

COMMUNITY IN THE COMMON RULES

A. The years previous to the redaction of the CR

* The foundation contract with the Gondi's (XIII 197)
(April 17, 1625)

- life in common
- missionary work in common
- community of goods
- renouncing ecclesiastical benefices
- obligation to keep the Rules to be written
- Vincent, the superior in the group
- election of a new superior upon Vincent's death

* Donation of the Bons Enfants College to the CM (XIII 208)
(July 20, 1626)

- Common property of the group: "We donate... the Bons Enfants College to the Society or Community of the priests of the Mission"

* Act of Association of the first missionaries (XIII 203)
(September 4, 1626)

- "joined and associated to work" in the missions
- Vincent "chooses and joins" them to the group
- in order "to live together as a congregation"
- "to work for the salvation of the poor country people"
- obedience to Vincent and to his successors

* Bull of the official papal recognition of the CM (XIII 257)
(January 12, 1633)

- living in common
- under Vincent's authority while he lives
- election of a successor after his death
- community composed of clerics and brothers
- daily Mass, weekly confession, daily one-hour meditation, examination of conscience
- the Rules to be redacted subject to the approval of the Paris Archbishop. .

B. The text of the Common Rules

1. The redaction process of the CR

* Several early mentions: 1628 (I 66); 1632 (I 176-177); 1640 (II 138)...

- * 1642 - First General Assembly: a first project of Rules is presented to be discussed (XIII 291). Corrections posterior to the Assembly...
- * 1651 - Second General Assembly (XIII 357). Corrections posterior to the Second Assembly...
- * 1658 - Printing of CR and distribution to the community (XII 1). A few corrections still added...

The definitive text of the CR is basically the product of the two assemblies mentioned above. Although that text was no doubt thoroughly inspired by Saint Vincent himself, it is the outcome of a collective work done by many members of the Congregation, in particular by those present at both assemblies. The participants at the 1651 assembly declared the contents of the text to be entirely “in agreement with our way of life, and with the end and the nature of our Congregation” (XIII 358-359). Vincent himself affirms in the prologue to the CR that “you will not find anything which you have not been doing for a long time.”

In spite of both remarks, the text of the CR is neither a picture totally faithful in all details to the daily life of the missionaries of St Vincent’s time, nor is it a sufficiently good source in order to know some fundamental aspects of that daily life, of the Founder’s spirituality, or of his manner of exercising his authority. We will see several examples of all of these in the next section which deals with the main topic of this presentation, how the community life of the Congregation of the Mission is described in the Common Rules.

2. Community in the Common Rules

The fundamentals of community life

- * The purpose of the Congregation: I 1
- * The Gospel teachings: II (the whole chapter); XII 2,3
- * Christ as model: III 1, V 1, VI 1, VII 1, X 1, XI 1

The spirit of community life

- * love, like that between brothers: VIII 2,7,8,9,10
- * the five virtues: II 14, XII 5-6, 12
- * charity among the members of the community: II 12, VI 2 (the sick)
- * brotherly correction: II 17, X 14
- * love of the Congregation: XII 10

A life of prayer in common

- * devotion to the Holy Trinity and Incarnation: X 2,3
- * devotion to the Virgin Mary: X 4
- * liturgical office in common: X 5
- * one hour of mental prayer: X 7
- * annual spiritual retreat: X 10
- * weekly conference: X 12

- * community chapter: X 13

The structures of community life

- * members: clerics, lay brothers: I 2, V 16
- * uniformity: II 11
- * community of goods: III 3
- * the order of the day: X 18
- * relations superior-subject
 - in various aspects of daily life: II 10, IX 4-8,11-13,15-16
 - in the field of poverty: III 4-6,8-9
 - in the field of obedience: V 2-14
 - in regard to ministries: XI 2-5,8,11-13,15-16; XII 9
 - in regard to the sick: VI 4; VIII 3,5
- * a life of silence: VIII 4,6

Dangers threatening community life

- * relations with one's own family: II 9
- * the vices opposed to the five virtues: II 15
- * exclusive friendships, all kinds of ostracisms: VIII 2
- * attacking the good name of others: VIII 11
- * violating secrets of various kinds: VIII 10
- * complaints about the material conditions of common life: VIII 13
- * speaking ill about other countries or provinces: VIII 14
- * speaking on political topics: VIII 15,16
- * praising our confreres in their presence; criticizing them: XII 4

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- J.F. Gaziello, "*La communauté selon Saint Vincent*", *Vincentiana*, 4-6, 1984, pp. 616-653.
 R. Maloney, "*The Way of Vincent de Paul*", New York: New City Press, 1992, chapters I and IV.
 J.M. Román, "*Saint Vincent de Paul. A Biography*", chapters XIX and XX.