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The Brother in the Congregation of the Mission

by

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Translated by

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I will divide my work into five parts.

1. The current concern about the situation of the consecrated brother in clerical institutes of the consecrated life and societies of apostolic life.
2. The situation of the brother in the Congregation from its beginning to the constitutions of 1984.
3. What the Constitutions of 1984 establish about the brothers in the Congregation of the Mission.
4. Other questions on the level of the Church and the Congregation of the Mission.
5. "Layness" in the thought of Saint Vincent.

The Current Concern about the situation of the Consecrated Brother in Clerical Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

For many years the "clerical" institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life have been concerned about the situation of the brothers in their respective institutes and societies. In 1981, the then secretary of the Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes (CRIS), now Cardinal Meyer, proposed a meeting with some superiors general who were especially interested in the brothers' situation. A little later, the secretary of the Union of Superiors General sent out the following questionnaire: (1) Do you have any problems with the brothers' situation in your institute? (2) Have you had recourse to the Holy See to seek special faculties? (3) Do you have any suggestions on this subject?¹

In January 1982 a synthesis was made of the responses sent back by the superiors general. They were as follows. Fifty superiors general admitted having problems. Thirty had asked for special faculties from the Holy See. Forty sent different suggestions, asking above all that an equality be created of rights and obligations

¹ *Conventus Trimestralis, Unione Superiori Generali*, circ. number 5/86 (C.N. 2/82), p. 1.

between the priests and brothers, respecting, obviously, the differences that arise from the sacrament of orders.

In February of the same year, 1982, the superiors general planned a meeting with CRIS. This meeting was held a few days later. The reflection began from two fundamental principles: (1) the demands of the institute's charism; (2) the sensibilities of the persons affected, that is to say, the brothers themselves and the other members of the respective institutes.

The result was that the topic needed to be studied in more depth and without delay in view of the importance that had been manifested. The pope, in the audience that he gave to the superiors general on 31 May 1983, touched on the theme of the brothers' vocation in institutes of consecrated life. Two years passed and until 22 May 1985, the superiors general did not return to the subject. The delay was due, among other things, to the serious preparation that they wanted to give to them, giving sufficient time to the theological commission and the specialists so that they could study the different aspects. The results of this meeting were gathered together in a pamphlet that bears the title *The Brothers in Our Institutes*.²

From 21 to 24 January 1986, the Plenary Session of CRIS dealt with the topic of the brothers. This agendum had been proposed several times. At last it has been studied and discussed. Unfortunately, the results of the Plenary Session are still not public as we write these lines. The pope, in an audience with the members of the Plenary Session of CRIS, gave an interesting speech that has as its title "The Brothers' Vocation is Irreplaceable in the Church."³

At the same time as the "hierarchy" felt a concern for the situation of the brothers, all of the institutes were concerned about them in one way or another, not only in order to formulate the texts of their respective constitutions, but because of other initiatives. Among these it is worth citing the Inter-Community Congress held from 18 to 23 April 1982 in Rome, the minutes of which have been collected in a book entitled *Il fratello religioso nella comunità ecclesiale oggi* (*The Religious Brother in Today's Ecclesial Community*).⁴

² Ibid., p. 2ff. Properly speaking, it was not a papal speech but an interchange of views between him and the superiors general attending the meeting. For that reason it is not found in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* nor in *Informationes*, the journal of CRIS. See *Los hermanos dentro de nuestros institutos*, Union of Superiors General, XXXI meeting, Spanish edition.

³ The papal speech is cited from the Spanish edition of *Osservatore Romano*.

⁴ *Il fratello religioso nella comunità ecclesiale oggi* by various authors (Rome: Ed. CIPI, 1983). This book contains not only studies but testimonies of several brothers from different communities. Four brothers from the Congregation of the Mission attended the meeting.

In the Congregation of the Mission, several provincial assemblies have touched on the topic, but the initiative of the Provincial of Paris, Father Claude Lautissier, merits special mention. With the consent of his council, he sent to the province a short questionnaire with the title "The Brother in the Congregation of the Mission."

1. Today, in the world and in the Church of 1986, after Vatican II, which has given the activity of the lay person its proper place and has established the permanent diaconate, what meaning can the vocation of the consecrated brother have in the Congregation?

2. The General Assembly of 1980 and our Constitutions forcefully join the identity of the Vincentian missionary with the following of Christ, the evangelizer of the poor. In an essentially missionary congregation, what is the role of the consecrated brother?

3. In the Community, the brothers are full members of the Congregation. How can we portray the brothers' profile?

4. How can the brother take his part in the common mission of the Community while living full his specific vocation as a layman?

The provincial of Paris added to the brief questionnaire a page that came from the White Fathers (Society of African Missions) and referred to the understanding and promotion of the brothers' vocation in that missionary society.⁵

As of this writing, we have been unable to review the results of the questionnaire from the Provincial of Paris and the members of his province.

The Situation of the Brother in the Congregation from its Beginnings until the Constitutions of 1984

In the first place, it is good to remember what Saint Vincent thought, how he acted, and what he left us in writing.

Among his writings, I distinguish those that have a normative character from those that have an exhortative nature. A combina-

⁵ See *Frère dans la Congrégation de la Mission*, in *Paris/Echo* (4 March 1986).

tion of both, I think, will permit us to see Saint Vincent's thought better and will explain his dealings with the brothers as lay members of the Congregation of the Mission.

I will be brief because I think that the material is well enough known.

