


THE CHALLENGES FOR THE UNIVERSALIZATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN SUPERIORATE OF FATHER JEAN-BAPTISTE ÉTIENNE (1843-1874)¹

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some reflections that help deepen research on the transnational and universal aspects of the Mission Congregation, a Catholic religious institute of male apostolic life. We seek to reflect on the efforts of this congregation to overcome internal tensions of the institution and those regarding centralizing and expansionist tendencies between the local and the universal context. We analyzed how these priests worked in the process of Catholic evangelization through missions during the administration of Superior General Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1801-1874). In order to reach this goal, we divided the text in two parts. In the first, a brief introduction into the historical path taken by this Catholic institution, with its normative and formulation of a missionary model or culture. In the second part, some aspects of the reform carried out by Étienne are analyzed, special attention given to the expansion of the congregation around the world, to hierarchy, to discipline, and to the *informative instruments*. We concluded by analyzing two practical cases of the Lazarist missions in Ceará, province of the Empire of Brazil, in which we seek to understand the process of *flexibilization* of the central rules and guidelines, as well as the consequences of disobedience to them.

KEYWORDS

Mission's congregation – universalization – missions.

OS DESAFIOS PARA A UNIVERSALIZAÇÃO DA CONGREGAÇÃO DA MISSÃO NO SUPERIORATO DO PADRE JEAN-BAPTISTE ÉTIENNE (1843-1874)

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar algumas reflexões que auxiliem no aprofundamento de pesquisas sobre os aspectos transnacionais e de universalização da Congregação da Missão, instituto religioso católico de vida apostólica masculina. Buscamos refletir acerca dos esforços dessa congregação para contornar tensões internas da instituição e aquelas referentes às tendências centralizadoras e expansionistas, entre o contexto local e o universal. Analisamos o modo como esses padres atuaram no processo de evangelização católica, por meio das missões, durante a administração do Superior Geral Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1801-1874). Para isso, dividimos o texto em duas partes: na primeira, faz-se a apresentação sucinta do percurso histórico dessa instituição católica, com sua normativa e formulação de um modelo ou cultura missionária; na segunda, analisam-se alguns aspectos da reforma realizada por Étienne, dando especial atenção à expansão da congregação pelo mundo, à hierarquia, ao disciplinamento e aos instrumentos informativos. Terminaremos analisando dois casos práticos das missões lazaristas no Ceará, província do Império do Brasil, nos quais buscaremos perceber o processo de flexibilização das regras e diretrizes centrais, bem como as consequências da desobediência a elas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Congregação da missão – universalização – missões.

1. Introduction

This article presents some reflections that will help deepen research on the transnational and universal aspects of the Congregation of the Mission⁶, in the historical context of the 18th-century Catholic Church. We seek to reflect on the efforts of this congregation to overcome internal tensions of the institution and those regarding centralizing and expansionist tendencies between the local and the universal context. In view of these issues, we analyzed the way in which the priests of the Congregation of the Mission have operated in the process of Catholic evangelization, focusing on the missions during the administration of the Superior General, Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1801-1874)⁷.

The Congregation of the Mission was one of the representatives of the new models of Catholic institutes proposed after the Council of Trent. During the years of this Council (1545-1563), many topics related to religious orders and congregations were discussed. One of the most discussed topics was the need to limit the exemption of

6 The Congregation of the Mission was founded on April 17, 1625 by St. Vincent de Paul and recognized by Pope Urban VIII in 1632. It is a society of male apostolic life, whose objectives are to carry out evangelizing missions in the fields and to educate the clergy in seminaries. Its members became known as “Vincentians,” “priests of the Mission,” “sons of St. Vicent” or “Lazarists.” Cf. DROIT: Notice Historique (Complete): 1907. Textes Normatifs. Peper 27. Disponível em: http://via.library.depaul.edu/cm_textesnorm/27. Acesso em: 29 set 2019.

7 Born in the village of Longeville, France, on August 10, 1801, he began his studies in the Minor Seminary of Metz and after the death of his father in 1817, he continued his priestly training in the Major Seminary. Due to his fragile health, he was always going to the hospital of the Daughters of Charity, where he learned about the history of St. Vincent and decided to join the Congregation of the Mission. In 1822 he took the congregational vows and in 1825 he was ordained a Vincentian priest. Thus beginning his career within that congregation, he became director of the Daughters of Charity, secretary, and procurator of the religious group. After becoming known and occupying various posts, he was elected in the assembly of 1843 as Superior General. During the 31 years of his superiorate, the congregation grew and expanded throughout various parts of the world. He died on March 12, 1874, after suffering from “a cruel illness.” Cf. RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019; VIE de M. Étienne: XIVe Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission et de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité. Paris: Gaume, 1881, p. 1-10. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/33VFl74>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

monks and friars from episcopal jurisdiction, which, according to the priests, was generating “abuses.” This concern resulted in parts of the resolutions of the last session of the Council of Trent, the XXV. However, independent of Trent and of Rome, new orders were founded⁸ which, despite some continuities with the Medieval period, sought a new spirit, or path of “perfection”⁹.

These new organizations were conventionally called “religious orders” but, according to Prodi, the problem of the status of some of these new Catholic movements and institutes would still be open, as they would not fit into the traditional category of religious order¹⁰. Issues of this kind would only be resolved in the 1983 Code of Canon Law¹¹. In the specific case of the Congregation of the Mission, a brief of Pope Alexander VII (1655) established it was not a religious order but a congregation of secular priests, who distinguished themselves from the ordinary secular clergy by being exempt from “submission to the ordinary [bishops] of the place *in all things*”¹². Since it is a congregation with its own specific regiments and hierarchies, its members should report to their superiors when they are in their seminaries or congregational houses, rendering obedience to the bishops only during the missions or in the case of the administration of diocesan seminaries¹³.

8 The Order of the Regular Clerics or Theatins, in Brazil known also as the Order of St. Caetanús, the Regular Clerics of Sao Paulo, known as Banabites, the Order of the Regular Clerics of Somasca, the Society of Jesus, the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins, the Regular Clerics Ministers of the Sick, also known as Camillians, among other denominations.

9 PRODI, Paolo. *Il paradigma tridentino: un'epoca della storia della Chiesa*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010. p. 169.

10 Ibidem, p. 169-170.

11 The oratorians of St Philip Neri are an example of this difficult framework. They did not take vows, and each community, even if composed of only three people, was completely autonomous. They were not considered regulars and were subject to the authority of the bishop in all their activities. Cf. PRODI, op. cit., p. 175-179.

12 Breve por el que Papa Alejandro VII aprueba los votos emitidos en la Congregación de la Misión, 22 sept. 1655. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974a. t. 10, v. 2, p. 436-439. p. 380-382 (emphasis added).

13 Breve sobre el voto de pobreza emitido en la Congregación de la Misión, 12 ago. 1659. In: PAÚL, op. cit., p. 552.

The flourishing of these new types of Catholic institutes, according to Prodi,

has undoubtedly happened in response to one of the demands of modernity, the pluralism of man's paths towards salvation, towards the absolute: In relation to the plurality of professions of faith and sects that arise in the post-Reformation world, there corresponds, within the Catholic world, a pluralism of spiritual and community paths towards perfection, pluralism which is expressed in the great vitality and diversity of religious orders; these are different phenomena, compatible with the hierarchical and unitary structure of the Roman Church, but no less important from the point of view of the spiritual and anthropological development of modern man. The rivalries and controversies between the orders in the post-Tridentine Catholic world cannot be reduced to "quarrels between friars," but deal with the great theological polemics of grace and salvation, with profound influence not only on the spiritual level, but also on the political level, due to the role of the religious in the courts, as counselors, confessors of princes, and in the society of the Old Regime.¹⁴

The establishment of these institutes also coincided with the European expansion in the world, which made them essential to the process of universalizing the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, in this context, they had a territorial character, related to the beginning of the new Renaissance governments and colonial empires. As the church lost much of Europe, with the consolidation of the Reform, it tried to transform Catholicism into a true universal religion¹⁵.

These "modern orders" initially had an "anarchic" growth, in the sense that they started off "from the bottom" and had a rapid expansion. According to Prodi,

The reform of religious life comes from unexpected directions: not through a unification and uniformity of rules from above, but through a plurality and diversity of initiatives from below; not a phenomenon completely internal to the life of the Church, but something that

14 PRODI, Paolo. *Il paradigma tridentino: un'epoca della storia della Chiesa*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010. p. 170.

15 Ibidem.

remains and becomes ever more intertwined with social and political life, for good and for evil.¹⁶

Prodi also alerts, in historical research, we cannot forget the fundamental core of religious orders: their *pietas*, that is, their proposal for reflection and the search for a path of perfection adapted to modern man. In this new context, the new associations justified their presence based on a function developed in the social field: school, training, culture, and assistance¹⁷, seeking

the recovery of the apostolic *mission*, through the preaching of the Gospel to all people, but it is not seen from a millenarian perspective, but with a concrete historical sense in relation to the new discoveries; the crisis of the Church was linked to the end of medieval universalism, which had become restricted, losing its original vocation, to the closed and limited world of Europe and in a circle of petty political and worldly interests. [...] But the project will become unrealizable. The Papacy had already renounced the *mission* in favor of “Catholic” sovereigns who had already strongly linked the work of evangelization to colonial conquests.¹⁸

In the 17th century, new proposals for Catholic institutes emerged, which gave a new impetus to the missionary spirit and led to the strengthening of the Roman institutional church, but with the consolidation of monarchies, the power of religious associations in the European society was diminished. This situation led the Catholic institutes to enter once again into crisis in the eighteenth century. An example of this process was the extinction of the Society of Jesus.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution greatly impacted the Catholic world. However, in the 19th century, these associations renewed themselves during a period of conflict with the “second modernity,” by then linked to the idea of European civilization and imperialism but also to a context of centralization

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 181.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ PRODI, Paolo. *Il paradigma tridentino: un'epoca della storia della Chiesa*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010. p. 194.

and strengthening of ecclesiastical institutionalization represented by ultramontanism.

