (Lumen Gentium 9, 44), looking for the things above (Lumen Gentium 6) and longing for its fulfillment in the heavenly glory when the final restoration of all things in Christ will take place (Lumen Gentium 2, 9, 48, 68).

The Church in its pilgrimage uses by and large spiritual means, but also temporal goods, created by God with a natural goodness, in their place can be means by which man is able to reach his final goal (Apostolicam Actuositatem 7).

The grave defectiveness, with which the use of goods has marked history, counsel not to put trust in these means but to order them to God.

Further, the practice of the evangelical counsels wishes to be and is a sign which manifests to all believers the heavenly blessings already present in this world, which testify to the new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ and which announce the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom, through which the eschatological character of the People of God becomes fixed (cfr. Lumen Gentium 44).

These theological motivations (Namely the opinion of the Church about temporal goods, the Church of the poor and
eschatology) can complete and qualify in an opportune way the text of the general principles of the Constitutions which are concerned with temporal goods.
REQUESTS TO THE PROVINCES

The CPAG 1980 has attentively considered the effect of the present-day eschatology on diverse aspects of the life of the Congregation. The community, therefore, taking into account the work completed, proposes some questions to the Provinces.

1. **Principles of Ecclesiology**

   It is obvious that the theological enrichment of the Constitutions can enrich the life of the Congregation: therefore, if the Provinces are in agreement, in the plan of the definitive text of the new Constitutions, there can be introduced or better accentuated some essential principles of the present-day ecclesiology, according to the indications of this study.

   If there are some reservations, indicate the points and the reasons.

2. **The Purpose of the Congregation**

   The XXXV General Assembly (1974) did not resolve the problem of the identity of the Congregation. It could be done, if, among other things, the specific purpose could be made clear.

   Therefore, the CPAG 1980 requests of the Provinces:
   
   --if they desire to keep intact the text of art. 2 of the present Constitutions, notwithstanding the
precisions that can be deduced from some of the principles of present-day ecclesiology
— or rather, if they are happy with the answer given by the declaration De Fine
— or if they desire that there be a revision of art. 2 according to the remarks made in this study.

3. Evangelization

The preaching of the Gospel which remains since the beginning the patrimony of the activity of the Congregation, is indicated in art. 21 § 1 of the Constitutions. The reflection of theologians, the Synod of Bishops (1974) and the papal document Evangelii nuntiandi (Dec. 8, 1975) in these years has deepened the theological value and the practical effect of it in the life and in the progress of the Church.

The CPAG 1980 asks the Provinces:

if, based on this ecclesiological development, the plan of the new text of the Constitutions should give greater space and importance to evangelization.

4. Authentic Ecclesial Community

The declaration De Communione fraterna portends that the Congregation, following the example of the first Christians, can become an authentic ecclesial community (cfr. the declaration, n. 44).

For this it will be necessary first of all to refer community life to the theological values which influence its
inspiration and realization.

therefore, it is asked of the Provinces:

if also in the articles of the Constitutions concerning fraternal communion they feel that in an explicit way reference should be made to the Trinity, the Church and the Eucharist, as has been indicated in this study.

5. The Spiritual Aspect of Formation

The chapters of the Constitutions which are concerned with the general principles and the stages of formation seem to present as sufficiently developed the human, doctrinal and pastoral aspects of formation. The spiritual aspect seems to be less complete and this is especially true in that which is concerned with liturgical and sacramental life.

The Provinces are therefore requested:

if they consider it opportune, the integration of the spiritual aspect of formation with the articles of the Constitutions.