

MARION BRESILLAC

Mission and Foundation Documents

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DOCUMENT 13: FUNDAMENTAL ARTICLES WHICH, IF APPROVED
BY THE S.C. OF PROPAGANDA, CAN, WE THINK, SERVE AS A
BASIS FOR THE SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS¹

(1856)

I

The Society of African Missions has for its principal aim the evangelization of the countries in Africa which have most need of missionaries.

II

It places itself under the protection of the S.C. of Propaganda, to whose authority it will always remain perfectly obedient as being the official voice of the decisions of the Sovereign Pontiff for everything concerning the missions.

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III

It will accept no mission except in conformity with the wishes of the S.C. of Propaganda. Conversely it will try to make itself capable of responding to these wishes for any point whatever in Africa, however unpromising or difficult be the mission to be confided to it. It will constantly work to prepare ways for penetrating into the places where there are no missionaries; and when it believes the time is ripe for an attempt to be made it will inform the S.C. in order to obtain authorization to put it into execution. Finally, on the express request, never sought, of the S.C., it can accept missions outside of Africa, provided it be to peoples of colour.

¹ APF congressi, etiopia, arabia, 1848-1857, p. 1091 ss. AMA, 41941; II/501 (copy). As far as we know, these 1856 fundamental articles were never officially approved by the S.C. of Propaganda. Neither were those of 1858, nor the first constitutions of 1864. These were approved only by Cardinal de Bonald, archbishop of Lyons, to whom the S.C. of Propaganda had left this responsibility. The first pontifical approval (decretum laudis) is dated 1890 and is for the Constitutions presented at that time.

IV

The Society being essentially secular, a member will not take vows. Later it will be considered whether it would be advantageous to have an oath of perseverance taken after a year's probation in the mother house, or after some years on the missions². For the moment he will just make a solemn Resolution to persevere in the Society to the end of his days, considering it his greatest merit to die at the work, either on the missions or at their service in Europe

V

The association shall comprise the Superior General, local superiors, councillors, other priest confreres, and lay brothers. The government structure of the Society will be detailed later. In the meantime Mgr. de Marion Brésillac shall be considered the Superior of the association, and the four senior priests his councillors. Before leaving for Africa he shall appoint a superior for the house in France.

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VI

To have active and passive voice shall require three years of membership.

VII

Before being accepted as a member a candidate shall normally spend a year in the house of probation in Europe.

VIII

Wherever several associates are together, they shall observe the common life.

² On 17th March 1860 Fr. Planque was to write to Cardinal Barnabo: "Mgr. de Brésillac often spoke to me of the Oath taken by the students of the S.C. of Propaganda. He told me several times that we must examine whether it "could be good to have the same Oath in our Society. Could Your Eminence kindly send me the formula and tell me what you think of this idea?" AMA, Letters du P. Planque.

They can use the revenues from their patrimony according to their own will. But everything they receive, directly or indirectly, from the missions or for the missions shall be put in the common fund. Superiors can require that their subjects apply a certain number of Masses for the needs of the community, but not more than four per week.

IX

Superiors shall take care to provide for the needs of the associates without neglecting anything necessary but without ever deviating from holy apostolic poverty.

X

Members of the association finding themselves in Europe, either by the will of superiors or in the cases to be foreseen in the Rule, shall not neglect to make themselves useful to the Church and the missions, not only by prayer but also by works which maintain the apostolic spirit at the heart of the association, for example: orphanages, educating poor children and children to be brought from the missions to be taken back home after their schooling. They shall also make themselves useful by preaching, especially in the country towns and villages. All this according to the directions of superiors.

XI

Lay brothers shall, as far as possible, exercise a skill or a trade, so as to be capable of teaching poor children and young Africans, either in Europe or in establishments on the missions.

XII

The sinew and strength of the Society is concord in perfect charity, and obedience to those placed in charge, to direct rather (P 172) than govern their confreres. Therefore, even if an aspirant has all the other qualifications, he shall not be incorporated into the association if he is seen to have a spirit of independence in him, or a marked reluctance to adapt to characters different to his own.

XIII

After eight or ten years of existence, a detailed Rule shall be drawn up and submitted for the approval of the Holy See.

A.M.D.G.