The Vincentians were essential in this process because, through missions, management and teaching in seminaries and schools they strengthened the circulation of their religious culture or their path to perfection during the 19th century. They thus worked for the ultramontane reform carried out by the bishops in their dioceses. These priests succeeded in reaching different levels of Catholic culture within society, by introducing the fundamental values for the development of ultramontanism.

The Lazarist missionary activity was not restricted to the religious sphere, since it derived from cultural exchanges with the local populations, which also involved ideas of European and extra-European civilization. We can think of an exchange between the French (European) culture and the culture of the various places where the congregation had settled. Cultural exchanges are inherent of contact amongst “the different” and the contexts where these take place, therefore, while the Vincentians have brought their cultural baggage (religious and secular) to local populations, they have also absorbed the customs and values of those with whom they have established contact. This encounter was thus religious, cultural, and civilizational, reaching various spheres of social, economic, and political life.

Local actions answered to a centralized approach, so to achieve Catholic universalization in modernity, diversity had to be contained in unity. This movement occurred through connections made from the normatization, its application, institutional documents, letters, people, objects, and habits that circulated in different spaces of the globe. All these aspects, when analyzed in a relationship between the universal and the local, allow us to think about how the adaptations in evangelization proposed by the Congregation of the Mission took place, allowing it to expand its process of universalization.

Fantappiè helps us understand this phenomenon in its normative aspects:

It is notorious that Christianity has had, since its origins, a strong self-awareness of its own universality, even in confrontation with other missionary religions. This was not born as an ethnic characteristic, linked to a race, to a people or to a group determined by a social or political factor; rather, it is based on the free adherence of all individuals to the preaching of Jesus and to belonging to the institution of Church. The universalist vocation of Christianity follows the divine mandate to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom “*in universo orbe in testimonium omnibus gentibus*” (Mt. 24,14). These two elements attribute to the presence of the Church in the world, from the first centuries, a double and unmistakable characteristic: visibility and publicity.¹⁹

This has shaped its institutional organization, including in the context of the development of nation-states:

The tendencies of the Roman Church to conceive of itself as the nucleus, the heart, the center of a “sphere” that tends toward the entire Universe²⁰ is expressed in the growth and dilatation of its *system of relationships*. The Church, as Raymond Aron noted, “has been, through the centuries, the origin of transnational relations”²¹. The relationships between individual churches, or between groups of believers in the same church around the world, go beyond the so-called interstate and international relationships, since they are linked across borders and are defined by collective subjects different from political entities. Imitating the type of diplomatic representation of modern states, the Papacy developed, from the end of the 16th century, a diplomatic network with the “national” churches and states, which has been expanding to the present day. The *Nunciatures* played an essential role in establishing legal relations with States, in maintaining the geopolitical balances of the Church, and in the process of Roman centralization in respect to the “national” churches.²²

But how to keep this multiplicity in unity? In this article we focus on three aspects pointed out by Fantappiè, used by the

19 FANTAPPIÈ, Carlo. La Santa Sede e il mondo in prospettiva storicogiuridica. *Rechtsgeschichte: Legal History*, Frankfurt am Main, n. 20, p. 332-338, 2012. p. 332 (our translation).

20 POULAT, Émile. *L'Église, c'est un monde*. Paris: Cerf, 1986.

21 ARON, Raymond. *Lezioni sulla storia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977. p. 331.

22 FANTAPPIÈ, op. cit., p. 332-333 (our translation).

Catholic hierarchy, which were crucial for the universalization of the Congregation of the Mission: normatization, communication, and flexibility. On the first point, according to the author:

The problem of ensuring a constant relationship between Rome and the particular Churches – to put it simply, one could say between the “center” and the “periphery” – has been faced since antiquity with the use of specific *figures and information* tools. With regard to these, it is enough to think of the apocrypts²³, who since the fourth century have ensured, in the name of the Pope, constant communication with the Church of the East, the apostolic vicars and, since the second half of the XII century, the pontifical legacies. As global information media, the Popes and the Roman Curia have been using various types of letters (“*espistulae*,” “*litterae sinodales*,” etc.) or information reports (“*relationes*,” which with Gregory the Great conquered a world horizon) since the first centuries.²⁴

The core then needs to develop a series of *figures and information tools*, which will also have a counterpart: the information passed on from the various locations to the core, which pass through various hierarchical levels. Through these instruments, the congregation sought to interiorize in its congregations the rules and values of the Vincentians (their *pietas*) for the fulfillment of their *mission*. The regulation (norm), which forms the core of the congregation, is what allows its unity and continuity in time, however, for the fulfillment of its objectives, that is, the *mission, flexibility strategies* are necessary

23 According to Anna Carletti, “in the middle of the 5th century, the apocrypts, or “responsible persons,” who were the Pope’s representatives before the civil authorities to which they were sent, appeared. The apocrysis was sent to the imperial court and was considered an eminent figure with special authority. Among the 13 apocrycles who served until the year 726, six of them were elected popes. At the end of the 9th century, the apocrypts were replaced by “*legatos missus*.” The Pope, concerned with strengthening closer relations with other states, sent the Papal Legates with the mission of caring for the interests of the Church. To better develop their mission, the papal envoys were given powers of representation to not only religious but also civilians. Cf. CARLETTI, Anna. A diplomacia da Santa Sé: suas origens e sua relevância no atual cenário internacional. *Diálogo*, Canoas, n. 16, p. 31-55, 2010. p. 39.

24 FANTAPPIÈ, Carlo. La Santa Sede e il mondo in prospettiva storicogiuridica. *Rechtsgeschichte: Legal History*, Frankfurt am Main, n. 20, p. 332-338, 2012. p. 332-333 (our translation, emphasis in the original).

in order to contain the tensions between the different contexts, the central structure and the normative. According to Fantappiè,

The flexibilization strategies most commonly used by the Church in the modern age to achieve religious unity are, in combination, *adaptation* and *discipline*. The first is based on the principles of the temporalization of the Church's activities in the historical course and on the adaptation of the mission to the characteristics of the various peoples, which it authorizes positively, as long as it does not conflict with natural and positive divine law. The other uses a complex of external and internal instruments of control in the quest to control behaviors, practices, customs, institutes and norms that contradict the Catholic faith. (italics in the original)²⁵

This same strategy will be used by the Congregation of the Mission, in which the missionaries will be able to adapt the missions to the "various peoples" as long as the adaptations do not conflict with the rules and values of the Congregation. When this happens, there is a reaction from the hierarchy and sometimes local consequences such as the expulsion or withdrawal of missionaries from a certain place. Discipline will be handled by the hierarchical structure of the Congregation and its system of communication and control, the *figures and information tools*.

To demonstrate this mechanism of universal and transnational operation of the Congregation of the Mission in its missions, we divided the text into three parts. In the first, a brief introduction into the historical path taken by this Catholic institution, with its normative and formulation of a missionary model or culture. In the second part, some aspects of the reform carried out by Fr. Étienne are analyzed, focusing on the expansion of the Congregation throughout the world, the *figures*, disciplinary measures, and *information tools*. We conclude by analyzing two practical cases of the Lazarist missions in Ceará, province of the Empire of Brazil, in which we seek

25 FANTAPPIÈ, op. cit., p. 335 (our translation, emphasis in the original).

to understand the process of *flexibilization* of the central rules and guidelines, as well as the consequences of disobedience to them.

2. *Mission as a path of perfection*

The Congregation of the Mission started from a contract signed in 1625 between Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and Mr. Gondi, who had many lands under his control. They wanted the clergyman to continue to carry out evangelical missions among the peasants who lived in that region and for this they allocated 40,000 pounds²⁶. The next step was the approval of the Congregation by the Archbishopric of Paris on April 14, 1626, when a building known as the *School des Bons-Enfants*, situated in the French capital was granted, where the future congregations would receive the necessary instructions and training to work in the fields²⁷. The papal recognition was made by Urbano VIII, in 1632, when the Supreme Pontiff asked the Superior of the Congregation, Vincent de Paul, to formulate the congregational rules²⁸. That same year, the headquarters of the Congregation moved to the Priory of St. Lazarus in Paris, so its members became known also as Lazarists. It should be noted the rules were only drawn up and approved in 1658, more than 30 years after the beginning of the activities of the Congregation of the Mission²⁹, which had as its principle “to instruct and catechize the poor, particularly in the villages and other places most neglected; to assist, and help the [...] sick; to prepare one another to make good general confessions”³⁰.

Until the middle of the 17th century, the Church hardly entered the French countryside. Thus, there were several peasant groups

26 ABELLY, Louis. *Vida de San Vicente de Paúl*. Salamanca: Editorial Ceme, 1994. (Publicado originalmente em 1664). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3iZHq8G>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

27 Ibidem; FRECKEN, Geraldo. *Em missão: padres da Congregação da Missão (Lazaristas) no Nordeste e Norte do Brasil*. Fortaleza: Edições UFC, 2010.

28 ABELLY, op. cit.

29 Conferencia del 17 de mayo de 1658 sobre la observancia de las reglas. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11.

