

CONTINENTAL REPRESENTATION AT THE C.M. GENERAL COUNCIL: HAS ITS TIME ARRIVED?

“All members, since they have been called to labor for the continuation of the mission of Christ, have the right and responsibility, according to the norms of our own law, of working together for the good of the apostolic community and of participating in its government.” (Constitutions 96)

Introduction

One of the objectives of the XLI General Assembly 2010 is the revision of the Statutes. To many this gives occasion to re-think important matters that impinge on the spirit, life, and organization of the entire Congregation of the Mission, all in an attempt to bring the Congregation into step with the movements and structures of an increasingly globalized world. According to some, an area that needs updating is the mode and manner of representation at the highest level of the Congregation’s governance. More particularly, few are suggesting a revision of how Assistants General are chosen, a task that, once again as in many previous General Assemblies, will occupy the time and mind of the 2010 delegates. As a matter of fact, among the proposals being submitted for consideration at the General Assembly is one on the election of Assistants General representing Africa and Asia, or better known in shorthand form as the proposal for continental representation. This postulatum is significant not only because of its subject matter but especially because three of the five Visitors’ conferences are endorsing it.

At first glance the proposal on continental representation at the General Council may seem simple, one concerning the criterion for provenance or origin. In fact, it is far less simple than that. In the history of the Congregation of the Mission the choice of the Assistants General¹ depended in an interrelated way on three things: the provenance/origin, the role or *munus*, and the number of Assistants prescribed by law.² The candidate’s background – his qualities, skills, and even his nationality and his home province, has always been a major consideration for election into higher offices of the General Curia. But the qualities and background depended in large part on the kind of role that the Assistants were perceived to play. Yet precisely on this perceived role or tasks depended too the number of Assistants. That is, if the role is limited, few will be

¹ The 1981 issue of *Vincentiana* featured a study made by Jose-Oriol Baylach on the Assistants General from the time of St. Vincent up to the first term of the General of Richard McCullen (1980). The first part of the Table in Appendix 2 is derived from that study. The rest is a re-construction from available materials in the official publications of the Congregation, such as *Vincentiana* and the annual *CM Catalogus*. Cf. J.O. Baylach, “Les Assistants Généraux (tableau, notes)” in *Vincentiana* 25 (1981) 288-292.

² The other aspects such as who would elect them and by what type of majority, their term of office, substitution in certain cases, relationship to the Vicar General, etc., are matters that are easy enough to resolve once the three major elements are in place

sufficient; however, if it is larger, then more will be needed. The three elements are so inter-related that often the decision on one would strongly influence the same on the other two. And because they are so intertwined it is often not easy to tell which of the three has priority. One, for example, is not chosen an Assistant first because of his skills and later because of the tasks that await him. Rather, both skills and future tasks determine many times whether one is a suitable candidate or not. And of course, in a failed world of mortals, skills and capabilities for specific tasks are not even as important as where he comes from, what group in the Congregation he represents. Nonetheless, this paper will attempt to abide by a proven dictum: separate what can be separated, and unite what needs to be united.

This presentation aims to contribute to the discussion on the matter of the Assistants General. It tries to zero in on the principal points of debate and by way of a historical review tries to establish the evolutionary process of constitutional prescriptions, the circumstances attending them, and their subsequent implementation and practice. Simply for the sake of logical order, this paper will first of all discuss the matter on the role of the Assistants General, then it will look into the question of their number, and further it will take up the point of their provenance. Lastly, a summary of the principal insights from the study will follow, ending with a suggestion, however impertinent and presumptuous it may seem to some, towards a possible procedure on how this matter can be debated clearly and logically at the General Assembly.

1. Role of the Assistant General and General Council

Article 115 of the 1984 Constitutions and Statutes states clearly the primary role of the Assistants General:

“The assistants general are members of the Congregation who constitute the council of the superior general and help him by their labor and advice in the government of the Congregation in order to promote the unity and strength of the Congregation, to assure the effective implementation of the Constitutions and decisions of the General Assembly, and to foster collaboration among all the provinces in advancing the works of the Congregation.”³

This article is the most essential summary of the Assistants’ “munus.” There are other articles in the Constitutions that also speak about the other functions of an Assistant, such as being a Vicar General (C. 108) or an Assistant for the Mission (S. 57), but for our purposes the above is sufficient.

The description basically consists of two parts: an assertion that the Assistants General as a group make up the Council of the Superior General, or what we usually refer to as the General Council; and then a list of their specific

³ C.115 *Assistentes Generales sunt sodales Congregationis qui Consilium Superioris Generalis constituunt, opera et consilio in regimine Congregationis eum adiuvant, ut unitas et robur Congregationis promoveantur, Constitutiones et decisiones Conventus Generalis ad effectum deducantur, omnesque Provinciae in operibus Congregationis promovendis collaborent.*

responsibilities. As their title suggests, they are to help (assist) the Superior General in the government of the Community in three specific areas: a) promotion of its unity and strength (*vis*), b) effective implementation of the Constitutions and Assembly decisions, and c) fostering collaboration among the various provinces of the Congregation.

As it appears to synthesize the role of the Assistants, this article in the Constitution gives the impression that the matter is so clear-cut and obvious that no further debate is necessary. However, the formula above was actually a product of intense debate that involved a number of permutations worthy of such an important office in the Congregation. A review of its history will hopefully make us appreciate the constitutional description as well as understand the related ideas and not least find out about other alternatives.

“Guardian Angels”

In the first Assembly of the Community, held at St. Lazare from 13 to 23 October 1642, presided over and directed by St. Vincent himself, the matter of Assistants (General) was already taken up. They were considered then as the “two guardian angels of the Superior General and the ones on whom the Company depends for all that concerns the Superior and the Company.”⁴ For such a responsibility, they were expected to be zealous, discreet, wise and well-read, and in general they were to show in their persons “all God’s gifts.” Since 1642, this has been a description of their role that has guided many General Assemblies in their choice of Assistants General.

Assisting in the Government of the Congregation

Few years after Vincent’s death, a slight precision was introduced. The *Constitutiones Maiores*⁵ describe their role simply: they help the Superior General in all things that pertain to doctrine and practice, but also are to look after all that concerns his food, dress, expenses, and physical welfare.⁶ This last responsibility is in contrast to that of the Admonitor of the Superior General, who looks after the General’s spiritual welfare.⁷ Later, the *Selectae Constitutiones* would further

⁴ SV XIII, 297. (In English, SV XIIIa, 330). Cited in Braga, C., “The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Notes,” in *Vincentiana* 44 (2000) 289-319, p. 297.

⁵ These and the *Selectae Constitutiones* are found in the volume entitled *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum ac Decretorum quae Congregationis Administrationem spectant*, Die 2 Feb. anno Domini 1847. In subsequent references, this volume will be simply cited as *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum*. An excellent study on the various Constitutions in the Congregation’s history is C. Braga’s aforementioned article in *Vincentiana* 44 (2000), and likewise, M. Pérez Flores, “Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980,” in *Vincentiana* 28 (1984) 751-784. I am indebted greatly to these two outstanding works.

⁶ “*Ipsi Assistentes in eadem qua ipse Generalis Domo residebunt, illumque in omnibus ad doctrinam et praxim pertinentibus juvabunt... Quoad victum autem, vestitum et sumptus, necnon curam corporis ipsius Generalis, Assistentium erit in illis providere.*” *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum*, p. 11.

⁷ According to the *Constitutiones Maiores*, the Admonitor is elected either from among the Assistants General or from among the confreres, present or absent (in the Assembly), with the proper qualifications. *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum*, p. 97.

expand it to include helping in the government of the Congregation by work and counsel.⁸ Again, given this responsibility, it was logical that the qualifications for it would be as demanding as those for the Superior General himself, i.e., they were to be “good priests, zealous, lovers of the common good, promoters of the primitive spirit, well versed in the matters of the Congregation, discreet,” etc.⁹ This was the accepted role of the Assistants all the way till the mid-20th century. The 1954 Constitutions in fact reiterated this in Articles 35 and 40.¹⁰ The only notable difference between the text in the *Constitutiones Maiores* and the 1954 Constitutions has to do with the role of the Admonitor who, in article 43, is categorically defined as one of the Assistants,¹¹ thus even expanding the role of at least one of them.

Fostering Collaboration Among All Provinces

In the succeeding years, especially with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1966), the Assistants’ role underwent some changes. The text that was approved in a provisional way in 1968 was practically the same text that remained in the definitive 1984 Constitutions and Statutes (see Appendix 1 for comparison of texts from 1954 to 1984), give or take a few precisions. Comparing it to the 1954 Constitutions, one notices easily that instead of the third part in the 1954 version, on taking care of the corporal needs of the Superior General, article 151 of the 1968 text introduces something that connects in an explicitly way the Assistants General with the Superior General’s responsibility towards the provinces. They are to help him “to foster collaboration among all the provinces in advancing the works of the Congregation” (Cf. Appendix 1). This is significant because whereas previously the Assistants’ link with the provinces was more

⁸ “...Assistentium autem partes erunt Generalem ipsum opera et consilio juvare in regimine Congregationis...” **Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum**, p. 128.

