Preparatory Studies: End of the CM, 1977
THE END

of the

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
The following is a retranslation of the document "La Congregation de la Mission: Pourquoi?", one of six documents presented by the Preparatory Commission of the 1980 General Assembly. The translation of this document as it appeared in the United States was poorly done, apparently rushed. The typing of the manuscript was such that it was barely readable. Apart from the particular point of view of its author, the document is important in that it assembles some key texts on the end of the Congregation and shows one of the arguments that led to the formulation of the end of the Congregation of the Mission in the new Constitutions.

References to this document in Vincentiana are as follows:
- 1977, #3, p. 148; #4, pp. 181-182
- 1980, #1-2, pp. 18-19

Neither this document nor any of the five others was printed in Vincentiana.
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Many of the difficulties, differences of opinion, and tensions of previous assemblies can undoubtedly be explained by a lack of precision concerning the very word "end."

There has been and there is—among other things—the temptation to confuse end with pastoral options, thus giving the word end a meaning which is too restricted and limited.

Thus conceived, the end would amount to a kind of exhaustive list of the authorized and official commitments and ministries of the Congregation of the Mission. From this arise two tendencies: either adding such and such ministry to the list to justify the status quo (cf. 1954 Constitutions, Title I, Chapters 1 & 2), or finding in regard to the end, expressions so vague as to justify every commitment (service of the Church, calls of the Church, signs of the times, urgent needs, etc.).

To put together a "Vincentian idea" of the end of the Congregation of the Mission, it would be necessary, among other things, to refer to the celebrated conference of December 6, 1658 dedicated precisely to "The End of the Congregation of the Mission" (XII, 73-94, cf. below pp. 19-24). In this conference St. Vincent firmly delineates this end: the evangelization of the poor; but he also justifies a whole range of commitments and pastoral options and rejoices in the extraordinary "polyvalence" of his Congregation.

It seems then that for St. Vincent, there is no incompatibility between an end strictly and precisely defined and a series of options and commitments that are practically unlimited.

What is, then, the end of the Congregation?

-- The end is the Congregation's raison d'être.
-- The end is the criterion providing for its organization.
-- The end is the criterion concerning its choice of options and commitments.
CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM OF THE "END" OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION -
from St. Vincent's point of view

Is there any longer a reason for hesitating about the goal which Saint
Vincent proposed in founding the Company? It is true that some people are
inconvenienced by the "primo propriae perfectioni studere" of the Common
Rules, or still yet by the "cum propria salute" of the Bull of Erection,
"Salvatoris Nostri". So is it still necessary to speak of one end, two ends,
or three ends? It does not seem that the care for personal perfection can
justify an apostolic community as our own. In writing to Fr. De la Fosse,
Saint Vincent established the difference between religious women and the
Daughters of Charity, and the Congregation is included in this comparison:

There is, then, this difference between them and religious women:
the only end of religious women is their own perfection, whereas the
Daughters, like us, apply themselves to the salvation and relief of
the neighbor. (VIII,239)

All communities, and even all Christians, are held to "be perfect as your
heavenly Father is perfect." (Cf. The Introduction to the Devout Life, St.
Francis de Sales)

So something else is required: and it seems that this something else
clearly appears in the numerous texts and documents in the life of Saint
Vincent.

In the following pages, we find again and again the corporal and spiritual
care of the poor as a beam of light which illumines and justifies all that
Saint Vincent undertook. Even with important people, he knew how to strongly
refuse a work which did not correspond to the end of the institute. And these
refusals were as convincing as the acceptances. First of all we will review:

1) the numerous official texts taken from Vol. XIII of Coste which
devote themselves to the authentic objective of the Mission (an
objective, to mention in passing, very different from that of
Adrian Bourdoise);

2) some passages from Saint Vincent taken either from Vol. XI of Coste
or from the correspondence of Saint Vincent, in particular the
letters addressed to bishops indicating to them that the Mission
for the sake of the poor comes before all else;

3) finally, from Vol. XII we will take up the last thoughts of Saint
Vincent not at all uncomfortable with the multiplicity of commit-
ments to the extent that they are in line with the care of the poor.

"...it having pleased (God) by his divine goodness to provide for the spiritual necessities of those living in the towns of this kingdom by means of a number of teachers and religious who preach to them, catechise them, animate them and conserve in them the spirit of devotion, there remain only the poor people of the country who alone are left abandoned."

(In order to remedy this situation, the de Gondi family established) "the pious association of several ecclesiastics known for their doctrine, piety, and ability who might wish to renounce not only the conditions of the said towns but also all of the benefices, responsibilities, and dignities of the Church in order to apply themselves entirely and solely, according to the good pleasure of the bishops and each one within the extent of his own diocese, to the salvation of the poor, going from village to village, dependent on the common purse, to preach, instruct, exhort, and catechise these poor people and leading them to make a good general confession of all of their past life, and not accepting from this any remuneration of whatever kind or in whatever manner this might be, so as to distribute gratuitously the gifts received from the liberal hand of God." (XIII, 197-8)

"...that the said ecclesiastics and others who will desire in the present or in the future to give themselves to this holy work will apply themselves entirely to the care of the said poor people of the country, and to this effect ...they will expressly renounce all responsibilities, benefices, and dignities, with the exception, nonetheless, that some prelate or patron may wish to confer some charge on one among them for its good administration. (But note carefully, this charge ought not be entrusted to any but one "having previously served eight to ten years in the said work" of the Mission.

The said missionaries "will also be held to spiritually assist the poor convicts." (XIII, 200-1)

And the contract clearly states that the charity directed toward the said convicts must be continued in perpetuity for the future by the said ecclesiastics. This was well understood as a requirement on the part of the general of the galleys, "our" founder.

B. THE ACT OF APPROBATION BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS

This act of April 24, 1626 recalls the aim of the Mission: it is a matter of "some ecclesiastics who are employed in giving missions to the poor country people by catechizing them, preaching to them, and leading them to make general confessions..." (XIII, 215)

C. THE ACT OF ASSOCIATION OF THE FIRST MISSIONARIES

This act of September 4, 1626 signed by St. Vincent and his first three companions (A. Portail, P. du Coudray, J. de la Salle) declares that the foundation of Monsieur and Madame De Gondi must assure "the livelihood of several ecclesiastics who are bound and united together in order to be employed in a kind of mission by catechizing, preaching, and leading the poor country people to make general confessions..." A few lines further on it is reiterated that the four above named are called to live together in the manner of a congregation... and "to give themselves to the salvation of the said poor country people..." (XIII, 203-5).
Near the same date, St. Vincent signed an act of renunciation of his goods in favor of his family. (XIII, 61-2) Wishing to live poorly with the poor, he decided to make a pilgrimage to Montmartre with his first confreres in order, with the help of the holy martyrs, "to enter into the practice of poverty." (XII, 411)

D. THE APPROBATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION BY THE KING, LOUIS XIII May, 1627

"...having considered in the course of several years that the inhabitants of the towns were spiritually assisted by quite a number of persons of learning and marked piety, and that the said poor country people were alone deprived of this consolation and assistance."

- Recall the foundation by the De Condi: "...These ecclesiastics will apply themselves entirely and solely to the spiritual instruction of the said poor people, going, with the consent of the prelates of this kingdom, each one within the extent of his own diocese, to preach, hear confessions, exhort and catechise these poor village people, without taking any remuneration..." (XIII, 206)

- In order to ratify the Union of the College des Bons-Enfants, Louis XIII declared: "Our beloved priests of the Mission, founded... to go from village to village, to preach to...and to catechise the poor country people..." (XIII, 215)

E. PRIVATE VOWS OF 1627-1628

"This poor Company which was nothing in its beginning, judged from then on, two or three years afterwards (1627-28) that the best thing to do was to imitate our Lord in this, in this practice of poverty...(in order to work near the poor).

F. LETTER OF LOUIS XIII TO POPE URBAN VIII 6/24/1628

King Louis XIII wrote to the pope on the date indicated above in order to ask him to approve the Company. On the same date he wrote a second letter to the French ambassador to the Holy See, Monsieur De Bethune, "so that you might make accessible to His Holiness and wherever else it will be needed all that is necessary for achieving the purpose of my intention." (XIII, 220)

These two letters characterize the Congregation in the same terms: "...to that which might please His Holiness to erect as a Congregation the priests of the Mission founded to go from village to village to preach, exhort, hear confessions, and catechise the poor country people without any temporal remuneration..." (XIII, 219-20)

G. LETTERS PATENT ORDERING PARLIAMENT TO RATIFY THE LETTERS OF MAY, 1627 2/15/1630

This document describes one more time the work of the Mission as that of addressing itself to the poor country people: "...Several ecclesiastics...associated together and living in common who wish to give themselves entirely to the spiritual instruction of the said poor people, going with the consent of the the prelates of our kingdom, to preach, hear confessions, exhort and catechise from village to village, without either taking or receiving any remuneration...For these reasons it is understood that the instruction of the said poor people is a purely evangelical work..." (XIII, 226)

The registration in parliament of the letters patent of May, 1627 and
of February, 1630 summarized the objective of the Mission: "...to attend, each one within the extent of his own diocese, to the exercises of charity and the spiritual instruction of the country people..." (XIII, 232)

We can follow the reading of the different official documents up to the Bull of Erection of the Company of January 12, 1632; we will see that the statute of the Congregation remains the same: the spiritual care of the poor country people. Let us consider the essential elements:

H. THE CONTRACT OF THE UNION OF THE PRIORY OF ST. LAZARE 1/7/1632

"Also considering the aforementioned prior and religious of Saint-Lazare, the revenues of the said priory having been destined for corporally aiding and assisting the poor lepers, and since they are lacking, it would seem more natural and in conformity to the intention of the founders to apply the said revenues to spiritually provide for the poor country people, distant from the towns, infected with the leprosy of sin, and not at all instructed in the mysteries of the faith necessary for salvation; in which the said priests of the Mission brought about singular fruit in several places in France, gratuitously and without any remuneration..." (XIII, 235)

When Saint Vincent refused the priory of Saint-Lazare from the prior, Adrian Le Bon, he gave this reason: "...We are poor priests who live in simplicity, without any other purpose than to serve the poor country people...