30 ABELLY, Louis. *Vida de San Vicente de Paúl*. Salamanca: Editorial Ceme, 1994. (Publicado originalmente em 1664). p. 101.

called by Jean Delumeau “outcasts of Christianity,” who lived in distant villages, socially and geographically, far from the system and vigilance of the Church³¹. Even in the villages where there were parish priests, an enormous religious ignorance permeated the clergy and consequently the laity³². Another point to be highlighted is that the majority of the peasants were illiterate, which is why the means used to carry out the religious teachings were oral, liturgical, and with iconographic material³³, and few priests were able to interpret the images and explain them in a way accessible to the public. The same was true of the evangelical parables and catechisms. Thus, aiming at forming a clergy specialized in the evangelization of peasants, Saint Vincent de Paul organized the Congregation of the Mission, considered by him essential in that context, since he gave up missioning in the cities and conquering ecclesiastical positions in order to “serve” the peasants and “save their souls from sin.”

At the beginning, the Vincentians “worked first in the places where the mission had been founded, and then went on to carry it out in other parishes, particularly those of the Diocese of Paris”³⁴. From 1645, the Lazarists began missions in other European countries and beyond, arriving in Tunisia (1645), Italy (1642), Algeria (1645), Madagascar (1648), and Poland (1650)³⁵.

It is noted, in the “path of perfection” traced out for the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission by its founders, the main objective was, in simple language, to “instruct and catechize

31 DELUMEAU, Jean. *Um chemin d'histoire: chrétienté et christianisation*. Paris: Fayard, 1981. p. 159.

32 Ibidem, p. 17.

33 Between the 16th and 17th centuries, Catholics produced a huge set of religious images with a pedagogical content in order to teach about sin, vice and how to reach paradise. These could be large paintings or drawings. Its content contained symbolic representations of vices or hell. For example: animals, women, fruits, usually meaning specific vices. There was also the apocalyptic Beast and Hell in order to impute fear on the population. This material was used by the priests to educate the faithful. Cf. DELUMEAU, Jean. *O pecado e o medo: a culpabilização no Ocidente (séculos 13-18)*. Bauru: Edusc, 2003. v. 1. p. 447-452.

34 ABELLY, op. cit., p. 110.

35 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1642-1762. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 1, p. 2, 1877. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3cknnPH>. Acesso em: 20 set. 2019.

the poor,” especially those who lived in more distant places, besides helping the sick and strengthening the sacramental practice by encouraging the general confessions. Later they also included teaching as one of the goals of the congregation³⁶.

2.1. *The normative*

In the first article of the congregational rules, entitled “*On the purpose and institution of this Congregation*” or “*From the end and Institute of the Congregation of the Mission*” [Art. 1], the objectives of the group and its composition were defined. They were part of that ecclesiastical and lay religious community, and the determinations imposed by the rules were directed to the Lazarist clergy, while the laity were to assist the religious.

At the beginning of Article 1 the main precepts of the Congregation of the Mission are listed:

- 1) To apply himself to his own perfection, striving according to his strength to exercise the virtues which that Great Master deigned to teach us by word and example.
- 2) To preach the gospel to the poor, especially those in the field.
- 3) To help the Ecclesiastics to acquire the sciences and virtues necessary to their state.³⁷

With this justification, St. Vincent made it clear to his brothers, from the very beginning, the Congregation sought to imitate Christ, including in the formulation of the general rules of the institute. Like Jesus, only after 30 years of missionary practices and experiences with other members of the community were the rules compiled to instruct their followers.

36 SANTIROCCHI, Pryscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Evangelizare pauperibus misite me: ortodoxia e ortoprática dos padres lazaristas nas missões do Ceará (1870-1877)*. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019. p. 52.

37 REGRAS ou constituições comuns da Congregação da Missão (1658), traduzidas por padre Antônio Ferreira Viçoso, Superior da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão, em dezembro de 1839. Arquivo D. Viçoso, Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Santuário do Caraça, p. 3.

To imitate Christ, “the Lazarists should walk through villages and towns preaching in them and teaching doctrine³⁸. Thus, this Congregation had as its main activity the *missions* of evangelization of the poor, especially the peasants, since the evangelization of all peoples through missions is one of the foundations of the universalization of Catholicism, as mentioned above. In chapter 11 of the rules, St. Vincent emphasized that “the Missions are the first and principal work among the other exercises for others; therefore, the Congregation must never omit them under the pretext of another lavish work”³⁹. For the founder of the Lazarists, the missions were also necessary for the popularization of the sacraments, and general confessions were fundamental, which, according to him, did not always take place with the local parish priests, out of suspicion or shame:

another reason to assist the people: it is in relation to those who do not make good confessions and who deliberately silence some mortal sins; because these people do not receive absolution and, when they die in this state, they condemn themselves forever. And how many do we find that keep quiet out of shame!⁴⁰

In order for Lazarist missionaries to be prepared to work in rural areas and for the secular clergy to be reformed, the Mission Congregation chose to invest also in *clerical training*. In the beginning, St. Vincent had no intention of leading his congregation to work in diocesan seminaries, but the context of Catholic reform in which he was inserted led him to “dedicate himself to making good priests”⁴¹. Training of clergy would therefore be a complement to the missions, a “work” dedicated to the “progress” of the Church: “How must the

38 REGRAS ou constituições comuns da Congregação da Missão (1658), traduzidas por padre Antônio Ferreira Viçoso, Superior da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão, em dezembro de 1839. Arquivo D. Viçoso, Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Santuário do Caraça. p. 3.

39 Ibidem, chap. 11, art. 10, p. 35.

40 Conferencia del 6 de diciembre de 1658 sobre la finalidad de la Congregación de la Misión [195, XII, 73-94]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11. p. 389.

41 Ibidem, p. 391.

poor missionaries give themselves to you in order to contribute to the formation of good priests, since it is the most difficult work, the highest, the most important for the salvation of souls and the progress of Christianity”⁴².

By also treating as a mission the training of the clergy, St. Vincent assumed for the institute which he founded the responsibility of training “good” priests so that they would “save” the Catholic faith, that is, from education in the seminaries, the Catholic clergy would be instructed in “sciences and virtues” according to the Tridentine precepts. At the same time they would have a preparation to interpret and explain biblical texts, as well as to learn a model of “holiness” that they should apply and serve as an example to the faithful. In the Vincentian perspective, “The happiness of Christianity depends on priests, since the good faithful, when they come to a good ecclesiastic, to a charitable pastor, venerate him and listen to his voice, seeking to copy him”⁴³.

2.2. Being Vincentian: elements of a missionary model

In laying down the rules of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent de Paul intended to draw up a missionary model to be followed by the Lazarist priests. In this sense, the precepts of the Regulation would have to be read daily at seminars or during missions so that they were always being remembered, internalized, and put into practice. The priests appointed as superiors in the missions needed to ensure the regulations were observed and enforced⁴⁴. Thus, “the daily incorporation of a model” of respect for rules, hierarchical obedience, and mercy were sought⁴⁵.

42 Resumen de una conferencia sobre la formación del clero [4, XI, 7-8]. In: PAÚL, op. cit., p. 702.

43 Resumen de una conferencia sobre la formación del clero [4, XI, 7-8]. In: PAÚL, loc. cit.

44 Consejos durante el retiro anual de 1635 [84, XI, 103-104]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11, p. 28.

45 AIRIAU, Paul. La formation sacerdotale en France au XIXe. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, Paris, n. 133, p. 27-44, 2006. p. 29.

The rules and norms were intended to “structure as much as possible the behavior and psychological dispositions” of the missionaries⁴⁶. The values and habits proper to the Congregation of the Mission needed to be aligned so that they could be incorporated by the Lazarists, for this reason the need for

respect for the rule, in other words habits repeated daily. *Habits are the source of holiness*. They are in a mediating position [...] ensuring the inscription of ecclesiastical society (its mental and behavioral rules) in the individual (those who live the customs, it is determined by them) and from the individual to the ecclesiastical society (which is perpetuated by him, does not exist only for him and his fellow men and can thus determine him).⁴⁷

In this sense, the individual (Lazarist) and the community (congregation) in which he was inserted were interdependent. The structuring of a Vincentian way needed to be presented and reinforced on a daily basis so that individuals could adhere to it. This was also crucial for the maintenance of the congregation, since it was up to the Lazarists to continue it, based on the founding values and habits.

If the precepts of the Congregation were not reaffirmed and there were no attempts to put them into practice, that religious group would disintegrate, therefore, the perpetuation of the group’s rules ensured its survival. These rules were guided by values that were to become daily habits, which the religious would acquire during training. The Vincentian missionaries, therefore, were conditioned to follow the “virtues” concerning their group⁴⁸. The founders of the Congregation devised a missionary model perceptible in the normative elements contained in the rules and conferences. By presenting some traits of this model, our objective is not to profile in a static way what a Vincentian missionary would be, or to affirm

46 AIRIAU, loc. cit.

47 Ibidem, p. 30 (our translation, emphasis added).

48 AIRIAU, Paul. La formation sacerdotale en France au XIXe. *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, Paris, n. 133, p. 27-44, 2006.

that everyone acted according to this model. In fact, a congregation builds in its guidelines a “mirror” to be followed, but the needs for universalization and actions in different contexts generally lead to the flexibilization of this model.

Let us reflect on the type of missionary that Vincent de Paul intended to create and spread. One of the first points is the *model of holiness* inspired by Jesus Christ, and among the main values that form the Congregation of the Mission are the *search for holiness, chastity, poverty, mercy, obedience/humility, modesty, and mortification*. In addition, we find incentives for *instruction* and *adaptation* in order to deal with different situations during missions. This last point reinforces the proposal of the mission rules, which should be based on “experience”⁴⁹. For Vincent de Paul, his congregation imitated the footsteps of Christ in their entirety, since he and his disciples did not shy away from living among the people, walking in the villages, preaching, and instructing where they passed, but continued to live far from the world by following the “virtues” of Christ. Moreover, living in contact with the outside world could be a more difficult path of perfection due to exposure to temptations, so they would be more “blessed,” because more “love of the Rule” and control of their “passions” would be required of them⁵⁰.