1. *What We Read in Texts of a Juridical Nature.*

On 13 February 1627, the first brother of the Congregation of the Mission entered, Brother Jourdain.⁶ In the petitions of 1628, which were directed to the Holy See in order that the Congregation would be approved by the Roman Pontiff, Saint Vincent wrote:

Be pleased, Your Holiness, to approve and confirm the said Congregation, or erect it again if necessary, and extend your blessing to it and name the above mentioned Vincent founder and superior general of the said priests and those who wish to join them and of those persons who are indispensable for the domestic work in the Congregation called Mission, in which they come together to live the common life, according to the example of religious, and place themselves humbly and piously at the service of the Most High God.⁷

In the third petition he affirmed that the Congregation "is made up of laymen, clerics, and priests who will have everything in common. The laymen, content with the office of Martha, will do the domestic tasks."⁸

In the bull *Salvatoris Nostri*, the pope would take this last thought from Saint Vincent and establish that the Congregation of the Mission "is made up of laymen, clerics, and priests. The laymen, content with the office of Martha, will do domestic work."⁹

⁶ Coste 1:188 (240-41). Translator's note. Father Pérez Flores cites the work edited by Pierre Coste, C.M., *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, entretiens, documents* (Paris: Gabalda, 1921-1924), using Roman numerals to indicate the volume and arabic numerals for the page. In this article, the American practice of using arabic numbers for both will be followed. The numbers within parentheses indicate the Spanish edition of Coste's work, *San Vincente de Paül: obras completas* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1972-1983), translated by A. Ortiz Garcia and others.

⁷ Coste, 1:47, 59 (114,123).

⁸ Miguel Pérez Flores, "La bula *Salvatoris Nostri* y la Congregación de la Misión," *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión* (1983):393-424.

⁹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis in Favorem Congregationis Missionis* (AACM), (Paris: Chamerot, 1878), 5, col. 2. See also Coste, 13:261 (10:309).

In the Common Rules there is an almost identical expression, "This Congregation consists of clerics and laymen." In addition, it points out fully and by way of example the possible tasks of the brothers. "the function of the laymen, on the other hand, is to help the clerics in the manner of Martha in all the enumerated ministries, as they are brought to their attention by the superior. They will also cooperate with their tears, their mortifications, and with the good example of their lives." It should be noted that the ministries pointed out to the clerics are by way of example and not exhaustive. After the list, Saint Vincent adds "and other activities conformable to the aforementioned works and oriented toward them." This broad-mindedness is worth taking into account because it clearly indicates the many things that a brother can do and does not reduce his activities to domestic tasks, however worthy these might be.¹⁰

Despite these early attitudes, Saint Vincent did not free himself from the dominant ambience of clericalism. Certainly he never wrote that the "Congregation of the Mission is a clerical apostolic society," as would be written in the Constitutions of 1954 and 1984. However, the reigning clericalism brought it about that the brothers did not remain on the same level as the priests and clerics with regard to rights and obligations. There was a law of separation. They did not "need to have recreation."¹¹ They were forbidden not only to learn Latin, but to learn to read and write without the permission of the superior general.¹² They received no monetary remuneration or it was not equal to that of the priests. They did not participate in government. They lacked active and passive voice. Neither the *Constitutiones Miores* nor the *Constitutiones Selectae* gave them any right of participation in matters of government.

Without a doubt, the image of the brother that the normative texts offer is that of a "second class" member of the Congregation.

2. What We Read in the Exhortative Texts

Here I am referring to the conferences and correspondence.

Saint Vincent did not hesitate to affirm that a good brother was a treasure for the Community.¹³ He knew how to give the brothers those tasks that were more in agreement with their personal quali-

¹⁰ Common Rules, 1:2.

¹¹ Coste, 11:368 (257).

¹² Common Rules 5:16.

¹³ Coste 11:153-54 (74-75).

ties and talents. During Saint Vincent's lifetime, we see a good number of brothers who excelled in the missions entrusted to them. We might recall Brothers Ducournau, Parre, Patte, Régnard, Robineau, Servin, Véronne, etc.¹⁴ He remained firm in not permitting a brother to pass to the priestly state.¹⁵

He created normative guidelines for the shared life between priests and brothers based on charity, humility, tolerance, and recognition of their own mission with the common mission of evangelizing the poor and helping clerics and lay people who came to the houses of the Congregation to be good priests and good Christians. The conference of 13 December 1658 is eloquent and masterful in this regard. In it we read:

We have all brought to the Community the resolution of living and dying in it; we have brought everything that we are, the body, the soul, the will, the capacity, the skill, and all the rest. Why? To do what Jesus did, to save the world. How? By means of this bond that exists between us and the offering that we have made to live and die in this Society and to give it all that we are and all that we do; from that comes this communion that exists among the missionaries; it makes all the benefits common, since all share in the success, so that not only the priests effect conversions, but the brothers also contribute.

He goes on to explain the contribution made by the person who pumps the bellows so that the organ can play.

In another section, Saint Vincent said to the brothers, "you are not direct workers like the priests," and he pointed out to them the danger of wanting to usurp offices that did not belong to them. He gave them the examples of Saul and Uzziah who, although they were kings, were not anointed priests and God punished them for taking on the cultic functions that belonged only to the priests. The whole conference was directed so that they would have mutual esteem, love

¹⁴ See Coste 3:172 (157) for the biographical date on Brother Ducournau; for the facts on Brother Parre, Coste 3:434 (394); on Brother Patte, a celebrated surgeon, whom Saint Vincent cited many times, see Coste 14:451. For the biography of Brother Régnard, see Coste 1:466 (468-69); for Brother Robineau, see Coste 4:433 (407); for Brother Servin, a slave and a brother at Saint Lazare, see Coste 8:540 (5:380). Finally, for the biographical data on Brother Véronne, see Coste 1:351 (375).

