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DOCUMENT 37: FUNDAMENTAL ARTICLES WHICH SHALL BE THE BASIC RULE OF THE AFRICAN MISSIONS

(1858)

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

It places itself under the protection of the Sacred Congregation 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.

It shall accept no missions except in conformity with the wishes of the S.C. of Propaganda. Conversely, it will try to make itself capable of responding to any request made on it for any point whatever in Africa, however unpromising or difficult be the mission to be confided to it.

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Independently of the care it will give to the missions specifically confided to it, the Society shall constantly work to prepare ways for penetrating into the places in Africa where there are as yet no missionaries. And when it believes the time is ripe for an attempt to be made, it will inform the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda in order to obtain permission to put it into execution. Finally it can, on the express request of the Sacred Congregation, accept missions outside of Africa, provided it be to peoples of colour<sup>2</sup>

The centre of the Society is at Lyons, at the African Missions House. Candidates from all nations shall be received, provided they bring certificates of capability and good conduct and, moreover, give signs of a vocation to the apostolic life.

They will first be received as Aspirants, without being immediately incorporated into the Association.

Aspirants will become members definitively only after at least one year's probation. If they are not priests and are studying for this, they will become members only after receiving the priesthood, unless they are sent earlier on the missions. To shorten the time of probation would require that a pressing need of the missions absolutely demanded it.

Superiors will not be obliged to send new members on the missions immediately upon membership. They can keep them in Europe as long as they judge convenient, either to have them do special studies or for any other reason.

Aspirants who are already priests when they come must, as far as possible, give 400 F for their maintenance during the year of probation. If they withdraw before the end of the year, they will be reimbursed according

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<sup>1</sup> AMA 2 A 1.00, p. 21-40 (French) and p. 60-75 (Latin). In the handwriting of Fr. Courdioux. This text does not seem to have ever been sent to the S:C. of Propaganda for approval. Not to be found in their archives.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin has: "nigritantes populos",

to the proportion of time remaining

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Those who are not priests must, unless dispensed, pay for accommodation at the rate of 600 F if they are students and 400 F if they are lay-brother Aspirants.

The Society being essentially secular, a member will not take vows in it but he will 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.

The sinew and strength<sup>3</sup>of the association is concord in perfect charity and obedience to those placed in charge, to direct rather than govern their confreres<sup>4</sup>

Therefore even if an Aspirant has all the other qualifications, he shall not be incorporated into the association if he is seen to have too much of a spirit of independence in him, or a marked reluctance to adapt to characters different to his own.

Members shall have active and passive voice in the Society only after three year's incorporation, with priestly character.

The association comprises the Superior General, Major Superiors, local Superiors, Councillors and simple associates.

The Superior General shall be appointed for life by the Major Superiors, the local Superiors and the Councillors present at the place where the election is made, by majority vote. He can reside outside Europe.

The Major Superiors are: the Bishops who will be part of the association and those appointed by the S.C. of Propaganda (P 223) without Episcopal character: Vicars or Prefects Apostolic having, so to speak, quasi-Episcopal jurisdiction<sup>5</sup>

If a Major Superior happened to lose his post without leaving the congregation, he would retain the title of Councillor.

Local Superiors are those who have received this title from the Superior General, with responsibility for governing a certain number of confreres, whether in Europe or on the missions under the spiritual jurisdiction of non-Society Bishops or Vicars Apostolic. If they happen to lose their post they will retain only the rank they had before being appointed, or the rank befitting them according to the following Article :

Councillors are:

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<sup>3</sup> The Latin has: "robur".

<sup>4</sup> The Latin does not have this nice nuance. Just: "qui proponuntur directioni et regimini suorum fratrum."

<sup>5</sup> This arrangement, making the heads of Missions (Vicars or Prefects Apostolic) to be Major Superiors of the Society, is copied from the Rule then in force in the Paris Foreign Missions (printed for the first time in 1847 p 44 n<sup>o</sup> 2) This type of hybrid government was to lead to difficulties from the very first years of the SMA between Fr. Planque and his missionaries. His correspondence with Frs. Borghero, Courdioux, and Verdelet etc. shows this. Later on, the regulations of the Holy See, valid for all missionary institutes was to clarify the relations between Mission heads and Institute Superiors: Apostolic Constitutions "Romanos Pontifices" of Leo XIII, 8th May 1881, Collectanea SCPF, Tome II. n<sup>o</sup> 1552, p. 145 ss. And the Instruction "Quum huic" of the SCPF, 8th December 1929, AAS 1930, p. 111-115.