⁹ “II. *Elegi debent quatuor (sic) Assistentes, ex numero eorum sive absentium, sive praesentium, qui saltem decennium post emissa vota in Congregatione exegerint, qui in quantum fieri poterit, sint ex variis Provinciis, et praesertim sint boni Sacerdotes, obsequii Divini zelatores, inordinatis affectibus, quantum humana fragilitas patitur, immunes, erga suam vocationem maxime affecti, boni communis amatores, studio et zelo Instituti conservandi ejusque primitivum Spiritum promovendi ardentis, multum discreti in agendis, sed praecipue in Instituto rebusque Congregationis bene versati, ad recte ac fructuose conversandum cum externis apti, nec non pacifici atque fideles, denique omnino tales, quales esse oportet, quibus Congregatio debet vices suas, quod spectat ad suam providentiam circa corpus et animam Superioris Generalis committere, et qui eundem, tamquam ejus consilarii, tam in rebus quae pertinent ad doctrinam quam in agenda sunt sublevaturi.*” **Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum** p. 94-95.

¹⁰ C.35 “*Consilium Superioris Generalis constituitur ex Assistentibus generalibus.*” And C.40 “*Assistentium partes sunt: 1° Opera et consilio Praepositum Generalem in regimine Congregationis iuvare, tam in rebus pertinentibus ad doctrinam, quam in agendis; 2° Sincere et fideliter, coram Domino, a partium studio alieni, proprium suffragium seu sententiam pandere, secundum nostrae Congregationis doctrinam et praxim circa omnia quae a Superiore Generali in Consilio sint proposita, et de omnibus servare secretum; 3° Providere in iis quae respiciunt victum, vestitum, sumptus, necnon curam corporis Superioris Generalis.*”

¹¹ “*Admonitor Superioris Generalis erit unus ex Assistentibus, et eligitur a Conventu generali, sicut fit pro electione Assistentium generalium ad plura medietate suffragia.*” After 1968, the office of Admonitor for the Superior General was no longer included in the Constitutions.

implicit, in the new Constitutions they have a more explicit responsibility to help the Superior General in promoting collaboration among the provinces, as well as in serving as link between the provinces and the General Curia. The idea is that their responsibility is not only towards the Superior General, but in an indirect way also towards the provinces, especially in assuring that they work together. How did this change in the Assistant's responsibility come about?

When one looks at the preparatory phase of the 1968 General Assembly,¹² certain things emerge as factors in the change. The 1968 Schemata, later known as the Black Book,¹³ contains the synthesis of the proposals from the provinces relative to our subject matter. The articles C.207 and S. 158 describe the nature and extent of the Assistants' role. But a decisive factor is the idea of "coetus provinciarum." As S.157 puts it, the Assembly would divide the Congregation into as many groups of provinces as there are Assistants General to be elected. Each of these groups will nominate three candidates from the provinces in the group, and the Assembly elects one from each of these groups who would become Assistant General.¹⁴ What is instructive here for our purposes is the inter-relationship that is being proposed between the provinces and the members of the General Council, both in the election and in the subsequent functions of the Assistants General.¹⁵

¹² From this time (preparatory to the 1968 Assembly) to the end of the 1980 Assembly, one of the best histories on the subject was done by an eyewitness throughout these years. Cf. C. Braga, "Le Nuove Costituzioni della Congregazione della Missione," in *Vincentiana* 25 (1981) 63-82. The basic framework of the historical part of this present study derives from Braga's insights.

¹³ *Schemata Constitutionum ac Statutorum Congregationis Missionis*, Romae, die 25 ianuarii, 1968. Henceforth to be referred to as 1968 Schemata. Its rejection at the start of the 1968 Assembly was among the dramatic highlights of that Assembly. C. Braga puts it in a prosaic manner. "L'Assemblea era cosciente dell'importanza del lavoro e, quando ai primi di settembre, esaurite le formalità iniziali, pose mano al lavoro, decise di trattare del fine, della natura, dello spirito della Congregazione come problemi fondamentali. Ugualmente pose allo studio le questioni principali riguardanti il governo della Comunità. Ma da dove cominciare? C'era il volumetto degli Schemata Constitutionum. Fece la sua apparizione in aula con l'appellativo di "libro nero," ma fu un'apparizione molto fugace: l'Assemblea decretò rapidamente il suo tramonto. Fu giudicato un testo eccessivamente ampio, di carattere troppo generale e poco specifico, impreciso e poco ispiratore. Un testo di Costituzioni avrebbe dovuto essere breve, essenziale, preciso. Il "libro nero" troverà la sua vendetta: servirà di guida a molti ritiri spirituali. L'Assemblea si trovava quindi a cominciare il lavoro da zero. Anche i Postulati delle Province furono giudicati non vincolanti. Restavano le tensioni e le preoccupazioni che delegati portavano con sé. Così il lavoro, nel mese che restava, non poté andare molto lontano..." in Braga, "Le Nuove Costituzioni", p. 65. Pérez Flores summarized it succinctly. "De hecho, el *Libro negro* fue útil, no sólo como fuente de material para ejercicios espirituales, etc., sino en la misma Asamblea para el que quiso usarlo. En una de las últimas sesiones de la Asamblea de 1980 salió a recluir el casi ya olvidado *Libro negro* para clarificar algunas posiciones." Cf. "Desde las Constituciones de 1954. . ." p. 776.

¹⁴ S.157 *Assistentes generales eligendi sunt, de numero, sive eorum qui Conventui intersunt, sive absentium, et singuli Assistentes eligi debent ex diversis nationibus, hoc modo: 1° Conventus generalis dividit Congregationem in tot coetus provinciarum quot Assistentes eligendi sunt; 2° unusquisque coetus provinciarum, per suos congregatos in Conventu generali, designat tres candidatos ex provinciis huius coetus; 3° Conventus generalis eligit de unoquoque coetu provinciarum unum ex candidatis, qui erit Assistens generalis; 4° ordo inter Assistentes erit ordo vocationis.*

¹⁵ This view was expanded even more by the postulates from the Province of Madrid. One of them speaks about the Assistants General as ones who preside as delegates of the Superior General with a right to vote at the regional or national Groups or Conferences. "d) *praesidere ut delegatus Superioris Generalis cum facultate suffragii Coetibus, vel Conferentiis regionalibus, nationalibus, etc.; e) unum ex sequentibus operibus Congregationis promovere: Missiones ad Gentes, missiones ad populum,*

This proposal in fact did not pass in 1968-1969, and not even in the definitive Constitutions of 1984. But arguably it was an idea that would not die a natural death. In fact, one can go back to it as the seed of the so-called “Synod of Provincials,” later to morph into the Conferences of Visitors, and even of the proposal for continental representation in the General Council. But we are going ahead of ourselves.

Two Prevailing Tendencies

From the time the role description was discussed in 1968 two prevailing tendencies surfaced: one, inner-directed, i.e., the Assistants as members of the Superior General’s Council, forming as it were an intimate circle of advisors; and two, outer-oriented, i.e., towards the provinces and their relationship to the General Curia. These tendencies, of course, were not mutually exclusive. But the tendency one opts for will almost always have repercussions on how many Assistants should there be and from where or by what category of provenance they are to be chosen. To illustrate, if one regards the Assistants’ role as primarily advisory to the Superior General, then the number of Assistants need not be large and they could be chosen from among those confreres at large who would qualify as good advisor. Whereas when one opts for the role as embracing clear relations with and responsibility for several or many provinces - even though in a delegated way by the Superior General, then it matters that there be enough Assistants not only to represent but also look after later the needs of the provinces or groups of provinces. The perception of the Assistants’ role lies at the crux of the debate on our subject matter. It is at the heart of the tug-of-war between two sides, one that would have serious consequences on the questions of number and provenance of the Assistants.

The tendency towards the provinces was, for example, clearly seen in the initial debate on the matter at the 1968 Assembly.¹⁶ Some opined that the integration of provinces, especially those in the far-flung areas, could not be attended to without the effective representation of an Assistant General who would oversee their needs. Also, some expressed that for provinces with specific problems having a representation before the central government would certainly be desirable. And, according to others, the duty of the Assistants is to promote the integration of efforts with the pastoral exigencies in the regions and dioceses where the Congregation works.

Administrators, Department Ministers, Regional Spokespersons

Regarding the tendency towards the inner circle of advisors, from 1968 several interesting interventions that favoured this point of view. Early in the second session of 1969 and speaking on behalf of the Assistants, Benoit recalled the diverse concepts of their role discussed in the first session: as administrators,

institutionem cleri, institutionem et formationem nostrorum, paroecias, apostolatium laicalem nostrarum Associationum.” Propuestas de la Provincia de Madrid C.M. a la Asamblea General y Vías Prácticas de Renovación, Madrid, 1968, 74-75.