The approbation of this union by the Archbishop of Paris allows us to know this: at least twelve priests of the Congregation of the Mission would live at Saint-Lazare; of this number at least eight would have to labor in the work of the missions: they would teach the mysteries of the faith to the "rudes", they would hear general confessions, etc.

N.B.: It should be recognized, nevertheless, that the document remarks as another work of the missionaries the reception of the ordinands of the diocese of Paris who would make a retreat of fifteen days before ordination under the direction of the Fathers of the Mission. This is in 1632; from 1628 on Saint Vincent discussed with Msgr. Pottier, the bishop of Beauvais, the necessary formation of the clergy in order to prolong the fruits of the missions. We will return to the question of the formation of the clergy. Should this work be considered as a second end of the Company?

I. THE BULL OF ERECTION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION 1/12/1632

If there is a text which indicates "the end" of the Company, it is this one; but what does it say?

The De Gondi foundation: "Cogitaverunt ad salutem animarum utilissimum Deoque optimo maximo gratissimum fore, si aliqua pia proborum et ideneorum virorum congregatio institueretur, qui rusticorum et habitatorum pagorum, oppidulorum et locorum humilium hujusmodi instructionis curam haberent, et de propriis eorum bonis ad hanc congregationem, seu ejus domum, in dicta civitate Parisiensi instituendum seu fundandum, quadraginta quinque millia librarum turonensium erogarunt." (XIII, 259)

"...Videlicet quod praecipuus hujusmodi congregationis illiusque personarum finis et peculiare institutum sit, divina favente gratia, cum propria salute, in eorum salutem incumbere qui in villis, pagis, terris, locis et oppidis humillioribus commorantur." (XIII, 260)
Ministry in towns where there was an archbishopric or bishopric was excluded. An exception was made for retreats preparatory to ordination; they would last for fifteen days. Then the text returns to the works of the missions:

"In iis locis ad quae missi fuerint, ignorantes Dei praecepta doceant, eosque christianae doctrinae rudimentis informent, confessiones etiam generales audiant, ac eis Sanctissimum Eucharistiae Sacramentum, conciones familiares ad populi captum habeant, catechismi munus exercet, obtenta tamen prius a parochis licentia, sine qua praefatis exercitiis se non immiscent."

Wherever a mission had been given, the establishment of the Confraternities of Charity was required..."ut pauperibus aegrotis subveniat..." (XIII, 260-2, passim)

The introduction of the work of the ordinands should not make us conclude too quickly that Saint Vincent aimed at two unrelated objectives, nor that he was putting all the weight on one foot. Our Founder must have perceived very quickly, following the formula of the organization of the parish priests (pastors) of Paris that "the Mission would be useless if the bishops, mindful of their flocks, did not give parishes except to persons of known piety and ability." He himself would say later: "Long experience has made it clear that the fruits gathered from the missions do not last very long without the aid of the pastors." But he had occasion to make clear to a confere who was concerned about his fidelity to his vow as a missionary because he was working in a major seminary: "Those who are working in the seminaries are working mediately for the salvation of the poor country people, since they are forming good pastors who afterwards are to instruct them and exhort them to live a good life." (V, 81)

In other instructions, Saint Vincent would be even more clear about the subordinate role of seminary work. We will make reference to the text later on.

Acceptance by the King of the Bull "Salvatoris Nostri" 5/16/1642

In this text Louis XIII wrote:

"For these reasons, taking into particular consideration all that which touches upon the said Congregation, to the glory of God, on account of the many fruits which it continues to realize each day: the solace and the salvation of the poor subjects of the countryside, we have allowed and authorized, etc..." (XIII, 286-7)

It happened that in the mind of some missionaries, the work of the galley slaves seemed marginal. But were not these convicts among the poor? And so in establishing the foundation of Marseille, the Duchess of Aiguillon and Saint Vincent clearly set forth the work of the missionaries:

"Agreed once again to the task that the said four priests of the said Congregation of the Mission will go for a full five years aboard each of the said galley ships in port at Marseille and at other ports of this kingdom in order to catechise and instruct the poor convicts and others in the same galley ships in the love and charity of God..."

Furthermore, he was thinking at the same time about the condition of "the poor Christian captives and detainees of the said places so that they might also be evangelized." (XIII, 300)
K. ADVICE OF ST. VINCENT TO FR. NOUVELLY AND BR. BARREAU before their departure for Algiers about May, 1646

We have this other document to complete this question of Christian slaves:

Both will go to Algiers "in order to spiritually and corporally assist all the Christian slaves..." Saint Vincent asked to be kept up to date on a regular basis "not about the state of affairs of the country, but about the news of the poor slaves..." "...if they can do so without danger, they can visit the poor slaves in the countryside; they will go and attempt to confirm and console them and distribute some alms to them to this effect..." (XIII, 306-7)

L. SAFE CONDUCT FOR THE PRIESTS OF THE MISSION SENT INTO CHAMPAGNE AND PICARDY 2/14/1651

In another area, the aid to devastated provinces, we can find several instances which confirm one more time the primordial care for the poor. In the above mentioned document issued by the government of Louis XIII securing safe passage, we discover:

"In order to sustain and nourish the poor...quite a number of people of the good city of Paris are giving large and abundant alms...so greatly useful to the Priests of the Mission...to the extent that a great number of these poor people have been comforted in their necessity and sickness...(the help of the king was requested so that)...the provisions, clothing, and other things destined for the poor might not be taken." (XIII, 324)

M. THE ACT OF ACCEPTANCE BY THE HOUSE OF SAINT-LAZARE OF THE BRIEF "EX COMMISSA NOBIS" 10/22/1655

In order to finish the review of the official texts putting into relief the fundamental option of service to the poor, we cite this document concerning our vows:

"...Post biennium probationis, emmitterant tria voto simplicia paupertatis, castitatis et obedientiae, seque toto vitae tempore in dicta congregatione pauperum rusticanorum saluti applicandi..." (XIII, 383)
PART 2: CONFERENCES AND CORRESPONDANCE

Here we take up what we learn from the thought of Saint Vincent, whether from his remarks, those which Abelly reports or those which we know from the conferences, repetitions of prayer, or from his correspondance. Volume XI of Coste begins with extracts from Conferences to the Missionaries as related by Abelly. In these conferences we find several passages which prove, if there is still need, Saint Vincent’s attachment to the missionary vocation among the poor country people.

On the excellence of this vocation: "There is nothing more Christian (i.e., resembling the Mission of Christ) than going from village to village in order to help the poor save themselves, as you see being done in the face of much weariness and inconvenience..." (XI, 1)

We know very well the response that Saint Vincent made to the exclamatory question of Madame de Gondi: "Ah! Monsieur Vincent, how many souls are being lost! What can be done about this?" The response was the sermon at Folleville of January 25, 1617 and the instructions which followed it, instructions preparing "all these good people" for general confession. (XI, 2-5)

Saint Vincent would forever have the desire to assist the most unfortunate: it was these that he carried in his heart. We know that taking over the priory of Saint-Lazare was often questioned by him: the missionaries moved in there in January 1632. And if they would have been obliged to leave it...? Saint Vincent asked himself in order to know what would cost him the most, and he responded: "This would be to abandon the care of the alienated poor, of never seeing again these poor people..." (XI, 21-2)

He perceived very well that nature was not inclined to this kind of care, and the effort that was necessary in order to go beyond his first impressions. "I should not consider a poor peasant or a poor woman according to externals, nor according to what appears as their capacity of spirit; as a matter of fact, they often do not seem to have the appearance nor the mind of reasonable persons, so crude and earthy are they. But turn the coin over, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, who wished to be poor, is represented to us by these poor people; that in his passion he hardly bore the face of a man, and that he seemed to the gentiles to be a fool, and to the Jews a stumbling block; and for all of this he is known as the evangelizer of the poor: Evangelizare misit me! O God! how wonderful to see the poor, if we think of them in God and with the same esteem as did Jesus Christ." (XI, 32)