Following the rules, the Vincentians, when they formed priests, soon left the seminary for external missionary activities among the laity and did not remain prisoners in monasteries. At the end of the missions, they returned to the Mother House and waited until they received a new call from their superior to return to the field or they left immediately to mission elsewhere.

To achieve his goals, the missionary should detach himself from his possessions, personal relationships and affection for his native land. At the Conference of June 8, 1658, Vincent de Paul reflected on

49 REGRAS ou constituições comuns da Congregação da Missão (1658), traduzidas por padre Antônio Ferreira Viçoso, Superior da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão, em dezembro de 1839. Arquivo D. Viçoso, Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Santuário do Caraça. p. 12-33.

50 Conferencia del 8 de junio de 1658 sobre el desprendimiento de los bienes terrenos [182, XII, 19-26]. In: PAÛL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. II, p. 336-337 (our translation).

the removal of earthly goods and the means to achieve this end. In this sense, he designates submission to the simple vows⁵¹ of *chastity, poverty, and obedience* as essential for the missionary to attain the ascetic life⁵². The *vow of poverty* was established for the Lazarists so they would give up any material “attachment” that hindered their improvement and “surrender” to the missions. When entering the congregation and professing the vows, the missionary who had “real estate and simple benefits,” or possessed them in the future, “though they had dominion over them all,” could not use them freely nor “retain the fruits that come from these goods”⁵³. Even if the missionary lived in a state of poverty, his work should be done free of charge, and this would be a “very important means to produce fruit among the people,” since it would lead them to see the Lazarists as men sanctified by being “selfless”⁵⁴.

The *merciful life* of the missionary was also organized in Vincentian rules. In this sense, like Jesus and his disciples, the Vincentian missionaries would have to “retire sometimes to solitude, give themselves to prayer and the like”⁵⁵. In his sermons, they exhorted the people about the importance of the sacraments and the attendance to them, that is why Vincent de Paul considered the missionaries needed to be the example of this sacramental practice, having to confess “twice, at least once a week, to one of the confessors of the house, determined for this, and not to others [...] and they

51 The vows are commitments that Catholic priests assume in their training, and the breaking of these oaths is considered a sin and can lead to the removal of the religious from the Order to which he belongs. The Congregation of the Mission adopted the most basic vows of Catholicism.

52 Conferencia del 8 de junio de 1658 sobre el desprendimiento de los bienes terrenos [182, XII, 19-26]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11.

53 Breve sobre el voto de pobreza emitido en la Congregación de la Misión, 12 ago. 1659 [120, XIII, 406-409]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 10, p. 553 (our translation).

54 Conferencia del 21 de noviembre de 1659 sobre la pobreza [218, XII, 386-398]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11, p. 655-656.

55 REGRAS ou constituições comuns da Congregação da Missão (1658), traduzidas por padre Antônio Ferreira Viçoso, Superior da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão, em dezembro de 1839. Arquivo D. Viçoso, Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Santuário do Caraça, chap. 10, art. 1, p. 27.

will celebrate Mass every day if there is no obstacle⁵⁶. This merciful attitude of the Lazarist, according to Vincent de Paul, would bring security to the people, making them accept the missions and admire the figure of the missionary.

The Lazarists would have to take away from themselves the love of the homeland, of the family, and be ready to obey when they were chosen for missions in distant countries. Resignation would therefore be a value to be cultivated. Love for the homeland could be a hindrance to the dedication and obedience of the missionaries, who should become indifferent to specific ministries and places, being “willing and ready to leave all this willingly [...] to the nod of the superior”⁵⁷. They could be sent to work anywhere in the world and when they went on mission to other countries or provinces, they almost never returned to their place of origin.

The Lazarists needed to renounce “excessive love for relatives,” for “flesh and blood,” This features could serve as an “embarrassment to Christian perfection.” Thus, during their stay at the seminars, they would be trained to “feel no attachment, not even to relatives and friends, [...] to their interests” etc. For Vincent de Paul, the true missionary would be a man “who thinks only of God, his salvation and that of his neighbor”⁵⁸.

This detachment was fundamental for all the attention of the missionaries to turn to their institute, enabling them to see the world as their zone of activity and contributing to the spirit of the universalization of the congregation. Thus, those who decided to become Lazarists should abandon their entire past life to give themselves entirely to the tasks of their congregation and have as a family their own religious community.

An indispensable instrument for a missionary was his ability to communicate. Thus, communication strategies should be developed

56 Ibidem, chap. 10, art. 1, item 6, p. 29-30.

57 Ibidem, chap. 2, art. 10, p. 11.

58 Conferencia del 8 de junio de 1658 sobre el desprendimiento de los bienes terrenos [182, XII, 19-26]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11, p. 341 (our translation).

in accordance with the target audience, increasing their efficiency, and it is therefore necessary to develop a communication culture. The first point for a congregation that wanted to expand to the whole orbe was that missionaries should study several languages to better adapt to the places and exercise their office more easily.

In addition, they received instructions on how to preach to achieve “good results,” the goal of their instruction. For this reason, Vincent de Paul did not encourage them to think about the superficiality of his rhetoric or only about science, because for him this would stimulate his missionaries to be proud and, instead of carrying out their actions thinking about the community, they would focus on themselves, demonstrating their intelligence and oratory⁵⁹. In this way, Vincent de Paul returns to the theme of the “personal improvement” of the Lazarist. According to him, the missionary who is only concerned with speaking well or praising himself for the knowledge he has acquired would be moving away from his own perfection, which would divert the focus from the fulfillment of rules, from prayer, penance, etc. With this in mind, he encouraged his missionaries to exercise humility from humiliations imposed by the superiors or by themselves, that is, they should obey the impositions of the superiors without restriction, acquiring the “habit of asking nothing, refusing nothing.” In this regard, for Vincent de Paul, the superiors should know exactly the “remedies” for the “evils” which afflicted each of his missionaries, who in turn should blindly obey any impositions in confession or in daily life, as long as it did not seem “sin” to them⁶⁰.

The Lazarists had thus to accept in a submissive way everything that was ordered to them, and respect for the hierarchy was constantly reinforced. They should obey their superiors on mission or in the congregational houses and, if they did not do so, they would

59 Repetición de la oración del 9 de junio de 1658 sobre o dom de línguas [183, XII, 26-29]. In: PAÚL, San Vicente de. *Obras completas*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974b. t. 11.

60 REGRAS ou constituições comuns da Congregação da Missão (1658), traduzidas por padre Antônio Ferreira Viçoso, Superior da Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão, em dezembro de 1839. Arquivo D. Viçoso, Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Santuário do Caraça, chap. 5, arts. 1, 2 and 4, p. 16-17.

be punished. We must not forget, when they were on mission in the dioceses, they would have to obey the bishops in the same way, which made them great allies of the dioceses to administer or reform their dioceses.

As mentioned above, Vincentian priests were prepared primarily for mission and should be prepared to go on mission at any time. The decision of who would go to the French countryside or to other countries to evangelize was up to the superior, and it was up to the cleric only to accept. The Vincentian priests could do other work, such as teaching in the seminaries, caring for nursing homes, directing the Sisters of Charity etc., but only with the permission of the superior and if they had previously been missioned. In addition, they should be ready to leave their tasks to go on missions when they are chosen.

The Lazarists, as well as Catholicism in general, had a universalist goal since they set out to bring “salvation” to the poor all over the world. Thus, they went through various countries in evangelical missions, seeking to apply a missionary model standardized by the rules that should be constantly internalized by the priests, but at the end of the 18th century, the French Revolution hit the congregation hard.

3. The reform of fr. Étienne: control, expansion, and universalization

Catholic orders and associations suffered greatly from the revolutionary periods of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In France, during the French Revolution, religious groups were disbanded or had their institutions and members reduced. This was due to the “secularization of their assets and the condition of paid employees”⁶¹. The Congregation of the Mission had the Mother House (Priory of St. Lazarus) looted on July 13, 1789, with some

61 LEFEBVRE, Georges. *A Revolução Francesa*. São Paulo: Ibrasa, 1966. p. 163.

convents burned and many Vincentians killed⁶². Moreover, during the period of revolutionary government, that group had all their houses suppressed, only recovering years later, during the monarchic restoration⁶³. The problems faced by the center of the Congregation ended up being reflected in the periphery, since the provinces were left without general direction and had to make decisions autonomously, often constituting a national reorganization, such as, for example, the Portuguese Province of the Congregation of the Mission, which sent missionaries to Brazil in 1819. Already in 1834 it was the turn of the Portuguese Province to be extinguished by the government, while the Congregation in Brazil, after Independence, came to be considered a foreign force by the patriots and the regalists. Such circumstances ended up forcing the creation of the Brazilian Province, totally autonomous. The situation was not much different in other countries⁶⁴.

However, the Congregation of the Mission was not the only one to face these problems and try to reorganize itself. According to Martina (2005), the 19th century is both a period of crisis and a promising development for Catholic associations:

The crisis is irrefutably documented by various documents and facts: the plan of reform presented in 1814 to Pius VII by the future Cardinal Joseph Sala; the institution of a congregation “of reform,” which worked from 1814 to 1828, whose soul was Sala itself; the creation, in 1846, of a new congregation, “On the state of the regulars,” with the specific mission of studying the most opportune measures for the renewal of consecrated life; the two researches promoted respectively by Leo XII, in 1827, and by the congregation created by Pius IX, in 1846; the postulates of various episcopates on the occasion of Vatican I. The evil consisted essentially in the little observance of the vow of poverty

62 FERNANDES, Thales Contin. *Cartuxos em casa, apóstolos nas aldeias: a espiritualidade lazarista e a reforma católica no bispado de Mariana (1820-1890)*. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, 2019.