- I. All those who have persevered twenty years in the Society, with priestly character;
2. Representatives of Missions at the Mother House;
3. Two missionaries from each Mission elected by majority vote by the missionaries of that Mission to assist the Major Superior.

Those who have attained the rank of Councilor shall retain it perpetually, in whatever functions they are later employed by the Superior General or the Major Superiors.

The Superior General shall be assisted by a Council composed of all Councillors who can be near him. He shall also have a Vicar General appointed by the same electors as him and at the same time.

The Vicar General must always reside at the Mother House, who's Superior he shall be. If at the election of a new Superior (P 224) General he is not re-appointed, he shall take rank with the Councillors of the association.

The Superior General shall not deal with any grave matter without consulting his Council. He shall listen to the views of his Councillors but he shall not be obliged to follow them. He shall, however, let them know his decision and shall be obliged to suspend it if 2/3 is opposed. It shall be thus except where a majority vote is required.

Each Major Superior has a Council composed of: two Councillors appointed by majority vote of the missionaries of his Mission' the other Councillors who happen to be near him; and other missionaries whom he believes he should call to his Council. He shall listen to their views but shall not be obliged to follow them.

Local Superiors shall consult, where necessary and according to their discretion, those confreres who could be of help to them with their advice.

The Society of African Missions shall hold general meetings in which sovereign power resides. They shall take place:

- I. After the death of the Superior General, to appoint a new one <sup>6</sup>
2. Ten years after the last meeting;
3. On the formal written demand of 3/4 of the Major Superiors;
4. By order of the S.C. of Propaganda.

The General Meeting shall be composed of: the Superior General; the Major Superiors, or their fully-empowered delegates when they judge before God that they cannot leave their Mission; one deputy from each Mission; one deputy from any missionaries under the jurisdiction of a non-associate Bishop; (P 225) all the Councillors present at the Meeting place; at least two Directors of the Mother House if the Meeting is held elsewhere than in that House.

On the death of the Superior General, the Vicar General- or failing him the most senior Councillor present at the Mother House - immediately succeeds to all his authority. He immediately informs the missions, at the same time designating the time and place of the General Meeting, which must not be delayed more

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin adds: " ... iis peractis, de communibus sodalitatis negotiis agetur."

than a year. He shall preside over this Assembly until the appointment of the new Superior General. If the Vicar General were to die before the Superior General, the most senior Councillor present at the Mother House would take his place until the appointment of his successor, made by majority vote of the Superior General, the Councillors present, and those who could be called together without too much difficulty within a month at the most.

Procurators/Missions representatives shall be as many as there are Missions or groups of Missions distinct by interest or by different character of populations. Their exact number shall be fixed at each General Meeting. They shall be appointed for ten years by the Major Superior in Council, by majority vote. They can be revoked in the same way. After their term of procure they must return to the Mission that sent them. They can be reappointed indefinitely. During their stay in Europe they shall be under the Superior of the Mother House, who can employ them in the good works done by the members of the association and not incompatible with due care for the interests of the Missions sending them.

Each year they shall give an account to the Superior General and the Major Superiors concerning the income and expenses made for the missions.

The Vicar General shall be Procurator for those Missions not having a Major Superior at their head. He shall render account only to the Superior General about the income and expenses made for these Missions.

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The Superior General assisted by his Council shall have full authority over Society members in Europe or in any foreign country not having a Major Superior.

He shall send out the new associates to the various Missions. But once they have come under the authority of Major Superiors he shall have no power of direction over them. If, however, the Major Superior were to send them out of his jurisdiction, they would not thereby be driven from the Society, but would come back under the authority of the Superior General, who would determine in Council if their fault merited expulsion or if they could be usefully employed elsewhere.

A missionary desiring to change Mission could not do so without the permission of his immediate Superior and then placing himself at the disposal of the Superior General.

Other developments shall be indicated later as needed in order to specify the powers of the Superior General in such a balanced way as to work for the good of the whole Society without affecting the full authority of the Major Superiors in the Mission they have received from the Holy See.

Superiors, assisted by their Councils, shall have the free administration of the goods of their Missions, with this difference : that Major Superiors will not have to render accounts to anyone [in the Society] while local Superiors must render account every year to the Superior General concerning the income and expenses of their Missions.

Superiors shall take care to provide for the needs of their confreres without neglecting anything that is necessary but without ever deviating from evangelical poverty.

Wherever several associates are together, they shall lead the common life. They can use their own patrimony according to their own will. But everything they receive, directly or indirectly, (P 227) from the missions or for the missions, as well as any stipends they may be given for the exercise of the Sacred Ministry, shall

be put in the common fund. Nevertheless each priest shall be allowed 10 or 12 Masses free every month<sup>7</sup>.