¹⁶ Cf. *Acta 1968*, Sessio 35, 28 September 1968, pp.68-70

ministers of a department of work, or regional spokespersons.¹⁷ While he acknowledged that a bit of each role comes into play, he pointed out however that above all the Assistants are the Superior General's collaborators in his role as spiritual and apostolic animator of all members. He concluded that their experience thus far seemed to affirm that four would be sufficient, in spite of an increased agenda and notwithstanding the help of other Curia officers.

“Medici Medicinae Generalis”

In the 1974 Assembly, in a slightly accommodating stance, the Vicar General, Rafael Sainz, made the following intervention at the 17th session.¹⁸ He said that according to the wish of the Assembly of 1968-1969, the Assistants were doctors of general medicine, “*medici medicinae generalis*”, that is, no region or exclusive ministry is given to them, but this did not prevent anyone of them to take care, by consent of the Council, of a certain work of the Congregation, e.g. missions, Vincentian associations, etc. In this way the Constitutions and Statutes are kept intact. The Superior General thus governs the Congregation with the Assistants in such a collegial manner that no business is reserved to himself. The office is carried out by the Assistants as contact persons with the provinces and with individual confreres, particularly those in vocational crisis. He explained that all activities of the year are planned at the “*tempo forte*” meetings. As to the number of Assistants, their experience affirms that four would be sufficient to carry out the work in the Curia. He suggested that increasing the number of assistants (“*auxiliares*”) in the Secretariat, rather than the Assistants General, would help. Finally, he reiterated that it is for the General Assembly to tell the Assistants what their duties are, and not vice versa. Yet, he agreed with the proposal that their visits to the provinces be lengthened appropriately to provide time and occasion to speak and live with confreres in the local community.

Given interventions like this from people whom the Assembly delegates requested to speak from their experience, it was understandable that the Assembly in general would lean more towards this perspective rather than the outer-directed role, i.e. towards the provinces. In 1969 for example, when asked whether the Assistants were representatives and promoters of a certain region, the Assembly voted 130 against, 14 in favor, and 3 abstaining.¹⁹ And by 1974, the majority of the delegates found the existing text of C.151 sufficiently describing the role of the Assistant General.²⁰

Assistant for the Mission

¹⁷ *Anales de la Congregación de la Misión y de las Hijas de la Caridad* 78 (1970) 77. (Henceforth, to be referred to simply as *Anales*).

¹⁸ 03 September 1974. *Acta 1974*, p. 46.

¹⁹ “*Assistentes sint repraesentantes et promotores alicuius regionis.*” *Acta 1969*, p. 146.

²⁰ *Acta 1974*, pp. 41-42.

However the vote went, there was one additional responsibility that many delegates felt had to be handled by an Assistant General. This was the promotion of the mission, more exactly *missio ad Gentes*. As early as in 1968, this was already a concern. It was, however, in 1974, when the Assembly finally approved the proposal to have one of the elected Assistants as one for the mission.²¹ This was passed but not without the energetic debate on such an important issue. The bone of contention was still whether the Assistant was to be in charge of one particular apostolate. Among the questions that arose during the sessions were the following: If the Assistants' role is primarily that of an advisor to the General, then how can one of them be given a special task for the *missio ad Gentes*?²² An important question, certainly, but one that went to the background when the present Statute article 57 was later approved.

The approval on an Assistant's role vis-à-vis one apostolate or ministry is one that would be invoked whenever some sectors in the Congregation feel that a certain ministry or aspect of the Community's life deserve such a special attention as to necessitate one of the higher officials in the Curia to attend to it. The question, of course, is by what criteria will a particular ministry be deemed deserving of that kind of position. In the 1980 Assembly, at about the time when the sub-article on the "Assistant for the Mission" was adopted with near unanimity, still some sectors sought to propose something along this line. The Italian group invited the Superior General to consider the opportuneness of entrusting to an Assistant the particular care of other important parts of our life in community, such as, formation, Vincentian works, etc.²³ Also, Commission V De Formatione suggested that Commission VI De Regimine study the possibility of making a statute enjoining one of the Assistants to coordinate, stimulate, animate and unify, as much as possible, all the aspects of the formation of our members.²⁴ These suggestions, however, were rejected by the Commission VI.²⁵

²¹ "*Unus ex Assistentibus Generalibus specialem curam habebit pro missionibus ad Gentes.*"

²² After the 1968-1969 Assemblies, the General Council created a new position in the Curia, that of the Delegate for the Missions, a responsibility given to Father Archetto of the Province of Turin. His duty was to keep in contact with the missions and the missionaries and to make known their needs to the rest of the Congregation, particularly through the Nuntia Missionalia. After the 1974 Assembly, the position was given further recognition with the appointment of F. Kapusciak as the first Assistant for the Mission. Cf. J. Gaziello, "Les Missions 'Ad Gentes' dans la Congregation de la Mission" in *Vincentiana* 30 (1986) 481-486, p. 482.

²³ "Art. 151.2: Oltre a ciò che è espresso, ci sembra il caso di considerare l'opportunità di invitare il Superior Generale ad affidare a un Assistente la cura particolare di altri settori importanti della vita di comunità. Per es.: formazione, opere vincenziane ecc." In *Comm.V: De Regimine, Acta 1980*, p. 29bis.

²⁴ "La Comisión V que estudia el tema de la FORMACION sugiere a la Comisión VI que estudie la posibilidad de crear un Estatuto en el se diga que uno de los Asistentes Generales coordine, estimule, anime y unifique, en cuanto sea posible, todos los aspectos de la formación de los nuestros." In *Comm.V: De Regimine*.

²⁵ Netikat, speaking on behalf of the Commission "*De Regimine*," has this to say on why the suggestions were rejected: "It seems to the Commission that such a departmentalization of the General Council is not in accordance with its nature, unless the number of Assistants be increased. The Superior General is the Animator of the Congregation, and the Assistants help him in this task. It seems that

Reports from Assistants General

In subsequent Assemblies, the matter of the Assistants' role continued to evoke spirited discussion, especially after incumbent Assistants reported on their actual and concrete responsibilities. At the 1986 Assembly, for example, two Assistants General handling specific responsibilities gave reports: J. Gaziello, on the *Missio ad Gentes*, and J. Almeida, on Vincentian lay movements.²⁶ Their reports provided a look at the concrete roles that the Assistants were taking on at the instance of the Superior General. At the 1992 Assembly, aside from L. Lauwerier's report on the office of the Assistant for the Mission,²⁷ two other Assistants gave reports, describing their experience as Assistants and reiterating some views that had gained currency in the recent past. M. Pérez Flores, in his capacity as Vicar General and thus first Assistant General, underlined the following: that in the Congregation the idea of "Assistant" is not as in other communities; that the General Council helps the Superior General who himself distributes the work and the tasks, taking into consideration the possibilities of the Assistants; and that there is no one Assistant for a continent, nor one Assistant who represents a particular language. This, according to him, is what C.116 §2 means, and he admits being puzzled with still so much talk about regional representation for the Assistant-ship.²⁸ For his part Lauro Palú, after reiterating also that the Assistants General were not regional or linguistic representatives, explained that concretely their role consisted in advising the Superior General on matters for decision, making the visitations – with him or in his name, and even translating his homilies and conferences, responding to some letters, redacting the annual document of the General Council, participating in meetings of commissions and those involving Vincentian Family groups, and not least preaching at retreats for confreres or Sisters.²⁹ The over-all impression was that the Assistants General undertook many responsibilities upon the Superior General's request, including the visitation of Provinces.

there is no need for this 'department' of formation as there is for the *Missiones ad Gentes*." *Commissio V: De Regimine, Acta 1980*, p.59-60 (underscoring supplied).

²⁶ *Vincentiana* 30 (1986) 481-486 (Gaziello), and 487-490 (Almeida).

²⁷ "L'Assistant des missions est au titre de la Congrégation chargé de favoriser et développer cette dimension de notre vocation." L. Lauwerier, "L'Office d'Assistant des Missions" in *Vincentiana* 36 (1992) 512-515, p. 515. Lauwerier took over for Gaziello in 1989 when the latter resigned for health reasons.

²⁸ "En la Congregación no hay 'Asistencias' como sucede en otras comunidades. Todo el Consejo es para ayudar al Superior General. El Superior General distribuye el trabajo, los quehaceres, teniendo en cuenta las posibilidades de los Asistentes. En la Congregación, no hay un Asistente para ningún Continente. Ningún Asistente representa a una lengua determinada. El art. 116, §2 dice: *Los Asistentes, en número de cuatro al menos, y de diversas Provincias, son elegidos por un sexenio*, etc. Creo que, o se cambia la figura del Asistente, o hay que superar la idea de la representatividad regional o 'asistencias,' que no sé por qué esta (sic) muy presente entre muchos asambleístas." M. Pérez Flores, "El Oficio del Vicario General" in *Vincentiana* 36 (1992) 507-508, p. 507.