Had Saint Vincent not made the irrevocable decision to consecrate himself totally to the service of the poor after his temptation against faith, the objection formulated by a heretic would have led him to the discovery of the evangelical character which denotes the care of the poor. We are familiar with the objection: the scandalous contrast between the superabundance of the clergy in the large cities, and the religious abandonment of the poor country people. "Such a Church cannot be guided by the Holy Spirit." Saint Vincent tried hard to nuance the overly straightforward assertions of the heretic; but he did not convince him.
But then in the following year, a mission was given at Marchais, not far from Montmirail, "...the heretic was curious enough to listen to the preaching and catechetical instructions; he saw the care that was being taken in the instruction of those who were ignorant of the truths necessary for their salvation, the charity with which weakness and lethargy of spirit were dealt with among the most uncouth, and the marvelous effects that the zeal of the missionaries had on the hearts of the greatest sinners. Moved to tears...the heretic was converted, and Saint Vincent concluded his account in this way: "Oh! what happiness for us missionaries to verify the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his Church by working as we do in the instruction and sanctification of the poor!" (XI, 34-7)

Saint Vincent was preoccupied with developing in his missionaries the virtues for which they had most need in facilitating contact with the poor; and having read in the Book of Sirach 4:7 from the Latin Vulgate: "Congregationi pauperum affabilem te facito," he extracted a lesson for his missionaries: "Without the practice of kindness towards the poor country people, they are put off and do not dare to approach us, thinking that we are too severe or that we are persons of a rank too high above them. But when we treat them kindly and cordially, they have a different opinion of us and are better disposed to profit from the good we wish to do for them. Now, since God has destined us to serve them, we ought to do this in the manner which will be most profitable for them, and consequently to treat them with great kindness..." (XI, 68-9)

On the obligation of having the spirit of compassion, Saint Vincent spoke to the missionaries in these terms: "The missionaries, far more so than other priests, must be filled with this spirit of compassion, being obliged by their state and by their vocation to serve the most miserable, the most abandoned, and the most overcome by corporal and spiritual misery. So first of all, they should be moved to the quick and afflicted in their hearts because of the misery of their neighbor. Secondly, it is necessary that this misery and compassion appear externally and on their faces...making use of compassionate words...Finally, it is required to aid and assist them in their necessity and their misery...because the hand should be conformed to the heart." (XI, 77)

If we should guard ourselves against attachment to material goods, it is because there is a risk of "living pricked among their thorns and mired in their bonds," and it would not be long before hearing such ideas as the following: "We have such a profitable income, we should slack off; why go running through all the villages? ...Let us leave the poor country people there...And then we will be able to say goodbye to the works of the mission and to the Mission itself, for there would no longer be one." (XI, 79)

In October 1638, Saint Vincent was concerned about the perseverance of the missionaries in their vocation. He had heard it said that: "the Oratory is no more than a reasonable hotel." He didn't believe this, but in any case he didn't want Saint-Lazare to become one; and so he exhorted his priests: "We should neither seek nor hope for rest, contentment, and blessings other than in the Mission, for...in this vocation we are strongly conformed to our Lord Jesus Christ who, it seems, made his principal goal in coming into the world assisting the poor and taking care of them."
"Misit me evangelizare pauperibus." And if we ask our Lord: "What did you come on earth to do?" "To assist the poor." "And anything else?" "To assist the poor." he would answer again. But he in his company only poor people and he rarely worked in cities, but spent almost all of his time speaking to villagers and instructing them. So, are we not then blessed to be in the Mission for the same end which led God to become incarnate?...to catechise, instruct, hear the confessions of and assist the poor..." (XI, 107-8)

This service of the poor country people seemed so exalted to Saint Vincent that those who returned from the missions in the country had to be welcomed in a very special way: "We should receive them as persons who have come from banishing the devil making Jesus Christ reign and the name of God triumph. If there is the custom of triumphantly receiving those who have won some battle, why not those who have come from battling the devil?...So the porter should ring the bell five or six times to call the procurator and the one who has charge of the retreatants...At the sound of the bell they should stop whatever is going on, except for the holy Sacrifice of the Mass." (XI, 125-6)

On October 25, 1643 Saint Vincent exhorted the Company to zealously give themselves to the missions. This was an occasion to point out the connection which unites the work of the seminaries with the work of the missions: the latter is "the foundation" of our vocation. All the rest is accessory. (XI, 133)

"Monsieur Vincent came to speak about the missions which were going to begin, and he humbled himself greatly over the fact that while it was customary to begin them in preceding years around the beginning of October, this year they had begun later. He said this with a very great feeling of the fear of God's judgement; after which he said a number of beautiful things in order to encourage the missionaries in their work, and he began with the obligation that we have of working for the salvation of the poor country people because that is our vocation, and of corresponding to the eternal designs that God has for us. Now working for the salvation of the poor country people is the foundation, and all the rest is merely accessory; for (let us listen to this carefully) we would never have given ordination retreats, worked in ecclesiastical seminaries if we had not judged that this was necessary to support the people and preserve the fruit that the missions had produce when there are good ecclesiastics, imitating in this the great conquerors who leave behind garrisons in the places they have taken for fear of losing what they have acquired with so much difficulty. Are we not blessed, my brothers, to give expression to the vocation of Jesus Christ to simple folk?..."...Oh! how happy those will be who will be happy to say at the hour of death those beautiful words of our Lord: Evangelizare pauperibus misit me Dominus! So you see, my brothers, that the primary aim of our Lord was to work for the poor. When he went to other people, it was only on the way." (XI, 133-5)

This is another way of expressing the preeminence of the missions over the work of seminaries. Saint Vincent heard the objection of a director of a seminary: "But someone might say: 'If I am hired to give ordination retreats or in seminaries?' That is fine when it pleases God to use us there and when obedience sends us there;...still, in respect to us, we should, as it were, as in a state of violence (thescholastic expression for characterizing the situation of the soul after death in that having been made to be united to the body, it is separated from it), so therefore these things (ordination retreats, seminaries) are accessory to our prin-
cipal aim (missions). (XI, 135-6)

Saint Vincent frequently had the opportunity and the need to remind bishops who asked for missionaries from him of the priority of the missions to the poor. Here are some examples:

To Clement de Bonzi, the bishop of Beziers: "My Lord...I would say to you first of all, that we are entirely under obedience to our lords, the prelates, to go everywhere in their dioceses where it pleases them to send us to preach, catechise, and direct the poor to make general confessions..."

When someone asked Saint Vincent to send two missionaries, he knew very well that in general the bishops were thinking first of all about their seminaries. But Saint Vincent remembered that a seminary was not opened without first establishing a mission house; the ordinary situation would be two missionaries to work among the poor, and two others for the formation of priests. This is very clear in the letter to Philibert de Brandon, the bishop of Periguex of July 20, 1650:

"I beg you with all possible respect to understand that two workers are not sufficient for an establishment that corresponds both to what you want and to our Institute. You desire a seminary and we have our obligation to missions; our principal work is the instruction of country people; the services we render on behalf of the ecclesiastical state is only accessory. (Saint Vincent went on to explain the need for completing missionary work by means of the formation of good priests.) By experience we know that the missions are very fruitful because the needs of poor country people are extreme; and since these people are, on the whole, simple and uneducated, they forget what they have been taught as well as the good resolutions they have made; if there are no good shepherds to help maintain them in the good condition in which we have left them. This is why we work at preparing good priests by way of ordination retreats and seminaries..."

Saint Vincent then concretely states to the bishop: "...since you want to have some missionaries, it is desirable that you have at least four of them for the two functions, especially because of the difficulty they would then have by omitting the first, the missions; and the seminarians would be able to profit from this opportunity to be involved in pastoral ministry."

Finally, in the same letter, Saint Vincent responded to the foreseen objection that could be made: "But the missionaries at Cahors only do seminary work!" In effect, that was the only house that did seminary work exclusively. The reason for this exception: the bishop of Cahors (Blessed Alain de Solminiac) covered the mission field by means of the Canons Regular of Chancelade. (De Solminiac was the first Abbot of Chancelade before being named the bishop of Cahors.)