¹⁵ Coste 4:252, 306-07 (245, 293-294); 6:147 (140-42).

one another, and complement one another in their respective activities, since they were all missionaries.¹⁶

Concerning Saint Vincent's behavior, we can deduce from what he said and did that for him there was no doubt that the brothers were full members of the Congregation, that they had substantially the same obligations as the priests and clerics in what concerned the end of the Congregation. The differences came from the distinct offices and some rights which priestly dignity and formation demanded in an era in which the layman, although consecrated, had not acquired all of the value that he has acquired in the present century, especially since Vatican II at which all that was being written about the lay person as member of the Church, the People of God, was brought together.¹⁷

3. *The Brother in the Congregation of the Mission after Saint Vincent's Death.*

We cannot disregard the negative aspects occasioned by the lack of mutual understanding, unequal formation, and the institutional inequality in many areas about which people are very sensitive, especially at a time when a sense of dignity and of the advance and equality of rights is growing. There have been lamentable actions in some provinces. I leave aside all of these negative aspects, which characterized a minority of sectors within the Congregation. Above all, I will concentrate on those things that have had a more universal dimension in the Congregation.

¹⁶ Coste 11:94ff (399ff). There are many other passages in which Saint Vincent advises the priests to treat the brothers well (see Coste 3:319 (296/196) and to treat them as members of the same family. He recognized the effectiveness of their work, see Coste 11:109 (34-35). Here Saint Vincent felt inspired and, according to the copiest, said, "to encourage the coadjutor brothers in their vocation he added that they live, just like the priests, a life in conformity with Our Lord's and that they imitate the hidden life of Jesus Christ, during which he occupied himself with material tasks, working in a carpenter's workshop and at home like a servant. In this way, they imitate a life of thirty years, while the priests in their functions imitate only three and a half years; that they honor the life of service of Our Lord and the fathers his priesthood; in this way conformity with Our Lord is to be found in both vocations. Furthermore, thanks to the union that exists between the members of one body, what one member does is also the work of the others; therefore, the brothers confess with the confessors, preach with the preachers, evangelize the poor with the priest missionaries who evangelize and, therefore, live in conformity with Our Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁷ See Yves Congar, "Pour une théologie du Laïcat," *Etudes* (1948); Guillermo Baraúna, ed., *La iglesia del Vaticano II*, 2:977-1060. It is also interesting to recall what the present Code says about the laity in canons 224-31 and what is established in different parts of the Code. See the analytic index of the Code under the word "laity." We know that the next synod is going to study the laity. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to remember that there is not a complete parity between the lay person and the lay brother. The latter, by being a member of an institute of the consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, has his own "statute" in the Church. See *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

The Concern of the General Assemblies. If we put to one side some problems about the brothers' dress in relation to that of the priests, the consequence, no doubt, of cultural environment and limited to a few provinces,¹⁸ the principal concern has been the promotion of brothers' vocations and their formation,¹⁹ and the tendency to suppress inequalities.²⁰

The Constitutions of 1954, the fruit in part of the General Assembly of 1947 and the draft of the Constitutions that the assembly presented to the Holy See in 1948 included what we might call the statute on the brothers in the Congregation. All of Title X is dedicated to the brothers. It contains seven articles, almost all of which are exhortative: that like all of the other missionaries they strive to put on the spirit of Christ and practice the five virtues of the Vincentian missionary; they should fulfill the rules of their offices and the practices of piety; they should avoid familiarity with externs so as not to waste time, concerning themselves above all with the material order of the house. They should be very careful about faults against poverty, they should give the honor due to the priests as ministers of the Lord, considering them spiritual fathers. They are counseled that from the beginning of their formation they should learn some skill useful to the houses. It insists that no brother should pass to the clerical state but not to forget that although they might not be priests, they form one body, that is to say, the Congregation of the Mission, "precious" members as Saint Vincent said.²¹

The General Assembly of 1963, celebrated in the middle of the Vatican Council, entailed a considerable advance. During it the following was established.

- a) To intensify the brothers' formation, taking social conditions into account in such a way that they can discharge important tasks. The assembly asks the provincials that the status of the brothers be "raised.

¹⁸ *Collectio Completa Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis*, (Paris: Pellet et Dumoulin, 1882) numbers 499, 500, 501; General Assembly of 1955, number 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, numbers 499, 500, 501, 621, 622. General Assembly of 1963, number 83. To these decrees can be added the concerns of the superiors general. See *Explications sommaires des Régles Communes* (Paris, 1901), 23.

²⁰ *Decreta Conventuum Generalium*, 551-623.

²¹ *Constitutions of 1954*, 211-17.

b) Attention to the admission of postulants, who should be of good character, intelligent and of sound intention, above all when it is a question of admitting those who are already adults.

c) It was asked that special apostolic schools be created for the brothers and that their internal seminary be separated from the internal seminary of the clerics in order to give a great efficacy to the spiritual formation of the brother and to the obligations of his vocation.²²

d) Not to employ them only in manual labor but also to have them study, especially if they are young and may be able to receive a technical training, according to different regional circumstances, in such a way that they may come to be true masters in their fields.

e) That they be prepared to do intellectual work in the apostolic schools, in jobs such as librarian, archivist, secretary in high schools and parishes, including teaching Christian doctrine in the missions and parishes.

f) That they share more intimately in the common and family life of the house and that they have the same material rights as the priests and take common recreation together, according to Decree 11, number 2 of the thirty-second General Assembly (session 12).

I think that the tendency in the Congregation has been, despite the dominant clericalism, to “raise up” the brother and do away with the state of “inferiority,” if we can speak like that, in order that he may achieve the same situation as the cleric and priest, except in what arises from the sacrament of orders and preparation for it, and what the sacrament of orders confers.