²⁹ L. Palú, "O Oficio dos Asistentes Gerais" in *Vincentiana* 36 (1992) 509-511.

At the 1998 Assembly, which was distinguished particularly for the special week with representatives from the Vincentian Family, two Assistants presented descriptions of their roles: Victor Bieler's report in his capacity as Assistant for the Mission,³⁰ and Lauro Palú's description of his particular role as the Assistant General responsible for contacts with the Vincentian Family.³¹ Palú's presentation was significant in that it concluded with an interesting recommendation, presumably supported by the General Council: "in the future, if we want to maintain contact with the greatest number possible of Vincentian Family groups in an organic or systematic way, we have to think about assigning one of the Assistants exclusively to this task; or naming a confrere to it, as is done in the case of the Director General of the Daughters of Charity."³² Further on into the other weeks of the Assembly and shortly after the re-election of Robert Maloney as Superior General but before the election of the Vicar and Assistants General, an animated discussion was held in small groups as well as in the aula precisely on the topic of the Assistants General.³³

Updated Traits for an Assistant General

In answer to the question posed on the four or five criteria defining the ideal figure of the Vicar General and the Assistants General, the nine groups mentioned qualities that were not only useful for an advisor but especially for an Assistant who is becoming more and more connected to the affairs of provinces and the changing landscape ushered in by globalization.³⁴

In the discussion that ensued, three members of the General Curia, Palú, Fernandez de Mendoza and Maloney,³⁵ were one in asserting that the work load

³⁰ V. Bieler, "Report by the Assistant to the Missions for the General Assembly 1998" in *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 258-261.

³¹ L. Palú, "Contacts with the Vincentian Family" in *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 262-264.

³² L. Palú, *Vincentiana* 42, p. 264.

³³ The record of these Sessions (19th -22nd) at the 1998 Assembly may be found in the Acta in 4 languages: Italian, pp.23-26; French, pp. 97-99; Spanish, pp. 165-169; and English, 233-236. The quotes I will use here are from the English version.

³⁴ The traits or characteristics can be grouped into three principal categories.

(Personal and relational): good health, knowledge of languages, common sense, good humour, good interpersonal relationship, able to listen, sensitive to and understanding of others, intellectually and culturally open, able to dialogue, prudent, a man of prayer and discernment, balanced, with autonomous judgment, good theological and spiritual formation, critical judgment.

(Experience and work related): able to collaborate and work as part of a team, able to inspire, has administrative experience, broad (rich) pastoral experience, experience of mission, able to reflect and evaluate issues well, has local and provincial administrative experience.

(Vincentian dimension): shares the vision of the Superior General and supports his initiatives, loyal to him, knows and loves the congregation and its history, filled with Vincentian spirituality, faithful to the charism, has the vision of the congregation's universality, a global vision, with an international sense (open to other nationalities), endowed with a certain representativeness of various continents and languages, representing a good number of confreres or a geographical group. *Acta 1998 Assembly*, p. 234.

³⁵ *Acta 1998 Assembly*, pp. 234-235.

of the members of the Curia has significantly multiplied due principally to increase in correspondence (e-mail, internet), international missions, relations with the Vincentian Family, the Congregation's broader universality and the concern for international representation. Maloney went so far as to suggest two possible solutions: increase the number of Assistants or name "directors" for specific tasks, like relations with the Vincentian Family, etc. Later, Italo Zedde's report on the visits to the Provinces and vice-Provinces supported the contention of growing areas of responsibility on the part of the Assistant General.³⁶ The discussion that followed largely focused on the following points:³⁷ would the current work load of the Assistants be better served by adding to the current number of Assistants or would those be attended to by some other way like appointing specialists for particular jobs. Several pointed to the need for international representation, a concept that at this point was still in need of clarification as to its rationale and expression.

"Carthusians and Apostles"

At the latest General Assembly in 2004, aside from the discussion on the traits³⁸ expected of an Assistant General, several interventions were again made

³⁶ I. Zedde, "Visits to the Provinces and Vice-Provinces" in *Vincentiana* 42 (1998) 276-278.

³⁷ The debate is illustrative of the discussion, and so I am quoting it here in the footnote. "The economie general, Fr. Patrick Griffin, mentioned that the work of the curia had increased, but said that to develop it further, specialists were needed, and increasing the number of assistants is not necessary. Speaking in favor of increasing the number, Fr. Luciano Costa Ferreira pointed out that the general council should physically express its openness toward the poor (the vitality of the Congregation is coming from the southern hemisphere), as well as its missionary drive. Fr. Daniel Borlik, reported on the thought of the third language group. Since the work load of the curia is growing, he was in favor of increasing the number of assistants, but explained that he was not speaking of national representatives, since the Congregation is itself international. Abba Weldemariam was in favor of increasing the number of the assistants, since from his perspective, Fr. Victor Bieler had too much work to do. Since his name was mentioned. Fr. Bieler rose to say that from his perspective, it was not necessary to increase the number of assistants, but only of specialists.

Fr. Michael Joyce asked whether the general council had ever had any problems in finding a quorum especially when a collegial vote is required. The superior general said no, explaining that the important decisions of the council are left to the main council meetings four times a year. Fr. Franz Kangler said that to have adequate representation, the addition of one or two more assistants would not suffice. He proposed, instead, that in some circumstances the council invite to its meetings members of various provinces. Fr. Manuel Ginete said that he was unable to speak pro or con: the remarks already presented have two paradigms: efficiency and national/continental representation. The second one has not yet been explained sufficiently. In any case, he believes that the assistants should be symbolically representative of the international character of the Congregation. Fr. Dominique Iyolo Iyombe favors international representation, especially for the African continent. Fr. Alfonso Mesa, struck by the profound changes actually presented in the reports on the state of the Congregation, believes that the council should represent a new vitality. Fr. Luigi Elli agrees on the topic of more representation, but thinks it is still possible with four assistants. Fr. Georges Boujauodé feels it is necessary to explain which part of the world might belong to each assistant; and Fr. Maurice Sullivan, visitor (sic) of Australia, with typical Anglo-Saxon humor, asked someone to explain, whenever they talk about continents, to define which ones they are referring to. . . ." *Acta 1998 Assembly*, pp. 235-236 (EN), 167-168 (ES), 97-98 (FR).

³⁸ This is found in "Discussion on qualities of an Assistant General" in Appendix 29 of *XL Assemblée Generale*. On the discussion on five criteria for an AG, the Assembly chronicler had this to say: "Attitudes like: being able to work in team, knowing how to listen, hard working, a linguist, good

by the Assistants themselves: Fernandez, on the role of the Vicar General, Kapusciak, Ubillus and Bieler, on their work, experience and activities as Assistants General.³⁹ Kapusciak describes their role using a familiar image - Carthusians at home and apostles in the field. It is obvious from these descriptions that nowadays the range of the Assistant's role is much wider, with varied responsibilities in and out of the Curia. It is safe to assume that the Assistant has graduated from the traditional role of the Superior General's "guardian angel" into something more global.

The foregoing discussion showed that indeed the role of the Assistant General had evolved, and yet all throughout these years, from 1968 up to 2004, the move to increase their number from 4 was firmly resisted. What could be the reason for this? To appreciate whatever answer is given to this question, it will be helpful if we know something about the history of this aspect of our subject matter. We now turn to it.

2. Number of Assistants

The 1984 Constitutions, article 116 §2, says: "The assistants general, **at least four in number**, from different provinces, are elected for six year terms, and can be reelected once. At the end of a second consecutive six year term, they cannot immediately be elected vicar general."⁴⁰ The simplicity of the formula belies the intensity of the debates that surrounded it not only recently but even in the distant past.

The number is clear, "*saltem quattuor*," "at least four," which means minimum of four, but this could be increased to five, six, eight or even ten, as suggested in some General Assemblies in the past. For the sake of accuracy, however, we need to recall that the General Assemblies from 1968 to 1980 actually wanted simply four. The critical word "*saltem*," "at least," was added upon the suggestion of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS). This would prove to be a critical addition. But from 1968 up to 2004, invariably the General Assemblies thought that four Assistants were sufficient, almost giving the impression that the number four had somewhat of a sacrosanct character, rooted in an almost "unchanging" tradition.

health and energy, with a global vision of the Congregation, adaptable to other cultures, living the Vincentian charism, practical, efficient, approachable and open, a good animator, with a good spiritual life, a people person, knowledgeable about Vincentian spirituality, a vision for the future, in tune with and complementary of the SG . . ." C. Fernandez called it "white blackbird" – "wanting to find the impossible, the absolutely ideal, the miraculous." *Libro dell'Assemblea Generale 2004*, p. 1109 (EN), 1155 (ES), 1203 (FR).