When Bernard Codoing dreamed of introducing and developing what we would call "minor seminaries", Saint Vincent showed himself to be more than reticent about the success of such enterprises and above all, he added: "When it should please God to bless the Company in this way, it is not expedient that we should take on any establishment of this kind that would not support at least two priests doing the work of the missions; for otherwise the plan for assisting the poor would be destroyed because of it: 'Quod absit!'" (June 2, 1644) (II, 460)

On the occasion of the foundation of a hospital at Marseille by the Duchess of Aiguillon, Saint Vincent recalled to Fr. Portail that we should refuse "to provide for two priests in that hospital because our Institute has only two principal ends: the instruction of the poor country people
To the Superior of Saintes (December, 1655), he asked that he cooperate with the director of the seminary in its progress as well as with the continuation of the missions. (V, 489) And it is quite striking to hear Saint Vincent refraining the indiscreet zeal of a Brittany missionary who refused to render the services expected of him at the seminary of Saint-Meen because of his excessive affection for mission work. But let us look at the motives which Saint Vincent gave: "To go on mission, Monsieur, is not proper for you at the present time, since you do not have sufficient proficiency in our dialect to speak in public. We have had difficulty understanding you here; how then would poor people understand you?" (VIII, 562)

It seemed to more than one missionary that seminary work was a denial of the vow to serve the poor. Saint Vincent explained to the superior of Agen (1654): "In regard to your question of how one fulfills the fourth vow which is to dedicate oneself to the salvation of the poor country people all one's life, when one only does seminary work, I answer that it is first of all a preparation of the spirit, being ready to go to the missions at the least mention of it; and secondly, because it is a means of working for the salvation of the poor country people to be employed in the formation of good pastors and ecclesiastics who afterwards are going to instruct and exhort them to live a good life; at least we should have this intention and this hope." (V, 81)

We can examine two other letters taken from the correspondence of Saint Vincent sent in 1650, one to Innocent X and the other to this pope's nephew, Cardinal Pamphili; both of them define the end of the Company in almost the same terms:

Instituti nostri, Sanctissime Pater, scopus pauperum rusticanorum salus; ad hunc pagos et castella docentes circuimus, confessiones excipimus generalis, lites componimus et disceptationes, pauperum aegrotantium opitulationem procuramus. Haec ruri. Domi vero exercitia spiritualia tradimus, ordinando ad dignum susceptionem sacram perfectum, decem diebus ante quatuor tempora, praeparamus; clericos in seminariis ad mores ecclesiasticos, doctrinam et ritus sacros erudimus." (IV, 65-6; to the Cardinal, IV, 100)

Borrowing once again from the correspondence of Saint Vincent, we cannot neglect the letter which is so important for understanding the ends and the life of our Institute dating from a time, July, 1639, close enough to its beginnings—the letter addressed to Saint Jane de Chantal. On the end of the Congregation, we discover what we know very well:

"Our little Company is established for going from village to village at its own expense to preach, catechise, and lead the poor to make a general confession of the whole of their past life; to work at settling the differences we find among them, and to do all that we can so that the sick poor might be assisted corporally and spiritually by the Confraternity of Charity, composed of women, which we establish in the places where we give the Mission should they be desired; as to this employment which is our foundational work and to accomplish it better, (hence one end, then a means) the providence of God has added the work of bringing to us those who are taking orders for ten days before ordination in order to feed,
support, and teach them during this time practical theology, the ceremonies of the Church, the method and practice of mental prayer according to our blessed father, the bishop of Geneva, and all this in consideration of those who are from the diocese where we are established..." (I, 362-3)

To end these soundings from the correspondence of Saint Vincent in order to establish the end of the Congregation, we will cite at greater length a letter addressed by him to Fr. Jacques de la Fosse. This brilliant humanist had just left Marseille where the departure of the novices of the monastery of Saint-Victor had left him without employment; moreover, in response to a previous request for a change of climate, Saint Vincent placed him at Troyes where the air was considered to be the best in the kingdom: "Please," he wrote to Fr. Get, "have him go to Troyes." At Troyes, this confrere, often restless or at least disquieted, asked the reason for this, rejecting the direction of religious women since the Founder had recommended to him the direction of the Daughters of Charity. Saint Vincent's response to him marvelously clarifies the situation of the varied enterprises taken on by the Company in relation to its principal end (one would like to say the unique end: the super-end): the corporal and spiritual service of poor country people.

First of all, the care of religious women was seen as an impediment to the service of the poor: "I thank God for the sentiments which he has given to you in what I have written to you in regard to religious women; I am deeply consoled knowing that you have understood the importance of the reasons that the Company has had in distancing itself from their service in order to avoid obstacles to the service that we owe to the poor." But Saint Vincent declared that he did not reproach assistance given to religious women "for all that is allowable to others is not expedient for us."

So why, then, are we in service to the Daughters of Charity? "The Daughters of Charity are not religious, but Daughters who come and go as lay people do; they are parishioners under the direction of the pastors where they are established; and if we take on the direction of the house in which they are formed, it is because the guidance of God in giving birth to their little company is served by our guidance. (And according to a well known scholastic adage) "the same things that God uses to give being to things, he uses in order to preserve them."

Then comes a long explanation of the origin and the end of the Congregation of the Mission and of the diverse works which allow it to realize this end:

"Our little Company dedicates itself to God for the corporal and spiritual service of the poor; and this has been the case from its beginning, in such a way that at the same time that it has labored for the salvation of souls by means of the missions, it has established a means for comforting the sick through the Confraternities of Charity (one work); this is what the Holy See has approved by the bulls of our institution. Now, the virtue of mercy operates in diverse ways and it has guided the Company to different ways of assisting the poor, (then follows an enumeration of some of these works):

Consider the service that the Company renders to the convicts of the galley ships, to the slaves in Barbary; consider what it has done for the province of Lorraine in its great desolation and since then for the ruined frontiers of Champagne and Picardy where we have a Brother unceas-
ingly dedicated to the distribution of alms. You yourself, Monsieur, are a witness to the assistance given to the people of the surrounding area of Paris overwhelmed by famine and sickness following the encampment of armies. You have done your share in this great work, and you even thought that you as well as many others would die from it. The Ladies of Charity of Paris, moreover, are witnesses of the grace of our vocation to contribute to the multitude of good works...

"This being said, we have the obligation to help the Daughters of Charity in their advancement in virtue in order that they might carry out their charitable works well. The Daughters of Charity have entered into the order of providence as a means that God has given to us in order to do by their hands what we are not able to do by ours in the corporal assistance of the sick poor and to speak to them through their mouths some words of instruction and encouragement for their salvation.

"There is, then, this difference between them and religious women: religious do not have as an end anything other than their own perfection, while the Daughters are dedicated as we are to the salvation and comfort of the neighbor; and if I say with us, I would not be saying anything contrary to the Gospel, but rather would be in solid conformity to the usage of the primitive Church; for our Lord took care of several women who followed him, and we see in the "Canon of the Apostles" that they distributed provisions to the faithful and that they were involved in apostolic functions." (VIII, 237-40)

Saint Vincent ends by refuting the so-called danger of the involvement of the missionaries with the Daughters of Charity in recalling the rules that had been established to avoid idle gossip.

This letter, written in the last year of Saint Vincent's life at the moment, as we shall see in the conference of December 6, 1658, when some confreres were tempted to complain about the multitude of works, sufficiently clarifies what he called "the bull's eye"—the white center of the archer's target—of the Company, the precise end, the formal object: the corporal and spiritual service of the poor, especially the country poor. Moreover, there were at the time of Saint Vincent many beggars in the cities: we need only think of Macon, to say nothing of Paris.
PART 3: SAINT VINCENT'S FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE END OF THE CONGREGATION

In these last pages of Chapter I, we will examine the thought of Saint Vincent at the twilight of his life. Volume XII of Coste covers the years 1658-1660; these are particularly important years because after having finally distributed the Rules of the Company on May 17, 1658, our blessed Father, in the last conferences he was able to give, would provide a commentary on some of the chapters. Among these conferences that of December 6, 1658 "On the End of the Congregation of the Mission" stands apart. (XII, 73-94) Nevertheless, we cannot neglect the conference of May 17, 1658 in the course of which Saint Vincent distributed to the missionaries the little book of the Common Rules which had finally appeared in a correct edition. Our blessed Father spiritually prepared his missionaries by a short conference on the observance of the Rules, and this provided an opportunity for him to restate that which constitutes the end of the Company. (XII, 1-14)

One of the principal motives for practicing the Rules is, in effect, "that they are all drawn from the Gospel and tend to conform our life to that of our Lord's on earth. Our Lord came, having been sent by his Father, to evangelize the poor. 'Pauperibus evangelizare misit me.' (Luke 4:18) Pauperibus, to the poor! Gentlemen, to the poor as, by the grace of God the little Company strives to do." (XII, 3)

Saint Vincent continued by underlining that the Company was the first one to have this work as its principal, unique end: "An important motive for this same Company to humble itself is that never has there been one--for it was unheard of--which had for its end to do that which our Lord came on earth to do, to announce the Gospel to the poor alone: Pauperibus evangelizare misit me. And this is our end, you see; that which it pleased God not so very long ago to leave to us as a memorial..." (XII, 4)

The Queen had proposed to the missionaries that a mission be given at Metz. Saint Vincent replied that they could not: "Madame, your Majesty is then unaware that the poor priests of the Mission are only for the poor country people..." Saint Vincent, however, proposed that this mission be given by the priests of the Tuesday Conferences. The Queen then withdrew her request: ". . . She would be very sorry indeed to divert us from our institute, from the motive, from the end for which we have been instituted." (XII, 4)

Then Saint Vincent "hhapsodized": Our portion, Gentlemen and my Brothers, is the poor, the poor. What happiness, Gentlemen, what happiness! To do that which our Lord came down from heaven to earth to do..." A little farther on he took his theme up again losing himself in thanksgiving: "That there would be a Company and that it would be that of the Mission, composed of poor people, who would exist completely for this, who would go from here to there by way of towns and villages leaving the cities, something which had never been done before, in order to announce the Gospel only to the poor; and yet these are our Rules..." (XIII, 5)
Saint Vincent was not duped: he had not forgotten the diverse foundations, the seminaries in particular. In 1647 he wrote to a seminary superior expressing his joy that "we have sixty priests at the Bons-Enfants... thirty ecclesiastics at the seminary of Cahors of which his excellency, the bishop informs me he is satisfied, by the grace of God. There are eight (ecclesiastics) at Annecy, which is also a good start, and as many at Mans; at Saint-Meen, there are twelve or fifteen." But whatever the development of other works might have been, for him the essential, principal work was the care of the poor by means of the country missions.