The Commission of 1967. In July 1967, among the different commissions that were formed to prepare for the General Assembly of 1968, one was formed to deal with the question of the brothers. The commission was made up of six members: two priests and four brothers from different provinces—one from Madrid, two from the United States, and one from the General Curia.²³

²² Creating apostolic schools for the brothers in the style of apostolic schools for candidates for the priesthood was tried. Such were the attempts at Folleville (France) and at Paredes de Nava in Spain. But without results they did not pass beyond the project stage. In Brazil Saint Joseph's school (1950-1959) was created. See *Informativo SV*, 130 (1982):71.

²³ *Vincentiana* 11 (1967):116.

The commission presentation responded to the aspirations of the brothers. We will summarize what the commission proposed.

a) All of the priests and brothers form one body. All have their own particular responsibility for the salvific mission of the Church, according to the nature and sharing in the priesthood of Christ.

b) The brothers, by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, share in the royal, prophetic, and priestly power of Christ.

c) The mission of the brother is contemporary and in harmony with the mission of the Church and the Congregation. Even more, it is necessary. It is the same cooperation that is asked of the laity in order to complete the action of the hierarchy.

d) Vatican II has confirmed the brothers' vocation and has called on them to renew and adapt it to the demands of the moment according to the intention of the Holy Founder.

What the commission desired in order to bring about this adaptation and renewal is the following: (1) The promotion of the brother's vocation; (2) human, Christian, apostolic, and Vincentian formation; (3) the advancement of the brother for the apostolate; (4) foster fraternal charity and avoid discrimination, which is opposed to the attitudes of the time in which we live; (5) a greater and more perfect sharing by the brothers in the spiritual life of the Community.²⁴

What the Constitutions of 1984 Establish about the Brothers in the Congregation

1. New Perspectives

The present Constitutions have recognized that reflection on the situation of the brothers in the Community was shown to be valid and in conformity with the spirit of the Community of the demands of the Church. There was already a representation of brothers in the assembly of 1968-1969. Brother Eligio Rivas, a Spaniard, now a

²⁴ "Placita Coetuum," (Rome, 1967), pars altera, 84.

graduate of the University of Santiago de Compostela and the author of specialized studies,²⁵ summed up the situation of the brothers of the Congregation in this way.

There are few candidates and many departures. The reputation of their works does not attract today's young people. The deficiency of their formation makes them ineffective in any works of importance. This produces in the brothers a complex of low self-esteem, indifference, and emptiness, even to the point of asking themselves what the point of their life in the Congregation is.²⁶

The Constitutions of 1968-1969 opened the doors of equality and participation in the renewal and adaptation of the Community and its future, according to the Council's directives, the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, and also opened to them the possibility of being promoted to the permanent diaconate. In article 70, it said, "The brothers, observing what is prescribed in the common and particular law, can be promoted to the permanent diaconate wherever it is thought necessary."

The Assembly of 1974 completed this directive, adding that the norms of the episcopal conferences referring to the reception of the permanent diaconate be carried out. All of this was a result of what was written in the conciliar and postconciliar documents.²⁷ The superior general, Father James Richardson, sent the following petition to the Holy See on 4 December 1974, "In the name of the General Assembly held from 16 to 23 September of this year, I ask that the faculty of introducing the permanent diaconate be conceded to the Congregation." It refers to the brothers, among whom can be found some with the potential for offering this service to the church.

It advances an important consideration, although not entirely a clear one, and that is that "the admission of the brothers to the permanent diaconate will cause no change in their juridical situation in the Congregation. They (the brothers) will continue enjoying the same rights and obligations as the other priests and brothers of

²⁵ Brother Eligio Rivas, a specialist in philology, has written, among other works, *Toponimia de María, A Limia*, and *Una historia muy documentada de Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, the latter confided to the care of the Congregation of the Mission since 1869.

²⁶ *Informativo SV* (1973):303; (1982):77.

²⁷ *Vincentiana* 21 (1977):49-50.

the Congregation.” We believe that we see that the intention in this insertion is that the brothers continue to be brothers, although it is not said with all the clarity that one would wish.

It goes one to allude to the formation of the brother candidates for the permanent diaconate according to the directives of the episcopal conferences. In case of an appointment or a change to another country or diocese, the past activity of the brother deacon will be submitted for the approval of the ordinary of the place.

The Holy See responded affirmatively on 14 December 1974. Father Richardson added a note directed to the provincials. “Before the formation and ordination of permanent deacons is introduced into any province of our Congregation, the petition and response ought to take into consideration the response of the Holy See and the norms given in the *Motu Proprio Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* of Paul VI (18 July 1967.)²⁸

To all of this should be added the superior general’s short circular sent to all of the brothers at Christmas 1974. Its character is principally exhortative. After spelling out the importance of the brother’s vocation as sharing by baptism and confirmation in the saving mission of Christ and their condition as consecrated lay persons in the Congregation in order to contribute with their works to the mission of the Church, he asks for their collaboration so that sanctity might be developed in the Community.

I appeal to our brothers so that they will help us by their example and by their word to imitate Jesus Christ, who began by doing and teaching, as the Common Rules remind us (1:1). I ask the brothers that they keep in mind the recommendation of Christ to his disciples, “Let your light shine before men,” (Matthew 5:16), and I ask them to take part in our conversations, that they speak in our community conferences, particularly when they deal with our vocation, call to sanctity, and the practice of virtue.²⁹

²⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 29; canons 1031:2-3; 1032:3. Other canons that affect them are 207, 276:2 and 3, 281, and 288.