³⁹ Cf. In *Vincentiana* 48 (2004), I. Fernandez Mendoza, "The Office of the Vicar General," pp. 288-291; J. A. Ubillus, "My Experience as Assistant General," pp. 292-295; J. Kapusciak, "Work of the Assistants General," pp. 296-304; and V. Bieler, "New International Missions," pp. 280-282.

⁴⁰ "*Assistentes Generales, saltem quattuor numero, ex diversis Provinciis, ad sexennium eliguntur, et semel possunt iterum eligi. Expleto tamen secundo sexennio consecutivo, nequeunt immediate in Vicarium Generalem eligi.*"

If we trace, however, the history of the debate on the matter, we realize soon enough that the number has not always been “four.” In the quote above (page 3), St. Vincent only had two “guardian angels.” The *Constitutiones Maiores*⁴¹ and the *Selectae Constitutiones* moved between three or four.⁴² In subsequent years, the number was generally four. This arrangement prevailed until the 1954 Constitutions where one finds the number increased to six.⁴³

An examination of the history of the “Project”⁴⁴ on the revision of the Constitutions from 1947 up to its eventual approval in 1953 reveals possible reasons for the changes. The 1947 Assembly passed a decree enjoining that even as it is the General Assembly that decides on the number of Assistants, there should however be at least four, “*saltem quattuor*.”⁴⁵ From 1947 to 1954 several exchanges of opinions on various texts took place between the General Council of the Congregation and the Sacred Congregation for the Religious (SCR).⁴⁶ In one of them the latter expressed, among other things, the desire for a more definite number of Assistants. From all indications, the General Council seemed to have acceded to the SCR and have chosen “six” in place of the more open “*saltem quattuor*.” On the particular reasons for this change one could only speculate. Perhaps the option for a higher number might have been dictated by the Congregation’s growing population.⁴⁷

But, acting precisely on this prescription in the 1954 Constitutions, the 1955 and 1963 Assemblies elected six Assistants General, one each from France, Spain, Italy, U.S, Poland, and Brazil (Argentina, for 1963). Cf. Appendix 2. That some

⁴¹ Cf. (foot)note 9, above.

⁴² “2. *Tres vel quatuor Assistentes illi adjuget Conventus Generalis, atque Admonitorem dabit...*” *Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum*, p. 128. Quoting the 1673 Assembly, the *Collectio Completa* clarified that while three sufficed at that time, still the General Assembly would be free to choose four at some later time. “*Fuit autem statutum, non esse hac vice eligendos plures, quam tres assistentes cum nunc non videatur ulla necessitas quatuor eligendi; remanet tamen libera facultas in posterum quatuor eligendi juxta constitutiones, si conventui generali liberit.*” *Collectio Completa Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis*, Paris, 1882, p. 4. Henceforth to be referred to as *Collectio Completa*.

⁴³ C.38.1 *Eligendi sunt sex, de numero sive eorum qui Conventui intersunt, sive absentium, et singuli Assistentes eligi debent ex diversis nationibus.*(Underscoring supplied)

⁴⁴ The Assembly endorsed the “Project” on the revision of the Constitutions in line with the then new Code of Canon Law. This project had occupied three previous General Assemblies and had in fact been extended due to the war. Heading and coordinating it was Guido Cocchi, the Congregation’s eminent canon lawyer. Cf. M. Pérez Flores, “Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980,” p.763-64. See also Braga, “The Constitutions of the C.M. . .” p. 303.

⁴⁵ Decree 675 states: “*Petitum fuit ut Conventus generalis decernat ut in novo textu Constitutionum inseratur: Assistentium numerus determinatur a Conventu generali; eligendi autem sunt saltem quattuor. Conventus generalis fere unanimiter petitioni assentit. (Ex Sessione XIV).*”

⁴⁶ Cf. . M. Pérez Flores, “Desde las Constituciones de 1954 a las de 1980,” p. 766-767.

⁴⁷ According to the CM Catalogue, there was a steady increase in the Congregation’s membership during this time. In 1954 there were 5,800, including the clerical seminarians and those for brotherhood. This number went up to 6,314 in 1965, apparently the highest number reached by the Congregation during this period.

provinces continued to favour a larger number can be detected quite easily in the preparatory phase that produced the 1968 Schemata or Black Book.⁴⁸ In line with its proposal on the “*coetus provinciarum*,” it prescribes that there be eight⁴⁹ and that they be elected from diverse provinces in a particular way (cf. page 5 above, footnote 14). In addition, the Black Book proposes that the Vicar General be elected no less than by the General Assembly itself and from among the Assistants General themselves.⁵⁰

Yet this change to six Assistants General did not last long, not even in the context of Vatican II’s universalist vision. In 1968, it went back to four, but not without a momentous and dramatic debate that deserves a full accounting here. On 28 September 1968, the Assembly started to discuss the matter of the Assistants General.⁵¹ After varied interventions, J.M. Roman made a motion to postpone the study of all related questions until the second period, providing at the same time that the new Assistants be elected at this time according to the norms of the existing 1954 Constitutions (C.36-42).⁵² The discussion on this motion went for still another hour, with some speaking in favor and others for modifications. One such modification was the amendment, made by N. Persich, that only four Assistants be elected, instead of six as per C.38.1. After an animated debate, Persich’s amendment was accepted despite Pasquereau’s motion to retain the number 6, and despite still another attempt to postpone it at least to the next day. When C. Benoit pointed out the complication relative to C.39 requiring 3 members to form a quorum in the Council, the Moderator suggested that article 39 be considered as a directive, such that if the number four was approved then two would suffice for quorum. As a final attempt, Roman tried to withdraw his own motion. This did not work because a motion to vote was already made. Eventually the main motion was carried⁵³ by a vote of 93 positive,

⁴⁸ In the *Postulata* of the other Provinces on C.209, there was wide endorsement for the larger number (8 or 6) and for division into groups of provinces each being represented by an Assistant. The Province of Paris was in favor of division by works, while Portugal, Germany, SAF Eastern, and China were for groups of provinces. Ecuador suggested that the General Assembly elect 6 and the Superior General appoint 2. The Roman Province, SAF Western endorsed the number 6. The Philippines proposed a more flexible arrangement: 8 when needed but there should be as many Assistants as there are regional groups. Cf. *Provinciarum ac Viceprovinciarum Postulata circa Constitutiones*, pp.129-131.

⁴⁹ C.209 “*Assistentes generales . . . eliguntur a Conventu generali octo numero . . .*” Interestingly, the “*coetus theologico-juridicus*,” among the commissions formed in preparation for the 1968 Assembly, suggested that they be six or eight (“*sex vel octo*”). Cf. *Pars Prior Placita Coetuum 1-20*, p.43.

⁵⁰ C.205 “*Vicarius Generalis eligitur unus ex Assistentibus, ad plura absolute suffragia a Conventu generali ad sex annos et semel reeligi potest, salvo praescripto art. 202, 1° Constitutionum.*” Up to this time the Vicar General’s name was kept secret while there was a sitting Superior General.

⁵¹ Cf. *Acta 1968*, Sessio 35, 28 September 1968, pp.68-70.

⁵² J.M. Roman made the following motion: “*Remisso ad secundam Sessionem studio omnium quaestionum ad Assistentes Generales spectantium, electio novorum Assistentium fiat hac vice secundum normas Constitutionum vigentium, art. 36-42.*” *Acta 1968*, p. 69.

⁵³ *Acta 1968*, p. 70: “*Aprobarunt motionem ut pro hac vice Assistentes Generales, eorum numero ad quattuor reducto, eligerentur juxta normas Constitutionum vigentium, 93 congregati, contradicentibus 53, abstinentibus 7.*”

53 against, and 7 abstaining, with the amendment that for now only four Assistants would be elected. That was how the number of Assistants went dramatically from six back to four. Yet with as many as one third of the delegates voting against this motion,⁵⁴ some delegates were certain that the Assembly had not seen the end of the discussion.