Let us turn to the conference of this old man of seventy-eight years, so rich in life and missionary energy, who manifested more elan, more enthusiasm, and more confidence than many of the missionaries who were listening to him. What had happened to many founders, happened to him. Some of his disciples thought he was doing too much; so with Saint Benedict, Saint John of the Cross, etc. Saint Vincent would profit from the occasion to justify his works and to assure them the place that they deserved by relating them to one, essential end. (XII, 73-94)

Saint Vincent read in French (so the brothers could understand) from Article 1 of Chapter 1 of the Common Rules which sets forth as the end (the singular is used!):

1. to seek one's own perfection,...
2. to preach the Gospel to the poor, especially those of the country,
3. to assist ecclesiastics...

All of this constitutes the unique design of God for the Company. And we need not reflect too long to perceive that we are not faced with three elements aligned on the same level. There is a mixture, or better a subordination of these elements, one in relation to the others. Absolutely speaking, the attainment of perfection, personal perfection is an obligation for all Christians, and is subjugated to nothing. The interior life is not "the soul of all apostolic life" in the sense that it would be "ens entis," the "ens" being the means in relation to the "entis." Yes, this is true! But Saint Vincent (who said to us in the conference on seeking the Kingdom of God (XII, 131): "The interior life is necessary, and it must be developed; if it is lacking, everything is lacking...") did not follow this line of thinking when he sought to define the end of his institute. Consciously or not, he wanted to differentiate his work from that of older or contemporary communities. He went on to say that "the Carthusians do this, the Capuchins do that, the Oratorians, etc.... and the missionaries? It is appropriate, even completely necessary to discover exactly what is their end, for "finis est causa causarum." 'This is, then, what we have at the beginning of our Rules: our 'bull's eye' or our target that we aim at. (Had Saint Vincent seen archers practicing on their target?) "If we are asked: 'Why are you members of the Mission?', we should remember that it is God who arranged it so that we would work for: 1. our own perfection, 2. preaching the Gospel to the poor, and 3. service to priests..."

Seeking our own perfection does not differentiate us from other Institutes. Nor from all Christians. But what is going to distinguish
the Mission from other "religious" is essentially the instruction of poor
country people. "Yes, our Lord asks that we evangelize the poor: so this
is what he has done and what he wants to continue to do through us."

And Saint Vincent insists on recalling that Christ has assigned as
the proof of the authenticity of his messianic mission the evangelization
of the poor (Mt 11:6, Lk 7:23).

But someone could say: "But the parish priests and preachers are
already doing this!" Not at all as Saint Vincent points out: "There isn't
to be found in the Church of God one company which has the poor for its por-
tion and which dedicates itself completely to the poor so as to never preach
in the large cities; this is what the missionaries make profession to do;
this is particular to them to be dedicated to the poor as Jesus Christ was."
(XII, 79-80)

Saint Vincent then presented the motives for dedicating oneself to
this work: it is beautiful; it is the office of Jesus Christ. And it is
necessary, for according to the opinion of Saint Augustine and Saint
Thomas, the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are necessary for
salvation. And while other authors profess a "less severe" opinion, where
salvation is concerned, it is appropriate to follow the more sure opinion.

Finally, the evangelization of the poor entails the necessary work of
the purification of consciences—thus Saint Vincent's zeal for favoring
general confessions. All of us know what a revelation the sad spiritual
situation of the peasant of Gannes was for our founder. The poor country
people were damned: it was necessary to instruct them and to save them
from the danger of damnation.

Saint Vincent saw himself guiding an immense flock of Christian faith-
ful towards heaven, and he could not imagine that his missionaries would
refuse to help in such a task. "Such being the case, those act contrary
to the Rule who do not want to go on mission; or who, after having experi-
cenced some hardship at it, do not wish to return; or who, having developed
a preference for working in the ecclesiastical seminaries, don't want to
leave them; or who, having enjoyed some other work, don't want to put it
aside in order to do missions which are so necessary." (XII, 82)

CONCLUSION

"Indeed, it is something worthy for a missionary to have and preserve
this desire to go to the missions, to sharpen the blade of helping the
poor in the way that our Lord himself would help them if he was still on
earth..." (XII, 82-3)

Finally, Saint Vincent went on to the third level: the service of
ecclesiastics. He strongly insisted on this; but we should see in what
spirit. He himself recounted the origin of this orientation: first of
all, we should think about the salvation of our own souls, but according
to the call of God this personal salvation would be realized in laboring
for the salvation of the poor country people. In the end, the work of the
missions could not bear all its fruit if the Christian people did not have
in their service good priests who would support them in the good resolu-
tions they had made during the missions. Furthermore, our Lord himself
followed this orientation, this progressive development: the intimate life with his Father, then the work of teaching, finally, the formation of twelve good priests. It is probably appropriate to recall what Saint Vincent had said fifteen years before: "To work for the salvation of the poor country people is the foundation of our vocation, and all the rest is only accessory, for...we would never have given ordination retreats or worked in ecclesiastical seminaries if...we had not judged that this was necessary for supporting the people and preserving the fruit obtained from the missions, imitating in this the great conquerors who leave garrisons in the places they take from fear of losing what they gained with so much difficulty." (XI, 133)

If the work of the missions, then, is so primordial, if it is "the bull's eye" that must be aimed at, we should not refuse to do seminary work. Saint Vincent would never hesitate to call attention to this, and sometimes with a certain severity as in the case of the confrere from Brittany who refused to work at the seminary at Saint-Meen.

What follows in this very long conference of December 6, 1658 responds to different objections that could be formulated against this or that work which did not seem to be either in favor of the poor or strictly missionary.

-- "'The Daughters of Charity?' But didn't our Lord who came to evangelize the poor and form priests accept some women into his company, women that he directed to personal perfection and the assistance of the poor?...So it is not contrary to his procedure to take care of the Daughters in order to assist the sick, the sick poor..." (XII, 86)

-- "Hospital work?' But this is again a matter of the poor at at the Name of Jesus Hospital..." (XII, 87)

-- "'Bringing alms to the borders exposed to war and its terrifying consequences?' But the priests who were sent there took care of the poor...the afflicted members of our Lord... If there are among us those who think that they are members of the Mission in order to evangelize the poor and not comfort them, to remedy their spiritual needs and not their temporal ones, I respond that we must help them in every way, by ourselves and by others...To do this is to evangelize by word and by works..." (XII, 87)

-- "'The mentally ill...the foundlings?' Again, there are so many poor that they have to be comforted; the mentally ill--the Lord desired to be considered among them; the children--we have to be like them. God does not abandon those who were abandoned by their fathers and mothers..." (XII, 88-9)

If we look at them closely, all the works of Saint Vincent directly or indirectly concern the poor. He could conclude:

"It doesn' matter (this or that work); our vocation is: Evangelizare pauperibus!" (XII, 90)
CHAPTER II: MAXIME RURICOLIS ("ESPECIALLY THE COUNTRY PEOPLE")

This clarification "maxime ruricolis" is found in the Common Rules (I, I, 2), but it is already equivalently found in the Contract of Foundation: "The said ecclesiastics...will apply themselves entirely to the care of the said poor people of the country (XIII, 200) and in the Act of Association of the first missionaries: "and to employ ourselves in the salvation of the said poor people of the country..." (XIII, 204). From the beginning of the Mission, then, and regularly thereafter, Saint Vincent—speaking of the end of the Congregation—recalled this preference and priority in favor of the poor country people.

PART 1: WHY THIS PRIORITY?

Probably there were personal and psychological reasons as well as economic, social, and pastoral motivations.

A. PERSONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS:

Saint Vincent was, in effect, predisposed to such a preference for the poor country people. He was born in this milieu and his first fifteen years were spent there (IX, 81). Moreover, in the course of 1617 the two events which would decide the course of his life took place in a rural context and among poor country people (Gannes/Folleville and Chatillon). Finally, from 1618 to 1628 the missionary activity of Saint Vincent and his first disciples was practically limited to the country poor. Saint Vincent's own origins and the origins of the Mission as well are then clearly rural; and so we can understand that Saint Vincent had been spontaneously and initially called upon by the poor of this rural world.

B. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND PASTORAL MOTIVATIONS:

There was a correspondence between this natural predisposition of Saint Vincent and the beginnings of the Company and the economic, social, and pastoral situation. The economic policy of the Kingdom of France in the first half of the 17th Century, especially that of Richelieu, followed that of the United Provinces (Low Countries) in being centered around commerce, trades, artisanry, and—already—industry. All of this was to the detriment of the rural areas. Rural France was already consciously enough being sacrificed in the name of economic and political objectives which were given priority.

From a more conjunctural point of view would be added—in the course of the same period—the incessant wars of which cultivation and the peasants were the first victims. In addition to this there were a number of years of particularly intemperate weather and extremely poor harvests (cf. the first part of Fr. Ibanez's thesis).