²⁹ *Vincentiana* 21 (1977):49, taking the circular of the superior general, Father James Richardson, written to the brothers at Christmas 1975. See *Vincentiana* 20 (1976):11.

2. *"Ministries," A New Field of Pastoral Work for Brothers.*

Father Lauro Palù wrote in *Vincentiana* (1977) an article called "The Coadjutor Brothers: Situation, Problems, Solutions."³⁰ He studied what caused the brothers' situation, proposed some ideas on "lay ministries" in the Church, and in the third part of the article offered four reasons that suggested orienting the brothers toward these "ministries."

1. Because of the usefulness and efficacy of these ministries in the face of the continual demands and needs of today.

2. Because of the desire that Christians feel for a greater explanation of the faith, assuming an apostolic commitment of witness and service.

3. Because of the non-adaptation and dissatisfaction of the brothers at the present time and the lack of attraction for young people in the present situation.

4. Because of the direction that the works of the Congregation are taking toward parishes (remembering that his article was written in 1977) where the brothers can carry out numerous and effective ministries.

He goes on to recognize that there is need to begin with a greater selectivity and better formation of the brothers, to organize their ongoing formation, and renew the promotion of vocations to the brothers.

Father Palù reminds us that the General Assembly of 1974, in declaration #35, asked that a study of lay (non-ordained) ministries be made and the superior general insisted on this again when he visited the provinces of Brazil in August 1975.

For Father Palù, there is no question now of studying the ministry of the laity in the light of theology but rather the renewal of the brothers' situation in the light of that theology. Quoting another member of the Congregation, Father Adrian van den Berg, he concludes:

a. "We have to transcend the anachronistic distinction between two classes in the Congregation, one of priests

³⁰ Lauro Palù, "Los hermanos coadjutores: situacion, problemas, soluciones," *Vincentiana* 20 (1977):48-59.

and one of brothers.

b. "We have to make an effort to raise up and form pastoral agents to give continuity to the work in favor of the poor that Saint Vincent began and left as our inheritance.

c. "According to this vision, the invitation to candidates should not be to becoming a priest or a brother, but rather to serve the poor. The rest, being a priest or brother, will depend on vocation, personal option, and the qualities demanded for one task or another."

Father Palu believes that in this way the brothers' field of apostolic work is widened and they do not remain reduced to the so-called "domestic services."

What the Constitutions of 1984 Establish about the Brothers

1. All are Missionaries

Beginning with the fact that the Congregation is made up of "clerics and lay persons" (article 4), the Constitutions describe all of its members, clerics and lay persons, as "followers of Christ who have been called by God to continue his mission and have been admitted into the said Congregation. They strive, according to their abilities, to respond to their vocation by working according to the teaching, outlook, and instruction of Saint Vincent de Paul" (Articles 4 and 51).

All of the members, therefore, are *missionaries*, all share in the priesthood of Christ by baptism and confirmation (article 52:1). Of course, the priests and deacons share additionally, according to the order received, in the functions of Christ, priest, pastor, and teacher (article 52:2) As for the lay persons of the Congregation "who among us are called brothers," it is explicitly stated that they are destined for the apostolate of the Church and the Congregation and they carry this out by the work which is appropriate to their situation (*ibid.*)

Clearly, the brother is as much a missionary as the cleric. The difference comes only from the demands that the sacraments received bring with them. As for the works and tasks which they can do, no limitation is placed on them if they conform to the end of the

Congregation, and to the needs of the Church according to the charism, condition, and qualities of each person. The possibility of the diaconate is opened to them (articles 52:1 and 93:3) and although not mentioned explicitly, that of "ministries."³¹

2. *Equality of Rights and Obligations*

The response of the Constitutions tends toward equality, but an equality conditioned by the nature of the matter and the directives of the universal law of the Church and the particular law of the Congregation.

In reality this equality is granted with the exceptions that come from:

- a) sacred orders;
- b) jurisdiction, according to canon 274:1 (article 59:1-2).

Therefore they enjoy active and passive voice; they can participate in the government of the Congregation in all assemblies and in councils, but they cannot be superiors, according to what is said explicitly in article 100.

It is only right to mention that the superior general and the general council opposed this last clause in order to leave the door open for some brother to be a superior, at least a local one. CRIS refused to consider this petition but told us *viva voce* (orally) that if the superior general asked for it, it would be granted in the form of a rescript, but that in principle this norm, which was to have the main purpose of the plenary session of CRIS, scheduled for autumn 1984 but actually held in January 1986, was being retained. It is one of the questions still under discussion and we still do not know what the plenary session has said. I will discuss this problem later and we shall see what is to be thought of it.

c. A certain inequality has come from the different sensibilities of the provinces. Because of the fear that the brothers might not be elected and not be able to attend the provincial assemblies, different methods have been devised so that there will be no lack of representation for the brothers in the provincial assemblies.

³¹ Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam* (1972); R. Beraudy, "Les ministères dans *Ministeria Quaedam et Ad Pascendum*," *Maison-Dieu* 115 (1973):86-96; C. Braga, "Les ministères des laïcs," *Vincentina* 27 (1983):166, and in *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión*, "Los ministerios de los seglares," (1983):201-16.

The General Assembly of 1980 published a decree, number 8, in which it said:

To assure the participation of brothers in the next general assembly, the XXXVI general assembly decrees...there shall be...one delegate for each one hundred brothers and remaining part of this number; if the number of brothers elected...is less than this representation, the number of brothers mentioned above is to be filled by appointment of the superior general together with his council...The method of selecting particular brothers is left to the discretion of the superior general with his council [but on condition that the brothers who are called] will enjoy the same rights and be held to the same obligations as other delegates, according to the norm of the Constitutions and Statutes.