Question on the “Quorum” in the General Council

From 1968 on, however, the subsequent General Assemblies maintained the number and chose to elect only four. Doing so was not always easy. One problem that it occasioned was that of “quorum” in the General Council, already mentioned in 1968 by Benoit. In 1973, the preparatory Commission had asked provinces to answer the following question: what do you propose in order to solve the difficulties that arise when several Assistants are not present for the General council?⁵⁵ Earlier the Superior General himself had written about this difficulty and its context.⁵⁶ To address it an experiment was made: in his/their absence, one or other of the Assistants may be replaced by one of the three officers of the General Curia, namely, Secretary General, Procurator General before the Holy See or Econome General.⁵⁷

The responses from the provinces proved interesting to say the least. Of 26 provinces, 17 de facto proposed to increase the number of those who compose the Council in the following ways: increase the number of Assistants, but not by more than six (according to ten provinces); when necessary, to follow the present “experiment” (according to three provinces); or do by law what he does now (according to four provinces). One province suggested that there be no increase to the Assistants’ number.⁵⁸ Six provinces wanted the General and his Council to present a solution to the General Assembly according to their experience, a suggestion that, for its part, the preparatory Commission had advised.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ What the Acta characterize as “*aliqua turbatione*” and “*attenta perlonga et intricata deceptionem (sic)*” was mirrored in the accounts that the Congregation’s general membership received and read. Cf. *Anales* 76 (1968) 536; *Vincentiana* 12 (1968) 222.

⁵⁵ *Vincentiana* 17 (1973) 174-175.

⁵⁶ In his circular letter of 11 May 1973 the Superior General referred to the difficulties experienced after the 1969 Assembly, one of them being the inability to visit the provinces and vice provinces as C.142.4 prescribes. He acknowledged that this difficulty is connected with art. 155 which touch on the needed presence of members of the Council in order to form a quorum (“*semper et necessario duo saltem sint praesentes cum Superiore Generali vel Vicario Generali, ut Consilium Generale component.*”) Cf. *Vincentiana* 17 (1973) 124-125.

⁵⁷ “*Superior Generalis de consensu sui Consilii, pro tempore et quoties adest unicus Assistens cum eodem Superiore Generali aut cum Vicario Generali, statuit ut alteruter Assistens suppleatur per unum ex tribus officialibus Constitutionalibus Curiae, Secretarium Generalem, Procuratorem Gen. apud S. Sedem aut Oeconomum Gen.*” This was provided for and allowed, as per the VIII. Decreta temporaria II, to be found at the end of the 1968-1969 Constitutions and Statutes. De facto this “experiment” was rarely used at that time, and if at all, only for ordinary matters. Cf. *Vincentiana* 17 (1973) 175.

⁵⁸ “*Synthesis Responsonum a Provinciis Missarum*” in *Vincentiana* 18 (1974) 213.

⁵⁹ “*...ad hoc valde utile putamus Conventum Generalem invitare Superiorem Generalem, cum suo Consilio, ut relationem afferat de experientia iam facta.*” *Vincentiana* 18 (1974) 236.

At the Assembly proper and precisely at the 13th Session (28 August 1974), while several linguistic groups asked for six Assistants for the expressed purpose of facilitating provincial visits,⁶⁰ the majority favoured maintaining the four Assistants, despite some suggested variations like, i.e., four plus the Vicar General, or an additional Assistant for *missio ad gentes*. Some deferred to the current Assistants' experience, while others were in favour of the current practice, but only for ordinary matters.

At this point it is good to underscore the principal question of those who were opposed to the "experiment." They said that if the Assistants' role is essentially advisory, then would the Secretary General, Econome General and Procurator General, in participating at the General council, for ordinary or extraordinary cases, be considered also as general "councilors?" At the heart of the resistance to this "solution" was a basic question that if ordinarily, as per the Constitutions, a person becomes part of the General Council by being elected by the General Assembly, and since neither one of these are elected, then what is the nature of their function when they supply for the absent Assistant at Council deliberations? These questions, however, became moot and academic when the 1980 Constitutions passed what would become Statute article 59,⁶¹ making the "experiment" now a part of the Congregation's law.

The Wisdom of "Saltem"

When the 1980 General Assembly approved the new Constitutions and Statutes, the article on the number of Assistants fixed it at four. It was this that the Superior General and his Council submitted to the SCRIS. After a series of dialogue,⁶² one suggestion that came from SCRIS was precisely the change from simply "four" to "at least four," "*saltem quattuor*." In his explanation of this change, Perez Flores acknowledged that it was SCRIS who commanded the change, "removing the hardness of the number fixed in the Constitutions."⁶³ In hindsight, one can see in this change not only a recognition of the merits of arguments on both sides of the issue but also the role of a previous Assembly decision. The expression "*saltem quattuor*" in a way preserved the desire of the majority, i.e. four, but also somehow went back to the open-ended formula in 1947, while not contradicting the Constitutions in the process. As the provision

⁶⁰ *Acta 1974*, p. 30-32, 41.

⁶¹ "*Absentibus tamen, justa de causa Assistentibus Generalibus, ita ut numerus requisitus pro Consilio deficiat, Superior Generalis ipsum Consilium, cum jure suffragii, vocare potest unum ex Officialibus Curiae Generalis, hoc ordine: Secretarium Generalem, Oeconomum Generalem, aut Procuratorem Generalem apud Sanctam Sedem.*"

⁶² The best existing presentation of this "journey" is the article of Miguel Perez Flores, "De las Constituciones de 1980 a las de 1984" printed in *Vincentiana* 29 (1985) 84-146, and also in *Anales* 93 (1985) 102-158.

⁶³ "2. También la SCRIS mandó añadir en el §2 del artículo 116 el término 'saltem,' es decir, al menos cuatro Asistentes. Esta añadidura quita la dureza del número fijo en las Constituciones." Pérez Flores, "Desde las Constituciones de 1980," p.129.

stands now the General Assembly, as the supreme body of the Congregation, does not need a constitutional amendment to elect more than four Assistants. The present formula not only allows it but provides for it. But the succeeding Assemblies would continue to elect only four, notwithstanding persistent clamor for more.

More Attempts to Increase the Number

In the assemblies since 1968, proposals continue to come either from provinces or from Assembly delegates themselves, calling for more than four Assistants primarily because of what was perceived as the developing role of the Assistants and the additional responsibilities that have been entrusted to them since 1980.⁶⁴ In the most recent 2004 election, the delegates were given a choice between two options: Option 1 - Vicar General and three assistants; Option 2 - Vicar General and 4 assistants. In essence it was a choice between four or five Assistants. The results of their discussion netted the following votes and ideas.

There were five linguistic groups who favoured Option 1 and they advanced the following reasons: three is sufficient; when the number of confreres is decreasing there is no need to increase the number of assistants; it is best to avoid enlarging the structure of the central government; new means of communication have facilitated communication; there are other ways to attend to the needs such as is done with the Vincentian Family and in certain geographical area; and geographical representation is not part of our tradition. Those linguistic groups - also five of them - who agreed with Option 2 gave these reasons: this assures representation from all the continents; it facilitates the accompaniment of the provinces and vice-provinces; it widens the intercultural presence and understanding of the Congregation; and it assures an odd number of voters in the decision-making process. The groups were evenly divided between the two options, but when the individual vote was taken in the plenum, the result was: 68 in favour of Option 1, 49 not, and 3 invalid votes. So, the majority has opted that the number remain at four.

While this decision mirrored those in previous Assemblies, those favouring can be grateful for a small consolation. The gap between those in favour of the status quo and those who want more Assistants has slightly narrowed,⁶⁵ ever so slightly. Be that as it may, one is left with the possible question: could the “dogged” resistance to increasing the number of Assistants be somehow connected to the criterion of provenance or origin? To answer this question, we need to review also the history of the legislation on this precise aspect of our question. To this we now turn our attention.

3. Provenance or Origin of the Assistant General

⁶⁴ Some have suggested that instead of increasing the number of Assistants, the General Curia should hire more specialists, including even Daughters of Charity, and lay secretaries and staff.

⁶⁵ In 1968, the vote was 93 in favour of 4 Assistants, 53 in favour of more; in 1998, 68 voted to retain the number 4, 46 wanted more; and in 2004, 68 voted for the status quo, while 49 opted for an increase.

The 1984 Constitutions and Statutes (116 §2) state very clearly that the Assistants are to be elected “*ex diversis provinciis*” – from “different provinces.” The rationale behind the “*provinciis*” is obvious: “province” or “vice-province” is the most logical category of provenance or origin since that is how the worldwide Congregation is divided (C.120-121). The part about “diverse provinces” is intended precisely to prevent the election of two Assistants from the same province to the same General Council.

The history of the phrase “*ex provinciis*” and other categories of origin or provenance in the election of Assistants is in itself instructive. During the time of St. Vincent, this matter did not come up at all, since Assistants were chosen from among the closest of his companions. In the succeeding years, Assistants were elected from among the missionaries in general, as much as possible from various provinces.⁶⁶ This was generally the case all the way to 1955 when, by virtue of the 1954 Constitutions the provenance was changed to “diverse countries or nationalities,” “*diversis nationibus*.”⁶⁷ What was/were the reason/s for the change?