On the death of a missionary, any money he may have with him, as well as his effects, shall be deemed to belong to the Society unless he has indicated the contrary in writing. If he possesses immovable property in his name but in reality belonging to the Society he shall take care to make a will or to take whatever precautions are required by the laws of the countries concerned so that the Society may not be exposed to losing them.

The general goods of the Society shall be administered by the Superior General assisted by the Vicar General and his Council. The Vicar General shall keep the accounts and shall represent the Society in contracts. He shall keep the accounts available to the General Assembly each time it takes place. For day-to-day expenditure he can have the assistance of a Procurator, appointed in Council. The revenues of one Mission shall not ever pass to another. Every year, Superiors shall inform the Superior General of their needs and resources so that he can distribute the alms in Council, by majority vote, in proportion to those needs.

While carefully avoiding the least avarice, each Mission shall work to procure local resources to maintain itself; but nothing coming from the missions shall ever be passed to the Mother House. The Mother House must maintain itself out of foundations to be made for it, and out of alms from Europe from which (P 228) the Superior General in Council, by majority vote, can retain a proportion, to be employed for the common good, at the same time taking good care to scrupulously respect the intentions of donors.

If for any reason whatever a confrere obtains permission to come and spend some time in Europe, he shall not cease to belong to the Mission he came from. After the time conceded, he must return to his Mission.

After thirty years' effective service overseas with priestly character, or forty years without it, associates have a right to come and spend the rest of their days in Europe under the direction of the Superior General. If they prefer, on the contrary, to stay on the missions, they have this right; and they shall be treated with all the consideration due to their age and long service.

Members of the Association retained in Europe, either before being sent on the foreign missions or in the other cases foreseen in the rule, or indeed after thirty or forty years of missions as mentioned above, shall not cease to make themselves useful to the Church and the Association, not only by their prayers but also by works which keep up the apostolic spirit at the heart of the Society, such as, for example, orphanages for poor children, the education of blacks sent from the missions, etc. They can also make themselves useful by preaching, especially in the country towns and villages; all this under the direction of the Superiors.

As soon as possible, one or more houses shall be established for black children who will be brought from the missions to be taken home again after having done their education outside the atmosphere of paganism, and after having been taught a trade.

These houses must be established in Italy or at least in some (P 229).well-chosen places in the South of France<sup>8</sup>If any of these children show signs of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state, we shall try to foster the action of grace and shall arrange that some go to do their theological studies at the Seminary of Propaganda

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<sup>7</sup> On this matter of Mass stipends, another "palaver" was to arise between Fr. Planque and his missionaries. Fr. Planque, always a faithful interpreter of the Founder, demanded that this 1858 article be respected. Then he learned that in Dahomey "they have settled the problem of stipends and stole fees [unilaterally] among themselves". The problem was resolved only in 1864, with the Constitutions. The fundamental idea that Fr. Planque was fighting for was this: all Mass intentions belong by right to the Society, which then allows confreres some free intentions each month.

Cf, AMA Lett PI. III, 82; II5; also 23085; 2/0; 1865. Lett PI. IV 55.

<sup>8</sup> The Latin adds "vel in Hispania".

at Rome.

Lay brothers must all exercise a skill or trade so as to make themselves useful, either in Europe or on the missions, and be able to train the young negroes at the various establishments of the Society.

The Association of African Missions shall take on Affiliates who will share in a special way in the merits of the work, if they are ready to help it with all their strength.

Affiliates can help the Association in two ways: personally by joining it, or by their moral influence and the material support they can procure for it.

Affiliated members must be priests<sup>9</sup>. They shall be received in the Mother House or the other establishments of the Society provided they pay at least 800 F a year for accommodation and agree to render any services in their power, taking their age and capabilities into account. All Mass stipends will be left at their own disposal but they must provide for their own lighting, heating and clothing. Whatever stipends they receive for other church functions shall be put in the common fund. If, however, they contract to go on the missions and are accepted to be sent there, they shall be dispensed from paying accommodation and shall be treated in everything like the other missionaries, except that they shall not have active and passive voice in what concerns the Society. If they should wish to return to Europe they shall always be permitted, provided they pay their own fare. For the rest they shall be treated like brothers and cared for until death.

(P 230).

One can be enrolled in the Association at any age, and so finish one's life's career usefully, serving the Church and the missions to the last breath, enjoying the advantage of community life with confreres.

Once a year the Superior General or his delegate shall bring the affiliates up to date, in a common letter, about the state of the work, its steps forward, its hopes, its needs; moreover he shall maintain all useful contacts with them.