This economic situation engendered its own share of social injustices, as always. In this first half of the 17th Century there many other forms of misery and poverty, but it can be said generally enough that the country poor were among the poorest and most abandoned. And this is the reading of the society of his time that Saint Vincent made. And the Church of France seemed only so much more so conformed to the situation and the economic structure; and for all this, consciously or not, it resigned itself to social injustices of which the country poor were the victims. We know the objection of the Huguenot to Saint Vincent: "Monseur, you told me that the Church of Rome is guided by the Holy Spirit,
but I cannot believe that because we see, on the one hand, the rural Catholics who are not instructed in the requirements of their faith and most of them not even knowing what the Christian religion is all about, are abandoned to defective, ignorant pastors. On the other hand, we see the cities full of priests and monks who do nothing; perhaps in Paris you could find 10,000 priests who nevertheless leave these poor country people in that dreadful ignorance for which they are being lost…" (XI, 34)

So there was, then, an economic policy and situation which engendered social injustices aggravated still further by the abandonment of the Church, especially by priests. We know that Saint Vincent often brought up this massive abundance of priests in the cities and around the nobility in order to justify his fundamental option for the country poor. (XIII, 198; I, 45ff) He chose the poor country people first of all because they were the poor who were the most abandoned by society and the Church.

PART 2: THE INTERPRETATION OF "MAXIME RURICOLIS" TODAY

Should this preference and priority in favor of the country poor—so often and regularly recalled by Saint Vincent—make of the Company today an institute which first of all has a rural vocation? Does the qualification "maxime ruricolis" ("especially the poor country people") form an integrative part of the end of the Congregation of the Mission on the same level as "Evangelizare pauperibus"? Can we suppress this qualification without betraying fidelity to Saint Vincent and without attempting something regarding the end of the Company as Saint Vincent wished it and defined it?

First of all we point out that Saint Vincent never used the expression "maxime pauperibus" ("especially the poor"). The evangelization of the poor is not of the order of priority or precedence (it is not the object of its action), the end of the Institute. But—among the poor—the country poor had priority because, probably, Saint Vincent put into practice what he said one day to his community: "Come along then, my brothers, and let us dedicate ourselves with a new love to serve the poor, and let us even search out the poorest and most abandoned..." (XI, 393)

From the time of Saint Vincent, as we have seen, "these poorest and most abandoned" were often the country poor from which comes the "maxime ruricolis". The surest way to be faithful to the "maxime ruricolis" today would doubtlessly to be very attentive to the different categories of poor people engendered by the social injustices proceeding them. It has been said, even today, that the country poor are among the most forsaken of the poor.

In this sense, the "maxime ruricolis" can be understood today as the need to reactualize our end all the time as a function of the economic realities and social injustices of our time and our society.
CHAPTER III: THE END OF THE COMPANY IN THE VINCENTIAN TRADITION

1. AT THE TIME OF SAINT VINCENT (synthesis)

From what has just been said, it must be remembered that during the time of Saint Vincent there was an evolution of thought on the subject of the end of the Company. Originally, the first disciples of Saint Vincent formed a work group (cf. Contract of Foundation, April 17, 1625, p. 4, and Act of Association of the first missionaries, September 4, 1626, p. 5). Little by little the group was constituted as a congregation, modelling itself on religious communities (cf. Bull of Erection, "Salvatoris Nostri", January 12, 1633, p. 7 & 8). The movement developing, Saint Vincent introduced rules and vows (because of the need for a certain cohesion and stability, cf. II, 28 & 138), in order to preserve the works and honor contracts. In effect, during the first fifteen years, the Company was, as Saint Vincent said of the Oratory: "it was a good hotel", so many had departed, between a third and a half.

The original work, the preaching of missions to country people, was always placed in the forefront, but circumstances arose which called for the work of "the formation of the clergy": retreats in preparation for ordination (Beauvais, 1628) became more and more extensive and finally resulted in seminaries.

From 1633 onwards, the "Tuesday Conferences" had been established by Monsieur Vincent to support the zeal and piety of good priests; he gave them conferences and directed them towards giving missions to the poor of the cities where the "missionaries" would not go (e.g. Paris, Faubourg Saint-Germain, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Metz).

In short, for Saint Vincent there was only one aim, one end realized by diverse means: to bring back the abandoned faithful to a true Christian life, especially by means of the missions and by the formation of priests capable of continuing the fruits of the mission. The other works --parishes, aid to refugees of the provinces devastated by war, spiritual assistance to galley slaves and the slaves in Barbary, foreign missions-- were considered as secondary; though excellent as they might be, they were not the specific work of the Company.

And if Saint Vincent directed evangelization toward the country poor, it was because there were "the most abandoned", significant victims of the social injustice of his time, as has been noted throughout Chapter II.

Did the confreres understand this during Saint Vincent's lifetime, then? Probably not. This is why Saint Vincent felt the need to recall the true teaching on the proper end of the Company (cf. pp. 17-20). It is clear from the letters, that Saint Vincent's remarks are always interpreted according to the terms of the one receiving the letter. To the missionary who thinks of nothing but the country missions, Monsieur Vincent praised seminary work (which sometimes sounds like it would the major work, the end of the Company). On the other hand, in addressing the missionary who was over appreciative of the studious and tranquil life of the seminaries, he exalted the work of the missions as the essential, fundamental, specific work of the Company.
In his conferences, Saint Vincent was supposed to give an official teaching, valid both for the present and the future; in spite of this, he remained, as is evident, conditioned by circumstances. He seemed to contradict himself from one year to another.

In conclusion, recourse to such and such a separate text does not have the apodictic value of precisely stating Saint Vincent's intentions. It is necessary to examine the texts together as has already been seen.

2. AFTER THE TIME OF SAINT VINCENT

According to the Circulars of the Superiors General, we can see that they were principally concerned with sustaining the work of the missions; this is the major objective of the first and second successors of Saint Vincent, Fr. Almeras and Fr. Jolly. Nevertheless, during this period more and more seminaries, parishes, chaplaincies, etc. were accepted.

Under Fr. Almeras, the General Assembly of 1668 published "Notices and Resolutions of the Assembly Concerning the Missions", as well as "Notices and Resolutions Concerning the Seminaries". It should be noted that the principal works were tending to be differentiated and the confreres were tending to become specialized. Parishes had been accepted, and so the Assembly of 1673 set forth a series of notices concerning parishes.

In the 18th Century, the works became even more diverse: secondary schools, chaplaincies at universities (e.g. the Academie des Nobles Ecclesiastiques in Rome). Astonishingly, in the 18th Century the question of knowing whether such and such a work was in conformity or not with the end of the Company and the spirit of Saint Vincent was hardly ever asked.

As we look further on into the 18th Century, there were more and more confreres who lived and worked "on the fringe", placing themselves practically outside of the Company, involved in works foreign to the end of the Company. Missions continued to be given, but it should be pointed out that the number of confreres engaged in this work diminished in relation to those who were working in the seminaries. From time to time, at the Assemblies or in the Circulars of the Superiors General, great praise was given to the country missions and foreign missions (cf. the circular of Fr. Jacquier of January 1, 1780). Sometime before or after this date, the work of the seminaries was proclaimed as excellent. In particular, see the circular of Fr. Jacquier giving an account of the Assembly of 1786. The following is the principal passage of the text:

"It cannot be doubted that the direction of seminaries is one of the most honorable functions for us and one of the most important for the building up of the Church, a function which associates us in some way with the priesthood of Jesus Christ whose first concern was to provide worthy ministers for himself, deeply filled with his spirit and faithful imitators of his virtues; a function of consequent importance for the glory of God and the salvation of souls which demands all the effort of our zeal." (Circulars, Vol. II, p. 177)

The generalate of Fr. Jacquier (1762-1787) marks a period of decadence for the Congregation. The following generalate, that of Fr. Cayla de la Garde, elected June 2, 1788, signaled a renewal. Fr. Cayla de la Garde recalled the obligation to the work of the missions and to do them well, and to fulfill the work of the seminaries with competence and zeal;
he insisted on this so strongly that one is left with the strong impression that the seminaries as well as the missions had been neglected, even if the mission houses and seminary institutions still existed. Let us read a passage from the circular of September 8, 1788:

"...I believe I have discovered what has led in great part to the decline of the missions: on the one hand, the little care taken to prepare oneself for them, and on the other hand, the neglect in following the Rule...The article concerning the seminaries is of great interest and I have to dwell on this for awhile. I believe I can say in general that the directors of the seminaries, especially the young ones, have not yet sufficiently realized the importance of their responsibilities and have not made enough of an effort to take hold of the spirit which belongs to their position and to take the necessary means which can render their work useful..." (Circulars, Vol. II, pp. 210-11)

In reference to the seminaries, Fr. Cayla de la Garde issued a reformative rule of first value. Unfortunately, this was in 1788, and so the reform did not have the time to bear fruit: in 1789, the Company in France was severely affected by the sack of Saint-Lazare (July 13), and in 1791 by the discontinuation of almost all its works.

In the 19th Century, after the reorganization of the Company (1827), the principal concern was the question of essential works, those which were most directly Vincentian leading toward the attainment of the end designated by Saint Vincent for his community. Father Etienne, elected in 1843, often tackled in his circulars, the crucial problems of the missions and the seminaries; he did not, however, attempt to bring them together as one sole work with a double objective. Father Etienne favored the missions as much as the seminaries and it can be noted that during his generalate (he died in 1874) many houses, missions and seminaries, were opened. Nevertheless, we can say that Fr. Etienne allowed the development of works, secondary schools, for example, which apparently were foreign to the end of the Company.