“*Diversis Nationibus*”

It is hard to pinpoint the actual reason for the change but going back to certain periods of the Congregation’s history would help, albeit more tentatively. There is no doubt that from the time of St. Vincent up to the middle of the twentieth century, the French domination was very significant, more so among those who constituted the General Council.⁶⁸ In fact, the only notable exceptions were the Italian Assistants who since the 17th century⁶⁹ were elected to the post. The other non-French Assistants before 1947 were: Faure, from Savoy, Assistant

⁶⁶ The second article of Chapter IX of the *Constitutiones Majores*, precisely on the election of the Assistants and Admonitor of the Superior General says: “II. *Elegi debent quatuor (sic) Assistentes, ex numero eorum sive absentium, sive praesentium, qui saltem decennium post emissa vota in Congregatione exegerint, qui in quantum fieri poterit, sint ex variis Provinciis,....*” **Collectio Bullarum, Constitutionum** p. 94 (underscoring supplied).

⁶⁷ “*Eligendi sunt sex,...et singuli Assistentes eligi debent ex diversis nationibus.*” 1954 C.38, §1. (underscoring supplied)

⁶⁸ Baylach catalogues this quite well. “2. DIVERSITE D’ORIGINE : 1661-1955 « *in quantum fieri poterit sint ex variis provinciis* »; en fait, en 1661-1685, de 3. prov. Françaises; 1^{er}. fois un italien en 1685; en 1788, 1^{er}. fois un irlandais; en 1919, 1^{er}. fois un USA-Orl; en 1932, 1^{er}. fois un USA-Occ; en 1933, 1^{er}. fois un hollandais; en 1947, 1^{er}. fois un de l’Equateur (français), de Cuba (espagnol), de la Belgique (luxembourgeois).” Cf. J.O. Baylach, “Les Assistants Généraux (tableau, notes),” p.292.

⁶⁹ Actually, the 1685 General Assembly had already given this concession. “*Actum est in duabus sessionibus de huiusmodi postulatione, et postquam plurima a singulis congregatis perample circa rem propositam fuerunt in utramque partem allata, tandem conventus generalis ob multas et speciales rationes concessit, ut deinceps Italia habeat suum particularem assistentem, in Gallia cum Superiore generali residentem, atque aliis tribus assistentibus omnino parem. (Conv. Gen. iv, sess. 15, anno 1685.)*” **Collectio Completa**, p. 4. Throughout the history of the Congregation, particularly in the 18th century, the Pope had to intervene in the affairs of the Congregation. Cf. Poole, p.161-187. See also S. Poole, “Major Developments in the History of the Congregation of the Mission” in *Vincentiana* 29 (1984) 717-742, especially 718-726.

of Jolly; Ferris, from Ireland, Assistant of Cayla de la Garde; MacHale, from USA, Assistant of Verdier; and Romans, from Holland, Assistant of Souvay.⁷⁰ The dominance of the French was a congregational practice that would be mitigated starting only in 1947.⁷¹ In the same Assembly that elected William Slattery as the first non-French Superior General, the four Assistants chosen to form his Council also came not only from diverse provinces, but also from diverse countries or nationalities. Elected were L. Scamps, Province of Ecuador (of French nationality); A. Fugazza, Province of Rome (Italian); A. Lopez, Province of Cuba-Antilles (Spanish); and L. Peters, Province of Belgium (of Luxembourg nationality). To many this represented somewhat of a breakthrough on the matter.⁷² The same international representation occurred in two succeeding Assemblies, in 1955 and 1963, both of which followed the 1954 Constitutional provision of “six Assistants from various countries.” (Cf. Appendix 2) This period saw by far the most diverse representation in the General Council to date.

Back to “*Diversis Provinciis*”

But it did not take long to switch back to the traditional category. In the 1968 General Assembly, the Constitutions went back to “*diversis provinciis*,” replacing the possible “*in quantum fieri poterit*” of the *Constitutiones Maiores* with a forceful “*debent esse*.” The principal reason for this was not only tradition but also the logical division in the Congregation which is by “province/vice-province” rather than by “countries.” Also, the Assembly evidently thought it too far-fetched for two confreres of the same nationality but belonging to different provinces to be elected to the same General Council. In fact, that is precisely what the Assembly had avoided from 1968 to 2004, when it made sure the Assistants General came not only from different provinces but also from different countries, and in some instances, from different continents too. In this regard, one may even ask: were the General Assemblies from 1968 using other criteria in their choice of Assistants General?

To appreciate the question and the Assembly’s answer, it is good to know more about other categories of provenance, aside from “*provinciis*” or “*nationibus*,” that were discussed throughout the history of this debate, at least since 1968 onwards, or as could be divined from the actual elections themselves. Some have proposed the election of Assistants by linguistic provenance or by apostolates. For obvious reasons, these of course were not considered serious

⁷⁰ Cf. Baylach, “Les Assistants Généraux (tableau, notes),” p. 292. See also Herrera, J., *Historia de la Congregación de la Misión*, Madrid, 1949, p. 555. W. Slattery was appointed Consultor of the Vicar General in 1945.

⁷¹ “The struggle for a truly international community did not come easily. Even after the establishment of peace in the nineteenth century there were still nationalistic antagonisms and still a French predominance in Vincentian government. In a sense the struggle still goes on.” S. Poole, “Major Developments”, p. 726.

⁷² After the 1947 Assembly, commentaries like the following greeted this change. “La Curia Generalicia ha dejado también de ser francesa y se ha hecho universal. En ella están representadas las lenguas más habladas de la Congregación: la francesa, la española, y la italiana.” *Anales* 54 (1947) 340.

alternatives to “*ex provinciis*,” or even “*ex nationibus*.” But one was, and oddly enough, it is something that looks familiar.

“*Coetus Provinciarum*”

As mentioned earlier, among the more interesting proposals contained in the 1968 Schemata or the Black Book was the one on groups of provinces, or “*coetus provinciarum*.” The eight groups (*coetus*) of provinces into which the entire Congregation were to be divided would designate three candidates coming from their member provinces, and the General Assembly selects as Assistants General one from each of the groups.⁷³ Not a completely new idea,⁷⁴ some provinces already suggested it to the working commissions that served as the “ante-preparatory” bodies for the 1968 Assembly.⁷⁵

This was an interesting proposal but, as mentioned earlier, unfortunately it and its other forms did not meet the approval of the 1968-1969 General Assembly. More concretely, in 1969, when asked whether the Assistants were representatives and promoters of a certain region, the Assembly voted negatively, 130 against, 14 in favor, and 3 abstaining.⁷⁶ In 1980, the English group again had suggested “from diverse regions”⁷⁷ instead of “provinces,” but the Commission *De Regimine* rejected it primarily because the “term ‘region’ was as yet not clear and did not have any recognition in our Constitutions or Statutes, except in the case of Regional Superior.”⁷⁸ Even so, the matter of groups of

⁷³ Cf. (foot)note 14.

⁷⁴ One question worth asking: could the idea of the “*coetus provinciarum*” have actually arisen from the experience of international representation as witnessed in the 1955 and 1963 elections of Assistants General coming from diverse provinces, countries and nationalities? In fact, compared to these two General Assemblies on the matter of election, the 1968 election was a throw-back, a step back from the perceived move towards wider internationalization in the Congregation. Conceivably, the election in 1968 was allowed by some because they hoped that in 1969 a change could still take place. As it turned out it was wishful-thinking.

⁷⁵ Reminiscent of the Ante-preparatory Commissions of Vatican II, the different commissions or *coetus* submitted schemas for consideration of the Special Commission that drew up the 1968 Schemata. Among these schema, schema 35, on the office of the Vicar General and the Assistants General, listed the opinions of various provinces precisely on the number of Assistants. The province of Rome wanted to reduce the number from 6 to 4, because according to its judgment the Vicar General and the Procurator before the Holy See are already present in the ordinary council. But most of those who wrote suggestions wanted an increase in number for the purpose of regional representation. Cf. *Aggiornamento. Elenchus Opinionum Provinciarum Congregationis de ipsius Congregationis Aptatione Menti Concilii Vaticani II*, p. 125 (underscoring supplied).

⁷⁶ “*Assistentes sint repraesentantes et promotores alicuius regionis.*” *Acta 1969*, p. 146.

⁷⁷ In 1974, the expression used was “*ex diversis regionibus culturaliter sumptis.*” *Acta 1974*, p. 130.