63 MILON, Alfred. *Congregation de la Mission (lazaristes): repertoire historique*. Paris: Congregation de la Mission, 1900. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/36OfZj6>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

64 On the subject, cf. OLIVEIRA, Gustavo de Souza. *Aspectos do ultramontanismo oitocentista: Antônio Ferreira Viçoso e a Congregação da Missão em Portugal e no Brasil (1811-1875)*. 2015. Tese (Doutorado em História) – Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2015.

and, in general, of the common life, in the insufficient selection and formation of the candidates, in the frequent quarrels of the religious among themselves, and with the secular clergy. In short, the old guard, on returning to the convent after the Napoleonic dispersion, was not willing to renounce the freedom he had enjoyed for a long time; the new generations, had grown up in the new environment, gradually settled in. The political turmoil and frequent dispersions, the judicialism of many governments made the situation worse.⁶⁵

There were three main measures for reforming Catholic institutes indicated by the Holy See: 1) pressure for the reestablishment of common life; 2) better selection of candidates for membership in associations; and 3) support for all reform initiatives promoted by the grassroots⁶⁶. The institutional crisis, which fragmented and disorganized the Congregation of the Mission, was only effectively fought during Fr. Jean-Baptiste Étienne (1843-1874), described by his biographer⁶⁷ as the “second founder” of the Vincentians. He would have made them return to the “true spirit of St. Vincent”⁶⁸, from the recrudescence of discipline, regularity, and fidelity to common rules⁶⁹. The emphasis given by this superior to the congregational “primitive spirit” also meant a reaction to the attempts to “modernize” the group itself, that is, Father Étienne defended the Vincentian rules and encouraged his confreres not to deviate from them.

In 1847, however, a group of Italian priests from the Province of Piedmont tried to reformulate the rules and reorganize the

65 MARTINA, Giacomo. *História da Igreja: de Lutero aos nossos dias: a era do liberalismo*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2005. v. 3, p. 120.

66 MARTINA, op. cit.

67 The writer of the biography *Vie de M. Étienne* opted for anonymity and signed the book as “A priest of the Mission”. VIE de M. Étienne: X^{IV}e Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission et de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité. Paris: Gaume, 1881. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/33VF174>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

68 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, p. 4, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhl>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

69 SOUZA, José Evangelista. *Província mineira da Congregação da Missão*. Contagem: Santa Clara, 1999. p. 5.

congregation⁷⁰, an attempt severely repressed by the Superior General, and their authors were punished. In the opinion of Fr. Étienne, the Lazarists should not bow to “new ideas” nor adapt to “modern times,” but rather reinforce their founding guidelines⁷¹. In his first Circular Letter to the Lazarists, he positioned himself as follows:

I invite you to flee from all novelty and connect them from the depths of their entrails to the ancient and venerable maxims that our fathers transmitted to us. Let us seek to shine in the church of God, not by a knowledge that swells, but [...] let us remain on the path of our predecessors [...] who showed us all the wisdom of the rules and [...] in our Constitutions an impregnable bulwark that will always save the Company [...] from danger, if we know how to close ourselves up with an unbreakable fidelity.⁷²

The opposition to “modernity” advocated by Fr. Etienne was in line with the orientations of ultramontanist proposed by Pope Pius IX⁷³. Thus, many of the actions coordinated by the Superior General were part of a wider movement of reform of Catholic religious institutes in the 19th century⁷⁴, which included the restoration of

70 This group of Italian Vincentians, influenced by the moment of political renewal in Italy during the 19th century, proposed a democratization of the congregation. According to Fr. Étienne, they wanted to turn it into a “kind of sovereignty of the people.” They even took their proposals to Pope Pius IX, but they were rejected in a letter from Fr. Étienne dated June 1848 and during the General Assembly of 1849, in which the Common Rules were reaffirmed. Cf. RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019; VIE de M. Étienne: XIVe Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission et de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité. Paris: Gaume, 1881. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/33VFl74>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

71 RECUEIL... op. cit., p. 17.

72 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, p. 17, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

73 It should be noted the Fr. Étienne and Pope Pius IX maintained a relationship of proximity and mutual support. The superior of the Lazarists was one of the first to position himself in favor of the papal dogma of infallibility. Cf. VIE de M. Étienne: XIVe Supérieur Général de la Congrégation de la Mission et de la Compagnie des Filles de la Charité. Paris: Gaume, 1881. p. 503-518. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/33VFl74>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

74 RECUEIL..., op. cit.

unity, hierarchy, and Roman liturgy; the elaboration of seminary rules and support for new devotions such as the Miraculous Medal and the “Red Scapular”⁷⁵.

Despite the speech of Fr., the spirit of the original Congregation of the Mission was taken up again by Etienne, a tension present at the time of the foundation was already pacified: that of the Jansenists and anti-Jansenists, of the rigorists and anti-rigorists. The probability, defended by the apex of the Church, was consolidating in the face of rigor, therefore some visions held by Vincent de Paul, which sometimes brought him closer to the rigorists, such as, for example, that the ignorant of the biblical message would be condemned, no longer made sense in the middle of the 19th century⁷⁶. In this new context it was important to encourage, not hinder, the frequency of the sacraments, including the Eucharist. At the same time, together with other religious institutes, the Lazarists sought to spread a more indulgent, popular mercy, certainly more adapted to the taste of the masses than to the mentality of restricted intellectual circles, founded on frequency to the sacraments, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Our Lady, the emphasis given to “practices of mercy” and the various devotions to the saints or to particular aspects of the figures of Christ and the Virgin, with novenas, processions, pilgrimages, exercises, congresses.⁷⁷

One of the first efforts of the Superior General was to reorganize and strengthen the hierarchy of the congregation, giving special attention and emphasis to the system of communication under the responsibility of each of these instances. Below we present an organization chart, demonstrating parts of the hierarchical structure:

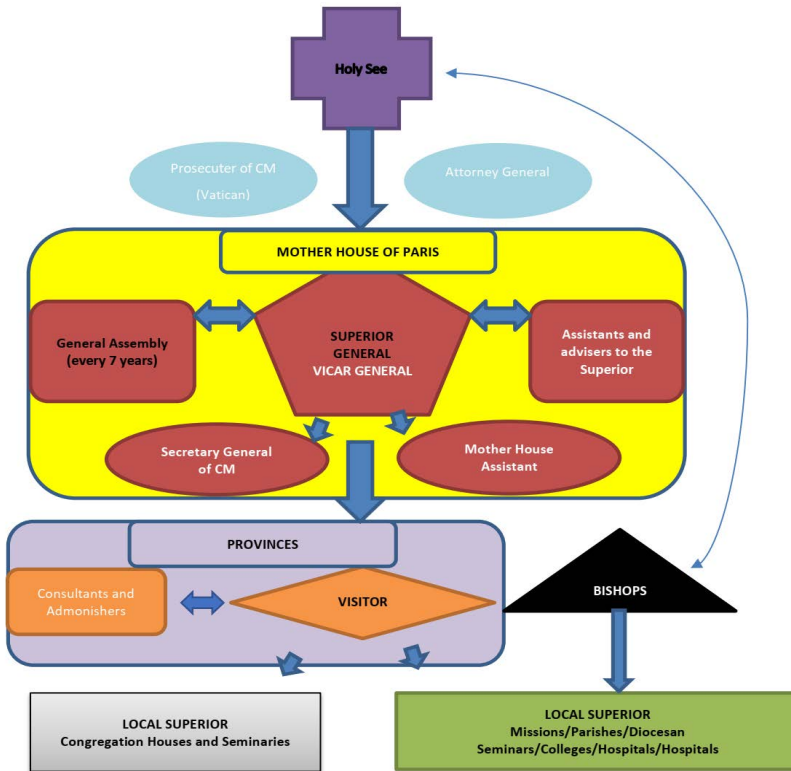
⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ SANTIROCCHI, Pryscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Evangelizare pauperibus misite me: ortodoxia e ortoprática dos padres lazaristas nas missões do Ceará (1870-1877)*. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019.

⁷⁷ MARTINA, Giacomo. *História da Igreja: de Lutero aos nossos dias: a era do liberalismo*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2005. v. 3, p. 123.

Organization Chart 1

hierarchical scheme



CM: Congregation of the Mission.

Source: RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhl>. Acesso em: 29 set.

Each of these positions or *figures* had specific duties and all needed to work in uniformity to contribute to the good functioning of the group. The Superior General was the leader of the congregation, whose functions were the general administration and the organization of general assemblies (every seven years) to promote decrees, make decisions, and reconcile internal differences. In his absence, the Vicar

General assumed such functions. He was also responsible for calling and chairing general assemblies for the elections of new superiors⁷⁸.

The Superior General had the help of *assistants* and *counselors* to better direct and organize the institution. His work was fundamental, since he could develop functions such as answering the missionaries' letters and formulating strategies so that their action in the various countries would be more efficient.

Generally, the Superior General communicated with his brothers by means of Circular Letters with which he gave advice⁷⁹, distributed duties and exhorted the Lazarists to the tasks and congregational rules. In addition, these letters were important *instruments of information* about the decisions taken during the assemblies on the ways of the Congregation. In each province of the Congregation there was a visiting priest and local superiors, the great majority formed by the Mother House in Paris and sent to work in the provinces. The former should act as the representative of the Superior General in the provinces, being the spokesperson for the decrees of the general assemblies and circular letters, and exercising vigilance and control over the local superiors and their missionary and/or formative establishments in a particular country.

The local superiors, in turn, administered specific missions or houses, such as seminars or schools. His task was to coordinate local activities in the establishments and to watch over his confreres. The consultants had the role of advising, while the admonishers were to point out possible failures in the actions of superiors and visitors. During the superiorate of Fr. Étienne not all the provinces counted on those last positions.