As a matter of fact, two provinces have elected a brother and another has been chosen by the superior general and his council.

3. *The Discussion of Article 62*

It deals with the obligations that members of societies of the apostolic life should have according to canon 739, "Apart from the obligations which derive from their constitutions, members are bound by the common obligations of clerics, unless the nature of things or the context indicates otherwise."³² Article 86 of the Constitutions of 1980 established that "the members of the Congregation of the Mission are subject to the obligations of clerics, unless otherwise evident from the nature of the matter."

We had a double surprise. First, we had to cite some canons and, above all, the one referring to ecclesiastical dress, canon 284, and canon 276, which refers to the celebration of the liturgy of the hours. Canon 1174:1 obliges all members of societies of apostolic life to the celebration of the liturgy of the hours, according to their constitutions.

³² (Article 62 reads "The members of the Congregation of the Mission besides the obligations to which they are held according to our own law are also bound by the common obligation of clerics. Not only are clerics bound, as is evident, to wear ecclesiastical garb (Canon 284) and to recite the Liturgy of the Hours (Canon 276), but also laics are bound by these canons unless the contrary is clear from the nature of the case or the wording of the text." Translator.)

The greatest surprise came when explicit reference was made to the brothers “unless the contrary is clear from the nature of the case or the wording of the text.” We wanted to avoid this reference to the brothers but that was not possible.³³ For all that, the final clauses of article 62 create, in my opinion, sufficient space for freedom to continue acting according to the traditions of the Community with regard to the brothers’ dress.

4. The Formation of the Brothers

The Constitutions and Statutes have taken into account the situation of the brothers in the matter of formation. Article 91 is clear. “Special care should be taken to assure that our brothers receive the formation they need to fulfill their mission in the Congregation faithfully.” Everything that the Constitutions and Statutes establish about formation is applied to the brothers also. Therefore, their formation in the internal seminary will be the same as that of the other candidates, unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

The formation of brothers who might be raised to the permanent diaconate will follow provincial norms and canons 1031:2,3,4; 1032:3; 1037.

Statute 48 completes article 91 of the Constitutions. “Special cultural and technical training should be provided for the brothers by means of a curriculum of studies leading to a degree or a diploma.”

Present Questions at the Level of the Church and the Congregation

1. At the Level of the Church

Sociological Aspects. There is always a danger in universalizing. We have to remember that within all of the institutes of consecrated life and the societies of apostolic life there have been and are brothers who are outstanding in their sanctity, fully committed to their vocation, and who have been affected very little by what the world might have thought about them.

³³ Miguel Pérez Flores, “De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984,” *Vincentiana* 27 (1983):113.

Given this fact, demonstrated further by the recognized holiness of many brothers, we should not close our eyes to certain questions that have a social origin. Let us look at some of them.

1. The social image in societies of apostolic life which are supposedly clerical in line with canon 736.

a. The first aspect that the statistics point out is the little interest in general in the brother's vocation during the crisis that has recently been undergone by societies of apostolic life. The tasks which the brothers undertook have been assumed by lay people, men and women, who are paid a corresponding salary. This lack of interest has meant for many brothers an unmistakable sign of their marginalization, secularization, and of their not being needed in the society. In short, it has meant a lack of appreciation for their vocation and their services.

b. The second aspect is the lack of value given to the works that the brothers used to do, seen from outside as lacking in prestige, power, influence, without equitable recompense and lacking the minimal amounts of freedom for rest, free days, etc., which society has given to all types of work.

c. If the lack of professionalism has affected the "priest" prepared for every "terrain," still more has it affected the brother, who has learned his office through daily practice from someone who, in his time, learned it in the same way. This has not permitted them to have the routine nor be creative nor has at times to be capable of using the new, technical means that society offers.

d. The environment created by secularization has also contributed to changing the vision of the brothers' services, justified by their gift of self to God, but which secularization has emptied of all gospel meaning.

e. It was believed, perhaps a bit naively, that the fundamental problems in the brothers' situation were going to be resolved by transcending the juridical barriers. These, in large part, have been transcended but the problem of dissatisfaction, bitterness, criticism, at times rebellion, and frequently of leaving have not been overcome because the roots are deeper. These are the lack of religious and professional training in the deepest sense of

giving oneself to God and the society to which they have been called to God. These failures have been a hindrance to the brother who might have known how to face new social, ecclesial, and community events and might have been able to assume a correct attitude.

f. Because of the above mentioned reasons and a logical sense of self-defense, many brothers assumed attitudes of conservatism or went to the opposite extreme of “throwing everything overboard,” lacking correct balance, a focal point, to give meaning in a situation of social, ecclesial, and community change.

2. Theological and juridical aspects.

a. From another point of view, from the magisterium of the Church, one comes to the same conclusions. The constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the decree on the mission of the laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, *Evangelica Testificatio*, etc., give a full meaning to the consecration and self-gift of the Christian, priest or lay person, to God and to the service of the Kingdom in the Church and the world.

This theological equality has highlighted human, apostolic, and community differences, despite the examples of many good brothers who, as I said before, by a deep living of gospel values were not affected by the adverse environment. For others, however, the theological and juridical equality asked for and made clear in the magisterial documents brought them to aspirations that were not seen to correspond with the success that some brothers desired.

b. The tendency toward “clericalism” on the part of some brothers in clerical institutes (societies) has been emphasized. It seems that some brothers thought they could resolve their problems in the Community by aspiring to the permanent diaconate or even to the priesthood. They were not content with the simple “ministries” that did not call for orders.³⁴

³⁴ For all of these questions, see *Il Fratello religioso*, especially the work of D. Pietrzak, “Atteggiamenti psicologici,” 74, and G. Dalpiaz, “Il religioso fratello nell’odierno contesto sociale ed ecclesiale,” 88.