Fr. Etienne authorized the redrafting of the directories, the rules of office for the varied functions within the Congregation; and nowhere was there given, or even hinted at, a synthesis of the "double end". Each work was extolled in turn, one to the detriment of the other, at least apparently. Let us look at two typical cases:


"...From this it is easy to conclude just how great and sublime is this work of the missions since it is nothing other than the continuation of the very work of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. Furthermore, as a rather natural consequence, there flows the love and affection that we should have for the missions which in light of our Constitutions are the first and principal aim of our Institute, after our own personal sanctification... Besides, the history of our Company would provide for us, if necessary, the proof that it owes its origins to the missions, the country missions. The missions, then, are the foundation upon which it has been built; they are like the vital principal, the sap from which must flow its life, strength, generosity, and perpetuity. Our General Assemblies have so well understood this
that most of them concerned themselves with this important subject, made recommendations, and stipulated that the missions never be neglected on account of any other work..."


"...The direction of seminaries has always been considered as one of the most important works of the little Company, in the very interest of the missions for which it assures and develops the fruits. And if the missions, to use the language of our Common Rules, should ever be preferred, the work of the seminaries nevertheless merits having our attention almost to the same degree of importance....It can even be said without fear of exaggeration that the formation of seminarians is indeed more noble and more elevated than the work of the missions....Less work might be done for the salvation of individual souls in the seminaries than in the missions, but there is an indirect involvement in the salvation of an entire people..."

Leaving aside the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th (since nothing of particular importance developed), we come to the present. In 1954, in order to conform to the directions of the Holy See, the authorities of the Company presented to Rome our Rules and Constitutions which had been revised and set in agreement with the Code of Canon Law. In these Rules and Constitutions the problem of the end of the Company was approached and the general and special end were skillfully distinguished. (The special end was a new idea and was understood to be triple.) We read from #2, Chapter I:

"Eius finis generalis est gloriae Dei et propriae sodalium perfectioni studere; finis specialis est:
1. Evangalizare pauperibus, maxime ruricolis;
2. Ecclesiasticos adiuvare ad scientias virtutesque acquirendas, ipsorum statui requistas;
3. Caritatis et educationis opera exercendas."

Note that in the "Project of Constitutions" of 1948, the formula had been stated differently and in a perfectly traditional manner. Here is the text of #2, Title I:

"Eius finis est:
1. Propriae perfectioni studere;
2. Evangalizare pauperibus, maxime ruricolis;
3. Ecclesiasticos adiuvare ad scientias virtutesque acquirendas, ipsorum statui requistas."

It can be seen that this text was purely and simply taken from the Common Rules of Saint Vincent.

3. FROM THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1954 TO OUR OWN DAY

And so until the rediting of the Constitutions of 1954, the end of the Congregation of the Mission had been lived without being questioned. It had been expressed in a variety of works following the clear formulation given to it by Saint Vincent. But the Constitutions of 1954, in stead of clarifying the unity of the end in accordance with the method of Saint Vincent, took account of the diversity of works of the Company and subdivided the end into three.
During this same period, the disappearance of traditional works specifying our end, involvement in a wide variety of pastoral activities leading us to collaboration with other Institutes or with the diocesan clergy, the decline of vocations to the Congregation, changes in society and the renewal called for by the Church, all these factors have provoked a crisis in many provinces or at the very least a questioning of our identity. For example, the provinces of France believed that a good preparation for the Assembly of 1968 required self-questioning. The responses revealed a lack of a clear understanding of our identity and our end on the part of everyone, confreres and non-confreres alike. The oldest confreres entered the Company with a clear objective, while many under fifty years old said that they entered the Community "by accident". Some members of the (diocesan) clergy estimate that we are "a Congregation en ister like so many others which, in any case, has nothing to do with the poor." The conclusion of all this was the necessity of a strong reemphasis of service to the poor. (Pamphlet, "Three hundred Years After," pp. 8-10)

Such observations were made in other provinces: fourteen of them are asking that a reorientation of the Congregation of the Mission toward the poor be clearly affirmed in the new Constitutions and that this end direct everything else.

At the 1968 Assembly, the first five paragraphs of the new Constitutions were the result of lively discussions; their confused redactions betrayed the uncertainties of the Assembly. Each delegate keeping the works of his own house or province in mind, there was an unconsciousness confusion of these with the end, and the fear of abandoning what was believed to be a life-long commitment. The result of this was a formulation consisting of saccharine elusive statements. Note #5, added after the editing of this chapter in order to appease the strong opposition of one of the groups of the Assembly, resulted in the removal from these paragraphs of any clarity or concreteness they had contained.

In the course of preparation for the 1974 Assembly, an article appeared in Vincentiana (1972, Vol. 6, pp. 237-241, "Studia a Coetu Studiorum' Proposita") under the responsibility of the Preparatory Commission*; it attempted to situate the end of the Congregation in the context of Church and World. This article was poorly received by those who had desired the addition of Note #5, and at the time of the review of the first schema of the declaration on the end, they saw it bearing an unhappy resemblance to the incriminated article in Vincentiana.

The formulation of the declaration of the end was immediately and overwhelmingly rejected by those who would have preferred a juridical text. A new expression of the end was accepted after hundreds of amendments.

* The Preparatory Commission, 1974 General Assembly:

The Group of SIX:  
Francisco CARBALLO - Spain  
Augustin MIKULA - Yugoslavia  
Nicholas PERSICH - USA  
Giorgio STELLA - Italy  
Andre SYLVESTER - France  
Vicente ZICO - Brazil

Other members:  
Victor GROETELAARS - Holland  
Jacques GROS - Vietnam  
Gerard MAHONEY - USA  
Luis J. ROJAS - Colombia
This declaration clarified two essential points:

1. we have to follow the same path that Saint Vincent followed;
2. the end has a normative character in relation to the rest of the Constitutions; it directs everything.

It remained to draw the consequences from this.

In his exhortation to the members of the Assembly on September 18, 1974, the Holy Father (Pope Paul VI) would very clearly specify that the poor are the motive for all our commitments:

"Today in an advanced technical civilization which paradoxically engenders so much poverty, you remain for your part the hope of the poor. For these poor, have the desire to stimulate and form solid vocations through the seminaries which are confided to you. Again, for the sake of the poor, continue appropriately and tenderly to assist the dear Daughters of Charity."

So since this conclusion of the 1974 Assembly, we are coming to an increasingly clearer awareness that our vocation does not consist in fidelity to a dusty rule and a primitive 19th Century spirit. To be faithful to Saint Vincent is to have in mind as he did a clear understanding of the end of the Congregation of the Mission, the service of the poor, and an infinite flexibility in the invention of means which are variable according to time and place: missions, seminaries, prison ministry, presence to the poor in the midst of their struggles. This is being faithful to the Church and to the world today; it is being concerned about the future.

Especially since Vatican II, the Church is recovering the theology of Bossuet as represented in "The Sermon on the Eminent Dignity of the Poor." The Church realizes that the poor, being at the center of the Gospel, should also be at the center of the Church, and that it ought to be built upon them and for them (Cf. Lumen Gentium #41, Gaudium et Spes #s 51 & 88, Letter to Cardinal Roy).

Thus our vocation completely centered upon the evangelization of the poor will be in service of the Church at the same time: in accord with our means, we will modestly help the Church to be faithful to its mission, truly being itself, which is to say Jesus Christ continuing to announce the Good News to the poor. This being established, the practical applications for the service of the poor will be in the order of means. These will be dictated to us by concrete needs, by the wounds of the world which cry out for help.

For some this advanced technical civilization, as Paul VI referred to it, creates sickness and over-indulgence: possessed by the need to have, they have lost the sense of their being and have become spiritually miserable. For others the modern world has created extreme poverty and frustration sometimes going as far as despair and revolution. All of them await hope and long for liberation. Only the Good News of the Beatitudes will bring to them liberation from all servitude, the hope for another world, and the beginning of the realization of the Kingdom of God here below. If we want to be faithful to Saint Vincent, our vocation, put into the focus of the proclamation of the Good News to the poor in response to the calls of the Church and the World, will find vitality and an unexpected future once more.
4. ABOUT "A NOTE"

At the end of the first session of the 1968-69 Assembly a vote was taken on the entire first chapter of the present Constitutions dealing with "the End of the Congregation of the Mission," in particular Numbers 2 and 5 which exactly specified the nature of this end. Number 5 said: "Consequently, the evangelization of the poor and the promotion of their human and Christian progress will be like a standard in the Congregation to unite its members and to urge them on to the apostolate."

In 1969 following personal interventions, several delegates, in the course of the second period, asked about the possibility of including an interpretative note. It was voted on as follows: "July 3, 1969...choice of our works." Since then, there have been differing reactions concerning this note.* At the time of preparation for the 1974 Assembly, the following remarks were made:

IRELAND: Article 5 of the Constitutions should be revised in such a way that there would be no need for an explanatory note.