The Society of African Missions places itself especially under the patronage of the Holy Family, honouring with special devotion the mystery which brought our Saviour into Egypt. It will also invoke with great devotion Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, Saint Benedict of Philadelphia, called the Moor <sup>10</sup>Blessed Peter Claver slave of the negroes, and all the Blessed who sanctified themselves by exercising the apostolic ministry on the missions, especially in Africa.

Until such time as the Society of African Missions is numerous and established enough to put all these articles into practice, it shall try to get as near as possible to the letter and the spirit that produced them.

After a suitable time Constitutions shall be drawn up in this same spirit, to be submitted for the approval of the Holy See and received back with respect, along with the modifications, additions and excisions which the Holy See will see fit to make.

In the meantime Mgr. de Marion Brésillac shall be considered the Superior General of the Association; and if he died, the most senior confrere would replace him immediately and provisionally, until the appointment of the new Superior (P 231) General, which shall be done by majority vote of the 10 most senior confreres having active and passive voice and, failing that number, by all the priest confreres already belonging to the Association.

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<sup>9</sup> Something like what are today called associate members.

<sup>10</sup> Mgr. Luquet published his biography. Also Fr. Pol de Leon, Editions Franciscaines, rue Marie Rose, Paris.

The admission of subjects, both as aspirants and as missionaries, shall be decided in Council, by majority vote.

When an aspirant has been judged fit to join the Association definitively, the Superior shall inform him and he shall prepare, by a three days' retreat, to solemnly make his resolution of perseverance.

On the third day, at the appointed hour, the "Veni Creator" shall be sung. Then the Superior (or failing him, one of the Directors) shall address a few words to the new missionary, who shall come forward to the foot of the altar and pronounce the following resolution on his knees, holding his right hand extended over the Holy Gospels :

"I, ..., priest (or lay brother) take the solemn resolution to work all my life at the missions in the pious Congregation of the African Missions. I make the commitment to observe its rules and, when I am on the missions, not to seek to return to Europe without the permission or the order of my Superiors, apart from the case where the Rule gives me the right.

"I shall be perfectly obedient to the decisions of the Holy See and to the orders of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, which I shall always regard as the voice of the Holy Father for everything concerning the missions.

"At this moment I make the offering of my life to God, joyfully accepting in advance, for His greater glory, for the salvation of my soul and the souls of the peoples to be confided to me, the resulting pains, privations, discomforts of climate, Sorrows of persecution and even martyrdom if God finds me Worthy to die in witness to the faith.

"May God graciously listen to this resolution and give me the strength to accomplish it as the precepts of His Holy Gospels."

(P232) After he has pronounced these words the Superior (or failing him the Director) shall say to him: "Dear confrere, I admit you into the pious congregation of the African Missions in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen <sup>11</sup>

He shall embrace him, as shall all the confreres present, and the "Te Deum" shall be sung.

His name shall be inscribed immediately in the registers of the Society, and he shall never cease to be a member of the body of the Association unless he freely withdraws or merits exclusion.

The causes for exclusion are: heresy openly and stubbornly maintained; a scandalous life; an enormous, publicly known crime; formal and stubborn disobedience to Superiors; a permanent and incorrigible habit

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<sup>11</sup> The binding force of this solemn Resolution was not necessarily perceived in the same way by all. Here is what Fr. Lafitte wrote to Fr. Planque from Dahomey on 3rd October 1862 : " ... I want to speak now of the return of missionaries when they judge it right not to stay on here any longer. According to you, the Mission cannot provide the money for their return. It seems unjust to you, and you put forward the famous solemn resolution that we made with the Gospel. If you knew what we all think of that resolution, you wouldn't talk any more about it. Just to make you sure about that, I will tell you now that no-one of us believes himself bound to anything, and everyone believes himself just as free as before. You speak of consulting Cardinal Barnabo. I do not see what the Cardinal has to do with this." Fr. Planque quoted this passage to Cardinal Barnabo himself in a letter of 2nd August 1863. And subsequently, at the express command of Barnabo, Fr. Planque recalled Fr. Lafitte to Europe "for the good of the Mission ... because of lack of respect towards authority ... and the Rule intended by Mgr. de Bresillac." Instead of going back to Lyons, Lafitte went to Puerto Real in Spain. From there he asked pardon of Fr. Planque. On the orders of Barnabo, Fr. Planque refused to re-admit him. "The Cardinal told me plainly that no way should I keep him in the Society." Planque to Noché 19th July 1864. See Barnabo-Planque Correspondence in AMA 1863 in 2/0 and Lettres Planque

of going against the rule of the Society or the regulations made in the various Missions; bringing a case before infidel courts with complaints or accusations against his confreres.

24th July 1858.