Today it is clear that in general this has not been the correct way to resolve the problem, although it may have worked for a few particular brothers. In taking the route of clericalism, the identity of the brother, his vocation and presence in the institute or society gets sidetracked. It was, in reality, to leave a way of being complementary in the institute in clear contradiction with the motivation, wishes, and history of the society or institute of consecrated life.

c. Despite what the Code established as the practical solution (that is, provide by rescript or privilege, if appropriate, that a brother might be a local superior) whether or not a brother can be a local superior in a clerical institute of consecrated life of pontifical right is still being discussed. The same question is put forth for the clerical societies of apostolic life of pontifical right, like the Congregation of the Mission. It seems that all of the authors are in agreement about disregarding the question of who can be major superiors.

The reason in favor is that the power of government does not come exclusively from the sacrament of orders but rather by the concession of ecclesiastical office.³⁵ Others, on the contrary, affirm that after the Council the power of government does come from ordination. On the other hand, the practice that CRIS has followed up to now is to grant that a brother can be a local superior by way of exception. Remember what they told us orally³⁶ that it would be granted if the superior general asked for it, despite what is established in article 100 of the Constitutions.

Father J.F. Castaño, professor at the University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome, counsels the following:

-that the superior general take the necessary steps, even of going directly to the Holy Father, to obtain that the brothers in clerical institutes of pontifical right be at least local superiors;

-that if this possibility does not appear viable at the present time, the law be dispensed with in each case but in

³⁵ J.F. Castaño, *Los hermanos dentro de nuestros institutos*, 72.

³⁶ See note 31.

an habitual way, not according to the practice of CRIS, where sometimes they grant it and sometimes do not;

-that the faculty of dispensing from canon 588 be conceded to the major superiors of clerical institutes of pontifical right since they are ordinaries according to canon 134:1.

It should be noted that this author does not admit that brothers can be major superiors in clerical institutes of pontifical right because, according to him, they enjoy quasi-episcopal power as ordinaries. Other authors, arguing that the power to govern comes from the sacrament of orders, as the Council says, and not from the conferral of ecclesiastical office, deny that a brother can be a local superior in an institute of consecrated life of pontifical right. For Father J. Torres, present sub-secretary of CRIS, the power of government for the superior of a clerical institute or society is the same as that of the Church, the same as that of the Roman Pontiff and the bishops. Such power comes only from sacred orders.³⁷ Father E. Sastre, C.M.F., puts the question in an incisive way: can a brother legitimately and appropriately assume and undertake the office of superior in a clerical religious institute of pontifical right? No, because he does not have the power of orders according to canon 588. This does not prevent his being a member of assemblies because, although they enjoy the power to govern, they enjoy it collegially.

Another question is asked: can brothers exercise the office of superior in clerical institutes of pontifical right through dispensation or privilege? No, in reference to the power of orders. Yes, as collaborators with regard to the power to govern. The reason is in canon 228.

This author goes further and posits the case of the suitability or lack of it of juridically possible appointments. His opinion is negative but naturally it is a question of prudence in government and it seems that absolute solutions are not possible.³⁸

³⁷ J. Torres, *Chierici e laici nelle congregazioni religiose clericali nel nuovo diritto canonico*, 99.

³⁸ E. Sastre, "Al margen de un congreso: i fratelli nei nostri istituti, synthesis latina," *Commentarium pro Religiosis* 66 (1985):304-05.

2. *At the Level of the Congregation of the Mission*

Most authors, when they deal with the problems of the brothers, do not allude to the brothers in the societies of apostolic life but to the brothers in the institutes of consecrated life, clerical or not, either of pontifical or diocesan right, taking into account that their condition is not merely that of lay persons as stated in *Lumen Gentium*, 31, “The term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church.”

Nevertheless, I believe that generally one can apply to the brothers of societies of apostolic life what is said about the brothers in clerical institutes of the consecrated life. In reality, the problems are more or less the same. With all this in mind, it is necessary to take into account some details. Concentrating on the brothers in the Congregation of the Mission, one should have the following in mind.

1. Saint Vincent’s intention when he introduced the brothers as members of the Congregation in the fullest sense.

If we compare what Saint Dominic Guzmán wanted for his Order of Preachers, it becomes obvious that there is a great affinity between the thought of Saint Dominic and Saint Vincent. In effect, the brothers (called *conversi*) of the Order of Preachers are created to help the brothers “preachers” in their work of evangelization. They accompany them on their apostolic trips and take charge of the material services of the house or domestic tasks. As “religious” they are equal, but they lack active and passive voice in the chapters and sometimes have separate places in the choir or dormitory. The offices that they carry out are varied and go from being cooks and tailors, doorkeepers, sacristans, etc., to helpers in the library, assistant treasurers, etc.

The model of the Jesuit coadjutor brother is even closer. According to the bull *Exponi Nobis*, “they are laymen who help and cooperate in temporal matters and in domestic services.”³⁹

2. In the history of the Congregation, the brothers have undertaken domestic jobs and other things that complete the works of the missionaries inside and outside the house, depending on their abilities. It has been so since Saint Vincent’s time. Let us remember again Brother Ducournau and the other brothers mentioned above,⁴⁰

³⁹ *Il fratello religioso*. V. Alce, *Il religioso fratello domenicano*, 166. M. Gioia, *La coadiutoria nella Compagnia de Gesù*, 214.

⁴⁰ See note 14.

not to mention other examples of brothers who presently develop works proper to lay people but with the end of completing works undertaken by the Congregation.