COLUMBIA: The Assembly (provincial) considers the texts clear enough, and so there is no need to correct them; furthermore, it believes that the explanatory note of Article 5 deprives the end of the Company of all its vigor, rendering it "flabby" and languid. Actually, this note amounts to a refusal of the definition expressed in the vow formula.

RIO DE JANEIRO: The current text of the Constitutions offers neither challenge nor "inspiration" because it attempts to justify all our practices and activities. Numbers 1 and 2 (of Note 1) should be omitted since they are presented as the true interpretation of the approved text.

MADRID: Suppress the note of Number 5 added to the Constitutions by the 1969 Assembly.

PHILADELPHIA: Suppress the explanatory note of Number 5.

ZARAGOZA: It is a matter of clearly seeing the way, the goal. The note to Number 5 of the Constitutions should be suppressed. I insist that it be suppressed; the end should be stated as: "the poor."

TOULOUSE: Suppress the explanatory note of Number 5.

* Note #1. In the 62nd Session on July 3, 1969 the Assembly by vote declared that the following propositions are true interpretations of the approved text "The Purpose of the Congregation": "1. The evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian promotion is the preeminent but not unique purpose of the Congregation of the Mission. 2. The evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian promotion is in itself a sufficient, but not necessary criterion of selecting our works."
And so it seems that this note weakened the general scope of #5 and #2 of the Constitutions. From all that has been said above, it can be uncontes-tably concluded that Saint Vincent wanted a Congregation centered around "the evangelization of the poor" and, keeping in mind circumstances and settings, the deployment of diversified pastoral tasks. At no point did he confuse "doing" (apostolic activities) with "being" (the life itself). But such a confusion impassioned the debate (of the Assembly), each one defending his own apostolate and believing that it was in a direct line from the experience of Monsieur Vincent.

It is much more exact to affirm that the End of the Congregation of the Mission directs all the activities and the life style of the Company (it directs the spiritual life and apostolic action). The tasks remain variable in accordance with "due regard for the differences of time and place" (Constitu-tions #3).

To deny the strict character of the end according to Saint Vincent is to distort the problem and to allow one to believe that the end can easily be adapted according to need or be broken down into several elements as deceptively seems to be the case in a superficial reading of the Common Rules. In fact, if Saint Vincent invites one "to work for his own perfection," it is for the effective service of the poor (VIII, 239), and even more precisely for care-

fully following Jesus Christ bringing the Good News to the poor (XI, 108). If he equally assigns as an objective "helping ecclesiastics to acquire the knowledge and the virtues necessary to their state," it is evidently for working from this reality for the evangelization of the poor (XI, 135).

To adopt the vocabulary of the first note of Article 5 (such adjectives as "preeminent", "unique", "sufficient", "necessary") is above all to reduce the end to a juridical arsenal far removed from the thinking of Saint Vincent. This argumentation is not found in the text of the Common Rules...and less so in the documents which have been presented here call to mind a vital flow, a breathing, a dynamic apostolic outpouring of the spiritual experience of Saint Vincent.

Anything which would favor a less casuistical interpretation and a more operational, invigorating one of our Constitutions would be most welcome. In this way we would avoid all risk of watering down the thought of Saint Vincent and in turn promote a more engaging and demanding missionary thrust.
CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

1. REGARDING SAINT VINCENT

1625: The Congregation was founded for the evangelization of the poor country people (XIII, 198).

1628: The question of the preparation of ordinands arose and it particularly interesting to see why and how Saint Vincent took on this "pastoral option": because there was the need for well formed priests in order to provide for the continuation of the fruit of the missions. The ordination retreats, then seminaries were not on the level of the end, but rather were at the level of means for the better evangelization of the poor. Saint Vincent even used the term "accessory" (XI, 133).

In all that followed and up to the famous conference of December 6, 1658 on the end of the Congregation, Saint Vincent retained the exact same manner of defining the end of the Company and justifying the numerous options and commitments of the Congregation either in relation to the end—the evangelization of the poor, or in relation to the example of Jesus Christ who "came to earth in order to evangelize the poor."

Saint Vincent, then, perfectly distinguished the end of the Congregation which—beyond any doubt—is the evangelization of the poor, and only that, and the apostolic activities which—in 1658—were already quite diversified especially because of urgent needs, but always justified by the end.

In the Bull of Erection of the Congregation of January 12, 1632, an incidental phrase appears in regard to the end—"cum propria salute", which in the Common Rules and according to canonical usage would become "propriae perfectioni studere". For Saint Vincent—and for others besides him—this is not the objective which characterized the priest of the Mission, but more simply and generally any Christian. It is additionally significant to see how for Saint Vincent perfection itself is in some way accountable to the Mission in imitation of Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor.

So for Saint Vincent, the end of the Congregation was the reason for which it was founded (XIII, 198), was the reason why one was committed to it (XIII, 203-05), was the reason why one was committed to holiness—it was the evangelization of poor people. A priest of the Mission might be called to very diverse apostolic activities, but these activities, along with everything else in his life, are evaluated and justified in relation to the evangelization of the poor.

2. SINCE SAINT VINCENT

It seems that without difficulty or hesitation, the official texts support the end such as it was defined by Saint Vincent. Being little familiar with the texts of Saint Vincent themselves—and for a good reason since Coste only dates from 1925—there had been a preference for the canonical definition from the first chapter of the Common Rules. From this definition came a certain distinction barely Vincen-
tion of the clergy. As we have seen, ideas and distinctions are a lot clearer in the writings and sayings of Saint Vincent.

During this period, evidently, apostolic activities continued to diversify according to urgent needs and the opportunities of the country and the times, but without the need to call into question, so it seems, the end of the Company.

In actuality and for historical and probably psychological reasons, major seminaries seemed, here or there, to take precedence over the missions. Perhaps a certain unbalance began to show itself, but there is no reverberation of this in the teaching or in official texts.

Even though very diverse, the apostolates at the end of the 19th Century and up to the middle of the 20th Century have tended to center around several traditional works (missions, major seminaries, minor seminaries, apostolic schools, secondary schools, and foreign missions) which experienced such a vitality that there was no need to even think about justifying them in relation to the end. But the habit of defining the Congregation of the Mission by its works became the norm if not more common than doing so according to the end.

3. **THE END...TODAY**

We can say that this is the current question, and the reports from the recent General Assemblies bear witness to it. In order to deal with and perhaps resolve the problem, two major tendencies are indicated:

1. one which is especially prompted by what is happening and what is being said in today's world, Church, and in each of the provinces of the Congregation. It is the principal purpose of these elements that they be of use in redefining the end of the Congregation of Mission;

2. the other tendency, the more obvious one, is to being faithful to Saint Vincent.

We already know the logic and the limitations of each tendency, and in our last Constitutions we see once more the tension that exists between fidelity to Saint Vincent and the appeals and realities of our age. And it appears that these Constitutions choose to place the two in juxtaposition to one another rather than in synthesis.

In his conference of December 6, 1658, Saint Vincent has provided us, perhaps, the way and the method for knowing how to clearly distinguish the end from apostolic activities. The end is that which unites, identifies, inspires, and animates. Saint Vincent wanted the end to be precisely and strictly defined. Apostolates are the concrete realizations of the end at a specific time, a specific place, and a specific Church—realizations which we are required to carry out faithfully.

This clear distinction between end and apostolates should remove the argumentative tone from the debate without, however, trying to avoid a certain and even necessary questioning, one of the other.
4. SUMMARY

Thus there is no room for multiplying ends, nor for ranking them (principal, secondary, etc.), nor for resolving the end in such a way that it would cover and justify everything. As it was for Saint Vincent, we should speak about the end and preserve its unique character. And it is this end which justifies the options which are diverse and numerous.
PROPOSED QUESTIONS

(These questions were a part of the original document as it was sent to all the provinces and to all the houses of the Congregation prior to the General Assembly of 1980.)

1. Having read the texts assembled in Chapter I, do you come to this conclusion of Saint Vincent: "It doesn't matter! our vocation is Evangelizare Pauperibus."? (XII, 90)

2. After having reflected on Chapter II, beyond its first and always stimulating sense (that is, Saint Vincent's qualification of "evangelizare pauperibus"), can the "maxime ruricolis"--"the poorest and most abandoned" (XI, 393)--be understood as the requirement to reactualize our end all the time, keeping in mind the economic realities and the social injustices of our day, of our society, and of the urgencies of evangelization?

3. In light of the clarity of Saint Vincent's affirmations, are you in agreement with the suppression of all qualifications of the word "end" (e.g. "first", "primordial", and even..."unique")?

4. "What good is it to become involved in so many things and so many poor?" (XII, 89-90) All during the conference of December 6, 1658 (XII, 73-94), Saint Vincent rigorously defined the end and justified the number of apostolic activities; are you in agreement--making the same distinction as Saint Vincent did between end and apostolic activities--with adopting the same rigor in defining the end and stirring up the same creativity in the invention of means?

5. The personal perfection of the missionaries is a requirement and a consequence of the evangelization of the poor. Are you in agreement with this apostolic definition of our sanctity? (XII, 302)

6. Are you in agreement with placing "the formation of priests" among the apostolic activities? (XI, 135; IV, 42; V, 81)