The Fr. Étienne knew it was necessary for the different congregational offices to act in uniformity, with submission to their

78 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

79 According to the documentation, some 55 circular letters were sent by Father. Étienne during his superiorate. Cf. RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

respective superiors and maintaining efficient communication. In the first assembly he presided in 1843, he stressed the provincial administrators needed “to have the same thought, the same intentions and the same rules of conduct” of the Mother House in order to “fight for the same objective” and “act in perfect harmony”⁸⁰. For this, it was necessary there be “union between the various rings of the hierarchy of authority”⁸¹.

It was exactly this convergence that was missing when Fr. Étienne took over the direction of the congregation. In the General Assembly of 1843, internal problems, which they called “abuses,” present in the local administrations, were presented, such as 1) lack of uniformity and communication among superiors general, visitators, and local superiors; 2) constant visits to family members; 3) disobedience and insubmission to the hierarchy; 4) negligence of superiors in controlling the correspondence of inferiors; 5) lack of annual reporting on the progress of the missions in each province by visitators and local superiors⁸². The House’s concern was that

these disturbances could only weaken the power of authority, deprive it of everything that would make it respectable in the eyes of those below and lose its esteem and confidence, conditions essential to [...] action and without which it must necessarily commit itself and perish.⁸³

As a consequence of the disarticulation between the congregational hierarchy, the superiors pointed out the “inferiors” forgot to practice the common rules, the vow of obedience and began to censure the administrations of their superiors⁸⁴. The local superiors, for their part, were not exercising due vigilance over their subordinates, ignoring the numerous correspondence of the

80Ibidem, p. 21 (our translation).

81 Ibidem, p. 19 (our translation).

82 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, p. 21-25, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

83 Ibidem, p. 19 (our translation).

84 RECUEIL..., loc. cit.

confreres under their administration. According to Fr. Etienne, such letters were inconvenient, since

besides the time spent writing useless letters, and the expenses of the post office which are violations of the *vow of poverty*, experience has provided us with ample evidence that it is especially in these letters that [the brothers] take care to censor the conduct of their superiors, [...] communicate [...] their ways of thinking, their discontent and the judgments they exercise over their confreres.⁸⁵

The conclusion reached by the brothers present at the Assembly was that such “violations” needed to be “promptly repressed.” Thus, the internal correspondence of the houses should first pass through the hands of the superior in order to have a greater control, which could correct the disrespect for the hierarchy and avoid possible internal divisions. Another crucial point to promote a greater cohesion of the group should be the removal of political affairs and patriotic passions, that is, the leaders of the Congregation of the Mission reproached the involvement of the Vincentians in politics, since it would be a further distraction from the outside world.

Upon arriving at the post of Superior General, Fr. Étienne tried to organize rules of surveillance in the seminaries and houses of the congregation, prohibiting that “public newspapers” continue to enter those spaces without the proper filter or control. The reading of the periodicals was restricted to the superiors, while the seminarians and confreres who were coadjutors could not have access to them⁸⁶. In the view of the Lazarists gathered in the General Assembly of 1849, concerns about politics would be harmful to the missions, since they would weaken “the love and practice of the maxims of St. Louis. Vincent and harm his piety and inner spirit,” that is, the missionary’s conduct could be “diverted,” and his works directed to other paths

85 Ibidem, p. 22 (our translation, emphasis added).

86 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhl>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

than those of his “vocation”⁸⁷. Finally, Fr. Étienne urged visitors and local superiors to do everything in their power

to persuade all missionaries under his direction to exercise the utmost caution in their conversations with outsiders, to always show foreign eyes to all political opinion and especially to show such in their preaching to the people, avoiding any allusion and insinuation in such matters.⁸⁸

It would thus be the task of the visitators and local superiors to watch over and advise the missionaries not to talk about politics in their places of work and never to make the slightest allusion to the subject in their sermons. Missionaries would have to remain neutral in the most diverse places of the world, focused only on vocational duties. Those who did not act in this way would be denounced to the Superior General by the visitors and local superiors and would suffer punishment for their behavior.

One of the ways of communicating the events to the Mother House was the annual sending of general reports by the superiors and visitators, and they were recommended to take “the necessary steps to obtain the information and transmit it” to the Superior General⁸⁹. Thus, a fixed correspondence within the provinces was also established. The local superiors of missions and seminaries should write to the visitators, while they would make a general report to the Mother House. It was also required that local superiors send the Superior General more detailed annual reports on each location⁹⁰.

The reports should cover the progress of the missions and the “spiritual fruits obtained in the missions, retreats, and other functions of the institute”⁹¹. The specifics of each place should also be detailed to

87 Ibidem, p. 125 (our translation).

88 Ibidem, p. 127 (our translation).

89 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamérot, v. 3, p. 24, 1880 (our translation). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

90 Ibidem.

91 Ibidem, p. 24 (our translation).

facilitate possible problem solving and prepare future missionaries for their tasks. By requesting this type of report from its brothers, the intention of the Mission Congregation was to be aware of the places where its groups were working and to prepare new missionaries in view of this information, since obtaining knowledge about the field of work gave greater power and enabled the organization of control strategies. The recommendation to send letters to the superior was already present in the rules of offices since the foundation, but they were not followed by everyone.

As reinforced by Fr. Étienne, communication between the periphery and the core was “the point of rule of the highest importance for the good government of the Society, because that is how the Superior General can have an exact knowledge of the state of each house, [...] of the affairs and the way in which the functions of our Institute are carried out”⁹². This was the way found by the Superior General of the Vincentians to manage the various provinces founded during his administration.

At that time an effective policy of expansion of the group to various continents (Europe, America, Asia, and Africa) was developed, but, as we have seen, the whole hierarchical system had been undone, so Father Étienne had to lead all the autonomous Lazarist provinces back to obedience and submission to the Mother House in Paris.

The following box shows the intense expansion of the Congregation during Fr. The table is organized in four columns: country (the option of organizing this column by country, not by province, is due to the space limitations of the article); type of activity (seminars, colleges, missions, etc.); number of localities (cities or towns where they are present in each country) and beginning (the year in which the activities began in a certain country or the year in which an autonomous province of a certain country returned to obedience to the Mother House).

92 Ibidem, p. 16 (our translation).

Box 1
Order distribution and expansion

Continent	Country	Type of performance	No. of locations	Beginning
EUROPE	France	Seminar, missions, parish administration	38	1844
	Turkey	School, missions	2	1845
	Italy	School, missions, pensions	6	1846
	Ireland	Missions, seminar	6	1846
	Spain	Missions, seminar	5	1846
	Prussia	Missions, pensions, Parish admiration, seminary	9	1851
	Austria	Missions	5	1852
	Portugal	Missions, hospital, hospice	5	1857
	Krakow (Poland)	Mission	1	1867
AMERICA	Mexico	Missions, seminars, school	5	1845
	United States of America	Missions, parish administration, School	5	1850
	Brazil	Missions, School, Seminary, hospital	8	1852
	Chile	Hospital	1	1853
	Peru	Missions, hospital	2	1857
	Argentina	Missions, hospital	3	1859
	Guatemala	Missions, hospital	1	1862
	Ecuador	Hospital, mission, seminar	2	1871
ASIA	Syria	Missions	2	1844
	China	Hospital, house, seminary, parish administration	4	1845
	Philippines	Seminar	4	1862
	Persia (Iran)	Mission	1	1862
AFRICA	Egypt	Missions and schools	4	1844
	Algeria	Seminar	3	1848

Source: RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

In 1843, when Fr. Étienne was elected Superior General, there were only 14 Lazarist houses under the authority of the Mother House in Paris, all in France and Algeria, with 166 missionaries. In March 1874, the date of death of the Superior, the number of houses reached 136, with 660 brothers present on the five continents of the globe⁹³, carrying out work in hospitals and colleges as well as in the administration of seminaries and parishes.

For the good functioning of the Congregation, it was necessary that the different hierarchical positions be standardized, and effective center-periphery and periphery-center communication be re-established efficiently. A complex of external and internal forum control instruments” was then elaborated, which sought to standardize “behaviors, practices, customs [...] and congregational norms”⁹⁴.

3.1. Flexibility strategies: adaptations, cultural exchanges, and experiences

As the Lazarist priests left France and ventured into the most diverse environments, they were subject to specific socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts. These spatial-temporal factors combined with the relationships between them and the local society (poor, rich, slaves, and original peoples) could generate changes in their “missionary structure, the messages, and the effects of their transformations”⁹⁵. It was precisely this flexibility that allowed the Congregation of the Mission to regulate the tension between the local and the universal, a fundamental factor for the success of Catholic evangelization. During the second half of the 19th century, several

93 RECUEIL DES PRINCIPALES CIRCULAIRES DES SUPÉRIEURS GÉNÉRAUX DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION: 1843-1878. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamérot, v. 3, 1880. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3ckjrhI>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

94 FANTAPPIÈ, Carlo. La Santa Sede e il mondo in prospettiva storicogiuridica. *Rechtsgeschichte: Legal History*, Frankfurt am Main, n. 20, p. 332-338, 2012. p. 335 (our translation).

95 GASBARRO, Nicola. Missões: a civilização cristã em ação. In: MONTEIRO, Paula (org.). *Deus na aldeia*. São Paulo: Globo, 2006. p. 67-109. p. 72.

Lazarist missionaries with French formation arrived in Brazil. This group sought to put into practice the precepts of the Congregation of the Mission, being called by the Brazilian bishops to assist them in the reform of the Church that they proposed to accomplish. Its work was centered in the educational, seminary, and mission fields with the people of the interior of Brazil⁹⁶.