The statistics gathered by Father José Oriol Baylách, C.M., indicate the sectors of the Congregation of the Mission in which the brothers work today. If there are 108 in manual labor, there are fifteen who work in centers of study, some as professors, with all the rights that their degrees give them, etc.

3. As for the current problems in the Congregation, we have the same ones as the other institutes of consecrated life.

a. The number has been decreasing by an average of 6.88 per year since 1951. Since the general assembly of 1980 it has gone down by sixty-two (18.02 percent). In this same time period, 1980-1986, there have been fifteen newly incorporated, sixty-one have died, and Rome has dispensed twelve from vows.

b. The attraction of "clericalism" does not seem to have been very strong in the congregation. From 1977 to 1985 three have been ordained priests, two have been ministers and transitional deacons. In the Congregation, only one brother is a permanent deacon. It is true that four have remained in the state of deacon, but for different reasons than the ideal of permanent diaconate.

c. We have already spoken of those who can or cannot be local superiors. Article 100 prohibits it in principle but we have the promise *viva voce* of its being granted, should the superior general ask for it. Surely, this will depend on what the plenary session of CRIS has determined in January 1986.

d. The question which should most concern us is how to offer an attractive image of the missionary brother in the Congregation of the Mission. To that end the road that we should follow is the same that other institutes and societies have proposed for themselves:

1. An adequate promotion and selection of vocations.
2. Relevant and serious formation, not only spiritual but technical, according to the works they will discharge.
3. The offering of "lay" works which, at the same time as they contribute to achieving the end of the Congregation, will help the brother feel fulfilled as a missionary in the Congregation of the Mission.

4. Create a truly family spirit, as Saint Vincent taught in the conference of 13 December 1658, in such a way that we can all say that we are disciples of Christ and that all

are missionaries.

5. Not to abandon the idea of promoting brothers' vocations. The creation of a new social, ecclesial, and community image supposes time and can be costly. We have to change mentalities and behavior. This presupposes time and patient work. We all have to look for and concretize new ways of being brothers in the Congregation without being unfaithful to the thought and behavior of Saint Vincent, overcoming some periods of history which are difficult to justify today. The creation of a new image requires time and patience. We all need time to find new forms of identity for the brother in the Congregation which are faithful to the thought and action of Saint Vincent.

"Layness" in the Thought of Saint Vincent

The central theme of this work is the "lay" brother in the Congregation of the Mission. Therefore, we have not tried to reflect on the support which Saint Vincent gave to the Church, influencing, organizing, and inspiring Christian lay people so that their Christian vocation would give itself to the building up of God's kingdom and that they might be faithful servants, from the lay condition, of the Church in its saving mission, continuing the mission of Christ. There are studies on this point that I recommend.⁴¹

What interests us here is to insist on "layness" in Saint Vincent in what refers to the missionary brother, a member of the Congregation of the Mission. To my way of thinking, we have to take the following into account.

1. The mission that Saint Vincent had for the lay person, man or woman, not a member of a community but living in the world and, in addition, forming a part of the masculine or feminine Confraternity of Charity which he founded.⁴²

⁴¹ M. Zanchin, "S. Vicente, precursor del Vaticano II en el apostolado de los laicos," *Anales de Barcelona* (1968):233; J.J. Muñoz, "Los laicos y la animación de la comunidad," *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión* (1975):595; Andre Menabrea, *St. Vincent de Paul, maître de l'homme de'état* (Paris, 1944); J. Giannini-Menichelli, "Dalle Dame della Carità ai gruppi del volontariato vincenziano," *Annali della Missione* (1980) 203; G. Gielen, "La CM animadora espiritual de las caridades," *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión* (1977):842; Sister Cajetan, "Concepción Arena, Spanish Disciple of St. Vincent," *Thought Patterns* 9:80.

⁴² Coste 13:417-532 (761-830) (X:567-671; 899-964).

2. It does not seem that there is any reason to separate this idea of Christian lay person from the brother who is a lay member of the Congregation. It is a complement, a help, a collaboration, so that the evangelization of the poor and the other works of the mission may be more easily realized. Saint Vincent asked himself the following question.

It seems that there is some difficulty in saying that the brothers dedicated themselves to the salvation of the country people and the instruction of clerics, since they do not catechize or preach nor have they the capacity or the character for these functions. Therefore, how can they contribute? Nonetheless, my brothers, they certainly do so in a certain sense. They help in these occupations...and the rule tells the truth when it confirms that they contribute...in their own way.⁴³

I think that there exists a certain relationship between the “layness” of the Ladies of Charity and that of the Daughters of Charity. We know that the latter group, juridically secular, were the complement for what the Ladies could not do.

3. These considerations are not directed against what has been established in article 52:1, 1°, where the road to the permanent diaconate is opened to our brothers, but rather to applying it without losing the value of Vincentian “layness” which Saint Vincent wanted for the brother members of the Congregation of the Mission.

4. I think that the identity of the brother is better and more satisfactorily achieved within the “lay” tasks which are his own and not within the “sacred” tasks proper to the priest and permanent deacon. The reception of the “ministries,” which do not presuppose ordination, has another meaning. They are like a public or official “mission” before the ecclesial community. There should be no difficulty in this since even lay people can receive them.

As I said before and the statistics show, the clerical tendency has not been strong in the Congregation. Fomenting it without discernment does not seem to me the best way to resolve the brothers’ problems.

⁴³ Coste 12:96 (401).

In summary, the Congregation consists of “clerics and laymen” according to the expression of the Common Rules, 1:2. The work that is asked is to update, revitalize the life of one and the other without having to confuse the roles that are proper to each within the Congregation of the Mission.