One of the Brazilian provinces where the Vincentians were active was that of Ceará, located in the Northeast region of the country, where a new diocese was erected, encompassing its territory in 1860. The first Bishop, D. Luís Antônio dos Santos, who, after his appointment, wished to begin his work in the educational and pastoral fields, invited the Lazarists to help him⁹⁷. For this purpose, he liaised with the Mother House in Paris, and after a few denials, some Vincentians were sent to administer the newly created Episcopal Seminary of Ceará (1864)⁹⁸. In order to expand the work of those priests in the region, other Lazarists were sent from 1870: Guillaume Van de Sandt, Joseph Freitas, and Antoine Azémar⁹⁹, whose function was to work in the interior, in missions for rural populations and in small villages. Such missions remained active until 1876.

When they began their preaching, the Vincentian missionaries encountered a great political and economic neglect in the interior of the province, noting that while the political power invested in modernization works in the capital, Fortaleza, the interior was relegated to abandonment. The basic items for the survival of these populations were missing, as well as material structures such as

96 SANTIROCCHI, Ítalo D. *Questão de consciência: os ultramontanos no Brasil e o regalismo do Segundo Reinado (1840-1889)*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2015.

97 On the subject, cf. SANTIROCCHI, Priscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Evangelizare pauperibus misite me: ortodoxia e ortoprática dos padres lazaristas nas missões do Ceará (1870-1877)*. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019.

98 On the subject, cf. LEITE, Priscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Enviados do Senhor: os lazaristas franceses e a reforma ultramontana no Ceará (1864-1891)*. 2016. Monografia (Graduação em História) – Universidade Regional do Cariri, Crato, 2016.

99 For information on the priests cf. SANTIROCCHI, Priscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Evangelizare pauperibus misite me: ortodoxia e ortoprática dos padres lazaristas nas missões do Ceará (1870-1877)*. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019. p. 109.

churches, houses, cemetery, dams, wells, among others¹⁰⁰. The few churches that existed in the interior of the province were small, cramped, and in need of repair, and the cemeteries were in a similar situation, with people being buried in improvised graves in many places. An aggravating factor for this situation was that periods of drought were becoming more and more frequent, creating the need to build artesian wells to quench the population's thirst and help in agriculture¹⁰¹.

The government of the new diocese had great challenges, since most of the interior people lived in places far from the villages where there were churches, so they were far from an experience of institutional Catholicism. This population, despite having no religious instruction or attending the sacraments, believed in the Catholic saints and maintained devotions to them.

While the region of the new province was part of the very extensive diocese of Pernambuco and also after the creation of the diocese of Ceará, it was frequented since the colonial period by itinerant missionaries who did not always have the proper diocesan authorization.³ These priests were oratorian Jesuits, Capuchins, or secular priests who felt an intimate call to carry out missionary activities. Most of the time, the Catholicism developed by them was penitential and communitarian in character. These religious helped in the construction of charity houses, cemeteries, dams, and other works that the population needed¹⁰².

The attitudes of these missionaries benefited the marginalized and needy populations, which led them to join these missions en masse, because when they arrived in a locality, the needy population knew they would not only hear religious words, but also obtain more

100 Ibidem.

101 Cf. PINHEIRO, Francisco José. O homem livre/pobre e a organização das relações de trabalho no Ceará (1850-1880). *Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Fortaleza, v. 20/21, n. 1/2, p. 199-230, 1989; SANTOS, Martha S. Nem turbulentos, nem despossuídos: mudança social, honra masculina e violência sertaneja no interior da província do Ceará, 1845-1889. *Revista de História Regional*, Ponta Grossa, v. 15, n. 2, p. 50-75, 2010.

102 NOBRE, Edianne. *O teatro de Deus: as beatas do padre Cícero e o espaço sagrado de Juazeiro*. Fortaleza: Imeph, 2011.

dignified material conditions. As a result, local authorities accepted these activities, giving them support and sometimes asking the missionaries to settle in the locality, as Karsburg reports in his work on the Capuchins in Brazil. Even after the end of the missions, these missionary works continued to have an effect on the population¹⁰³.

The Lazarist missions were one of the ways the bishop of Ceará found to react to his unwanted missionary activities. In this sense, the Vincentians acted as representatives of the episcopal government, exercising control and vigilance in the various provincial locations. In interior missions they preached the gospel, confessed, regularized marriages, baptized, and christened thousands of Ceará people, invigorating the Catholic sacraments among the population, which meant an institutional strengthening of Catholicism in that space¹⁰⁴. After this small and necessary contextualization, we will present an example of flexibilization, carried out by the Lazarists during their seven years of performance in Ceará. As mentioned above, these populations were already experiencing a type of Catholicism, and some regions had already received missions, even from priests not authorized by diocesan power, so that these local experiences generated expectations in the Catholic faithful and led the Lazarists to flexibilize some traits of their religious model, adapting it to that particular context.

We used the letters reports written by the Lazarists who worked in Ceará and sent to the Superior in Paris. These letters are present in the *Annales de la Congregation de la Mission* and, from them, we can make analyses about the possible ways of relaxing the rules in that space. One of the main adaptations made by the Lazarists who worked in Ceará was what they called “*material works*,” which were not present in their missionary rules or practices. This adaptation was due to the material precariousness and as a response to the

103 KARSBURG, Alexandre de Oliveira. Os apóstolos dos sertões brasileiros: uma análise sobre o método e os resultados das missões religiosas dos capuchinhos italianos no século XIX. *Estudos Históricos*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 28, n. 55, p. 51-64, 2015.

104 Cf. SANTIROCCHI, Priscylla Cordeiro Rodrigues. *Evangelizare pauperibus misite me*: ortodoxia e ortoprática dos padres lazaristas nas missões do Ceará (1870-1877). 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019.

pressures of the faithful, who were accustomed to the works that other religious groups had already introduced. This experience was told by the missionaries themselves, as we can see in the following account by Fr. Joseph Freitas:

we have launched the execution of some *material works*. The Italian Capuchins, quite numerous in this empire, introduced this practice in all the provinces of Brazil where they made missions. *The people of Brazil are already so used to it that the missions, of which these works are not a complement, seem to them fruitless or null. It was necessary, therefore, to resign ourselves to this need.* Moreover, although these material works may have some inconvenience in relation to our main objective, it is certain, however, that they render a remarkable and often valuable service in the parishes where they are carried out [...] First we erected a shed placed in front of the village chapel, too small for the number of faithful who go there [...] We also opened a 40-meter-long cemetery, more than twenty wide, which we left finished. [...] No one was dismissed from this service, no one dismissed him. The local chaplain set an example and I began to carry the brick and sand with him. [...] we saw with pleasure the big bourgeoisie of the village, improvised among bricklayers [...], working with ardor, without worrying about the burning heat that made them melt in sweat. [...] In a fortnight, the masonry work was completed, and the cemetery was blessed.¹⁰⁵

We realized although the Lazarists did not have these “*material works*” as one of the components of their missionary model, they needed to adapt to the expectations of that population, to facilitate their adherence to the missions. If they did not carry out these “public works” in the villages, they would probably not be seen with good eyes by the population or local authorities, running the risk of seeing their missions considered “fruitless or null,” so they would not win the popular appreciation and the participation of the people in the activities. They chose, therefore, to “resign themselves” to this “need” of building houses, churches, wells, and cemeteries.

105 Letter from M. Joseph Freitas to M. Chinchon, assistant general. In: ANNALES DE LA CONGREGATION DE LA MISSION. Paris: Imprimerie Adolphe Lainé, v. 37, p. 507-508, 1872 (our translation). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2RQKg3D>. Acesso em: 2 jul. 2019.

The practice of “*material works*” in the Lazarist missions was an effective adaptation, in the sense that they had their missions recognized by even their fiercest critics. We have an example of this in an article in the liberal newspaper *Cearense*. The text is not signed, being its author identified only as a “resident of the city Ipú.” The article makes harsh criticism of the preaching of the Lazarists and their missions, but in the end, it highlights the “*material work*” done by them as the only positive thing of their missions in the site of Ipú:

Before we consign the friars to the contempt they deserve, let us mention an important service that they are commanding: a cemetery. Until now, thanks to the abandonment of spiritual things in this parish, the corpses were buried in an extreme field by some bricks, a branch, inside which the cattle grazed.¹⁰⁶

In a tone of contempt and sarcasm, the author of the article highlights the work of the cemetery as an important action for that village. Not only the “spiritual things,” but also all the public works were stopped or unfinished within the province, since the political power had relegated those “distant” lands of the capital to neglect and oblivion. The only hope the villagers had was that a “saint” missionary (regardless of his formation) would pass through so that he could work “miracles,” not only spiritual but also material.

In his letter, Fr. Freitas presented to the superior how those works had won over the parish “leaders,” in this case the local parish priests:

Thus, religion obtains with one word, in a very short time and for free, what the government would not accomplish with great words, in many months and for money. I am just repeating the reflection of the “boss” of this parish, when I saw an even larger cemetery which we had built, which he went to visit and whose prompt execution seemed impossible to him.¹⁰⁷

106 CEARENSE. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 29, n. 63, p. 3, 12 ago. 1875. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3mKROOM>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

107 Letter from M. Joseph Freitas to M. Chinchon, assistant general. In: ANNALES DE LA CONGREGATION DE LA MISSION. Paris: Imprimerie Adolphe Lainé, v. 37, p. 508, 1872 (our translation). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2RQKg3D>. Acesso em: 2 jul. 2019.

Just to give one last example, let us look at the following passage from the narrative of Father Freitas, recounting with enthusiasm how the local potentates worked side by side with their subordinates in the construction of a well in the location of Mecejana:

The people of Mecejana were in great need of water, in which they were forced to go very far, because the one from village itself was not very drinkable. So we had to dig an eight-meters-deep well, which shows the water was at a great distance from the surface of the ground. The workers, however, did not lose heart, and when they reached the water, their courage rose from enthusiasm to the unrestrained ardor of work; 20, 30 men or more remained until ten o'clock at night immersed in the mud to the waist, to finish this important and painful work. The next day, a little cognac prepared them to resume the previous day's work. Needless to say, all this was done for free. I remember seeing the most prominent figure of the place, the Fristian Major, working with the people at the bottom of the well at the height of the heat.¹⁰⁸

As said in the quote, the population of Mecejana was thirsty, unable to find drinking water, and needed to go look for it in other villages. When faced with such a situation, the Lazarists took the initiative, probably from popular pressure, to dig a well.

These narratives help us to demonstrate how the Lazarists analyzed their performance space and reacted to it by adapting themselves. Through the missives sent to the superior of the Congregation of the Mission it was possible to accumulate a greater knowledge of that place of work, an experience which facilitated the planning of future missions and led to the incorporation of new practices into the Lazarist “religious model” for that specific environment.

To close this article and the demonstration of the points we proposed to analyze in this item, we will deal with some episodes that, although they go beyond the period of Father Étienne's superiorate, help us to understand how the congregation reacted when the missionaries

108 Letter from M. Joseph Freitas to M. Chinchon, assistant general. In: ANNALES DE LA CONGREGATION DE LA MISSION, Paris: Imprimerie Adolphe Lainé, v. 37, p. 514, 1872 (our translation, emphasis added). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2RQKg3D>. Acesso em: 2 jul. 2019.

did not follow the directives of the superiors and something ended up going wrong. We need to start again with a contextualization.

In the final years of the missions in Ceará, the imperial state and the Catholic Church were in a state of great tension, and in 1872 a conflict between the two powers began, which became known as “Religious Matter.” It was a political-religious conflict involving the State, Freemasonry, the Church, and the lay brotherhoods. Two bishops, D. Vital (Diocese of Pernambuco) and D. Macedo Costa (Diocese of Pará), disregarding that some papal bull that condemned Freemasonry had not received the imperial approval to be valid in Brazilian territory, according to the constitution of 1824, began to ban those brotherhoods that had publicly assumed Freemason members and refused to abjure the secret society. The attitudes of the bishops were also a reaction to the provocations of the Masonic newspapers, which in these two provinces even published a list of the names of their affiliates so that the bishops would know which members of the brotherhoods were Masons. These episodes were also instrumentalized by the political parties of the empire. The two bishops ended up in prison in 1874, accused of disobedience to the Executive and Moderator powers, and were given amnesty in 1875. But the freedom of the bishops did not calm the spirits¹⁰⁹.

This escalation of tensions and positions in Ceará ended up involving the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission, who, contrary to the directives of their superiors and their rules, became entangled in political matters, leading to a reaction on the part of the political elite and the local potentates. The case occurred in the village of Pedra Branca, on October 14, 1876, and was presented by the newspapers *Constituição* [Constitution], aligned to the Conservative Party, and *Cearense*, aligned to the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, we cannot find the missives of the Lazarist priests narrating the events and presenting their version.

109 On the Religious Issue cf. SANTIROCCHI, Ítalo D. *Questão de consciência: os ultramontanos no Brasil e o regalismo do Segundo Reinado (1840-1889)*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2015; VIEIRA, David Gueiros. *O protestantismo, a maçonaria e a questão religiosa no Brasil*. Brasília, DF: Editora UnB, 1980.

According to the newspaper *Constituição*, the judicial authorities appealed directly to the President of the Province of Ceará to end a conflict that was devastating Pedra Branca, requesting the government, the

necessary measures to reestablish public order and guarantee the action of the authorities threatened by the *unrest* that produced the words of *two foreign clergymen*, entrusted with the service of the missions, *falling into the ignorant and fanatical population*.¹¹⁰

According to some letters published in *the Newspaper Cearense*, threats were made to civil and judicial authorities “by the people mutinied by the words of Fathers Guilherme and Antônio,” which stimulated “the violent removal of a prisoner from the power of justice¹¹¹. The local authorities asked the missionaries to intervene in the riot in order to “pacify” the village from the “state of [...] anarchy and conflagration” caused by the “criminal troublemakers,” but the missionaries were “strongly opposed to the enforcement of the legal coercive measures of such crimes” and put the village leaders on alert for “further attacks¹¹². According to the *Constituição Newspaper*, the president considered such occurrences alarming for “the moral situation of the spirits of this region and” sought to “provide them with prompt and effective remedy, as required by their nature and gravity.” Thus, it provided “a force of 50 line squares with two officers to maintain order and ensure the authorities comply with the law¹¹³. He also wrote letters to the bishop’s government in which he reported on the events and “begged” him for a diocesan position of intervention against the priests’ attitudes. To “refrain from any act

110 CONSTITUIÇÃO. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 14, n. 128, p. 1, 8 nov. 1876 (emphasis added). Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3kBptO3>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

111 CEARENSE. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 30, n. 112, p. 2, 9 nov. 1876a. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2FP2b8s>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

112 CEARENSE, 1876a, loc. cit.

113 CONSTITUIÇÃO. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 14, n. 128, p. 1, 8 nov. 1876. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3kBptO3>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

that might excite the religious passions of the people, recklessly and criminally diverting them from the path of duty and moderation¹¹⁴.

With this, the politicians, in the words of the *Newspaper Cearense*, wished they would no longer find “obstacles in the mentioned priests” and that “public order would not” continue “to suffer the effects of the unrest caused by them”¹¹⁵. In this way, that “barbaric spectacle” was solved and probably “the disturbing German missionaries of public order,” removed from that location¹¹⁶.

It is important to stress this was the last record we found about the Lazarist missionaries in Ceará and the only one from 1876. In the *catalogues of the personnel of the Congregation of the Mission*, the names of Fathers Sandt and Azémar were only listed as missionaries in Ceará until 1877, however the names in the catalogues for a specific year were equivalent to the activities of the previous year. Thus, it can be said their missions effectively lasted until 1876. After this date, they were transferred to Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro¹¹⁷.

We do not have any documents reporting the departure of the missionaries and the closure of the Lazarist missions in that diocese, but it can be seen from newspaper articles that the relations woven between the priests and the elite, in that space and in that tense context of the Religious Question, were marked by growing disagreements and confrontations. The apex was the “White Stone conflict,” in which the Lazarists stripped themselves of their “modesty” and forgot the guideline of not getting involved in local political issues, and even more seriously, excited the people to confront the local potentates in their preaching. The documents do not allow us to understand who

114 CONSTITUIÇÃO, loc. cit.

115 CEARENSE. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 30, n. 112, p. 2, 9 nov. 1876a. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2FP2b8s>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

116 CEARENSE. Fortaleza: [s. n.], ano 31, n. 115, p. 1, 19 nov. 1876b. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/2R-QdQX2>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

117 CATALOGUE DES MAISONS ET DU PERSONNEL DE LA CONGRÉGATION DE LA MISSION. Paris: Typographie Georges Chamerot, n. 19, p. 72, mar. 1876. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3cmd-NeW>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019; Idem, n. 18, p. 56, feb. 1877. Disponível em: <https://bit.ly/3kFLcUU>. Acesso em: 29 set. 2019.

the prisoner was, why he was arrested, nor the reason for the priests' exacerbated reaction.

There is a great departure from Vincentian norms in these missionaries' actions registered by the newspapers, creating political difficulties for the bishop and the government of the province. Such facts could even lead to the questioning of the Lazarist administration of the diocesan seminary or to the expulsion of the Congregation of the Mission in the province. Probably the missionaries were removed from Ceará to temporalize and calm the situation, allowing the continuity of the Lazarist activity in seminary teaching. By avoiding the norms and directives of the congregation, they put at risk all the work of their religious institute and had to be removed from the missions in that diocese. We do not know if there were any other consequences for the missionaries, such as internal punishments of the Congregation.

These missionaries have moved away from their religious model, for adopting a rigid and combative posture in times of conflict between religion and politics in Brazil. After leaving the "civilization" and the core of European "progress," the heart of the Catholic *civitas*, the Lazarist Fathers ventured into the countryside of the province of Ceará with the aim of fulfilling their Vincentian mission: *evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. As foreigners in a strange land, fed by faith and equipped with a simple and imperfect language, they faced the hard ways of the interior of the Empire and, after the Religious Question, the opposition of the local potentates, Freemasons, regalists, and liberals. The challenges and needs forged new experiences, putting to the test the flexibility of a congregational structure that sought universalization.

4. Conclusion

The Congregation of the Mission set out to carry its Catholic Christian message across the globe, its *missio*. To achieve these goals its congregants must follow a path of perfection, a *pietas*. Abandoning the passions of the world, they should leave their family

and exchange their homeland for a transnational action, in search of the universalization of their religious institute. Through rules created from the experiences of its founder and first superior, Vincent de Paul, a rigid hierarchy was established in which obedience, discipline and an efficient communication system were fundamental for the success of the expansion of the congregation.

With a little more than a century of existence, the Congregation of the Mission was put to a hard test with the French Revolution and the liberal revolutions of the 19th century, but using one of its foundations, flexibility, it adapted itself to the new context and the new spaces of action, without losing its identity, by means of an efficient reform and resumption of the institute in Fr. Étienne.

With a strong hierarchy, efficient communication, rigid discipline, and controlled adaptability, so as not to escape the spirit of the congregation, the Lazarists expanded, taking their *missio and pietas* to all continents, becoming efficient diocesan auxiliaries and important evangelizers of rural populations. Knowing how it works allows us to better understand the mechanisms that govern the Catholic Church, an ancient, transnational institution in search of universality.

In these few pages we were able to draw up some lines of analysis that allow us to study Catholic religious institutes in their transnational and universal aspects, as well as to indicate various possible ways of researching the history of the Congregation of the Mission in different areas of activity.

Primary documentation

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