⁷⁸ An interesting intervention was made by R. Ruelos on 21 July 1980: “Regarding who are to be our Assistants General, there is a ‘tacit understanding’ that the C.M. is divided into Groups of Provinces. Each Group is to be represented by an Assistant in the General Curia. Southeast Asian Provinces form a Group, but cannot have an Assistant to represent them because one of the ‘traditional’ Groups will lose its Assistant in the Curia. As a consequence Southeast Asian Provinces are marginalized. . . Of course Southeast Asian delegates are eligible but because of the tacit understanding they are automatically eliminated. This elimination might be involuntary and unconscious on the part of the Assembly. I must mention here that several delegates from Provinces not of Southeast Asia have

provinces or its newer form - regional or continental representation - as criterion kept re-surfacing, much to the dismay of a Vicar General.⁷⁹

From Coetus Provinciarum to Synod of Provincials to Conferences of Visitors

The General Assembly may not have favoured the “coetus provinciarum” as category for provenance, but from all indications, this idea was not altogether devoid of importance, at least as far as some persons were concerned. In point of fact, in as early as 1969 this concept seemed to have been at the back of the suggestion for a “Synod of Provincials.”⁸⁰ Although at first it seemed more like a linguistic than a regional grouping, as years went by it became more and more a reality beyond language, at the very least in Latin America which was the very first continent to organize itself as a regional group of provinces. An experience like this, and a successful one at that, was bound to have some effects on the mental framework of Assembly delegates. That is why from 1968 until 2004, the idea of “coetus provinciarum” never did disappear, no matter the number of times the Assembly failed to recognize and approve it officially. Nowadays, of course, the idea of continental groupings is taken for granted, practically as a new structure⁸¹ operating within the practical framework of the Congregation’s government. At the very least, the Conferences of Visitors (CLAPVI, NCV, CEVIM, APVC, and

shown their concern about this situation. This is not a protest, but a memorandum for the next General Assembly to take into account. I mention it here so that no one can say that this Assembly had not even said anything about this situation.” *Comm.V: De Regimine*, also *Acta 1980* p.102.

⁷⁹ Cf. (foot)note 28. M. Pérez Flores said: “El art. 116, §2 dice: *Los Asistentes, en número de cuatro al menos, y de diversas Provincias, son elegidos por un sexenio*, etc. Creo que, o se cambia la figura del Asistente, o hay que superar la idea de la representatividad regional o ‘asistencias,’ que no sé por qué esta (sic) muy presente entre muchos asambleístas.”

⁸⁰ In the same circular letter announcing the formation of the “Group of Seven,” the Superior General mentioned that one question to be presented for second session of the 1968-1969 General Assembly’s consideration was the idea of a Synod of Provincials (or Visitors). (“*Inter quaestiones quarum introductio, durante secunda Conventus periodo opportune videbatur, Superior Generalis Coetui proposuit Synodi constitutionem. Unius sane Conventus Generalis est de hac re statuere; qui, tamen, securiore gressu procedet, si qua, saltem indirecta, praecesserit experientia. Hac ratione, enixe Provinciales ac Viceprovinciales rogamus ut, Provinciarum ac Viceprovinciarum coetus efforment, complectentes regiones vicinitate atque aliqua pastoralis affinitate coniunctas. Horum coetuum erit, non tantum de iis argumentis tractare, quae illas Provincias ac Viceprovincias afficiunt, sed et de rebus ad totam Congregationem pertinentibus. Quae omnia, nostro iudicio, e principiis defluunt subsidiariorum ac corresponsabilitatis.*” *Vincentiana* 13(1969), p. 11). This was an idea that was clearly influenced by Paul VI’s “Synod of Bishops.” But because the Congregation lacked experience on this matter, he exhorted Visitors and Vice-Visitors to form groups of provinces and/or vice-provinces according to regional proximity or pastoral affinity. These were to treat matters that pertained not only to them but also to the entire Congregation, thereby expressing the general principles of subsidiarity and corresponsibility which were already approved in the first session.

Among the earliest groups that pushed through with the organization of “coetus provinciarum” were the provinces of Spain and those linguistically or historically linked to them. They were the provinces of Madrid, Salamanca, Zaragoza, and the “filiales,” namely, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. (Of course, the division of the old province of Madrid into three was a major reason for the concerned provinces to come up with arrangements concerning personnel, formation, retirement, economics, etc. Cf. *Anales* 78 (1970) 445-450). CLAPVI would follow in 1972.

⁸¹ Even though it is still not in the present Constitutions and Statutes as such – understandably, because these have not been amended since 1984! Statute 8 comes closest to it.

COVIAM)⁸² serve at present as structure for coordination among provinces in the same “continent” and even as a consultative arm of the Superior General and his Council. The question now is whether it is going to be more than just a coordinating structure. The proposals for “continental” representatives in the General Council for Asia and Africa seem to point towards something more. But whatever the continental groups would evolve into, one thing is sure: the proposal for continental representation in the General Council is precisely anchored on the experience in the last 10 years or so with these Conferences of Visitors. Still, the incredulous may well ask: on what other basis would a proposal of this kind stand? Is there anything in the Congregation’s history and tradition that would warrant its acceptance?

An Electoral Pattern?

In the past when Assemblies decided on how many Assistants to elect and on where they came from, much premium was given to the experience of the Assistants themselves. It is an importance given to concrete experience that goes all the way back to St. Vincent himself. With this in mind, can we use the experience of the past elections in order to learn about the value or disvalue of a proposal such as that of continental representation? Well, it is something that is certainly worth exploring, in my opinion.

When one examines the way the elections of the Superior General and the members of the General Council have happened since 1947, one can see a pattern that may well be the basis for the idea of “continental representation.” When the French no longer dominated the elections, the higher offices in the Congregation’s government appeared to be shared not only by other provinces or nationalities, but also by continental groups. Appendix 3 shows us that since the election of Slattery as Superior General and while adhering to the constitutional criterion for provenance at the time - “*ex provinciis*” in 1947 and from 1968 to 2004, “*ex nationibus*” for 1955 and 1963 - and thus electing Superior General and Assistants from varied provinces and/or countries, the General Assemblies were also considering other factors by which a certain “international” balance would be struck and maintained.

The pattern that appears throughout these elections is this. The continental “groups” that can speak of a consistent representation in the General Curia, in the persons of the Superior General and his Assistants, are the following: Europe, with at least two, most of the time three representatives, coming as much as possible from the Eastern and Western parts; U.S.A. with one; and Latin America (either Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking) also with one. This basic pattern was consistent throughout the years from 1968 to 2004, with only 1980 as the lone exception since no one from the U.S. was elected then. The fourth continental group (Asia) started to be represented in 1992.

⁸² On the Conferences of Visitors, several important meetings have discussed them, like in Salamanca (1996) and Dublin (2001). Cf. S. Peralta, “Interprovincial Collaboration” in *Vincentiana* 40 (1996) 380-383; J.M. Nieto, “The Visitors’ Conferences” in *Vincentiana* 46 (2002) 232-239. Also *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, articles 376-378, takes up this matter.

Again, although some have interpreted this pattern more from the point of view of language,⁸³ the most plausible reason for this is simply numbers. Those groups enjoying majority numbers would expect to be represented at any table, congregational or familial. But when one analyses this way of electing on the part of the Assembly, one cannot fail to see the wisdom behind it. As laudable and constitutional the criterion “*diversis provinciis*” may be, it can however be abused. The different provinces of Europe could have, just as easily, filled all the four positions of Assistants General with confreres from their own continent, and still stay within the bounds of “*diversiis provinciis.*” But it is to their credit that they did not, perhaps because they realized that it would have been no better than the French domination in the past, from which the Assemblies since 1947 seemed to be moving away from. In fact, the Assembly’s attempt to balance international representation was a prudent way of avoiding the possible domination of the General Council by any one continent. Of course, at that time it meant that while USA and Latin America would have one representative each, Europe would have at least two. But this was perfectly understandable because when one considers that, following the democratic principle of equal representation, Europe as continent had more than twice as many confreres as either the U.S or Latin America. From the indications of the votes in these Assemblies, this was something that those from other continents would not begrudge Europe.

The equation, however, started to shift a bit when in 1992 Asia began also to be represented in the person of Bieler, thereby introducing a new continental group to the pattern of election. When again in 1998 these four groups had representation at the General Curia, it was almost expected that Africa will at some future time be asking also for representation. It was around this time that talk about a “desk” for Africa, or some symbolic representation of this continent, begun to be bruited about.⁸⁴ And, as to be expected, Africa did not get one, neither in 1998 nor in 2004. At the very least, some argued, it was because it did not have the numbers. (Appendix 4 can help illustrate this clearly). But the thinking behind the proposal for continental representation emerges clearly: first it was the turn of the Americans, then that of the Latin Americans; now, it is the turn of the Asians and the Africans.⁸⁵ The proposal may appear insolent to some,

⁸³ The main languages groups were represented at one time or another: French, Spanish, English, Portuguese, Polish, and Italian (only from 1685 to 1963!). Indonesian was an exception in two occasions. Cf. also (foot)note 72.

⁸⁴ The delegation from Africa was pushing for an Assistant for Africa Cf. footnote 37. In 2004, one of the postulata from the COVIAM was for an Assistant General for Africa; in another, to establish an office or desk in Rome for Africa. Cf. *40 Assemblea Generale Della C.M., Fase Preparatoria I*, p. 110-111. Also *Vincentiana 48* (2004) 344, and 349.

⁸⁵ At the 2004 Assembly, A. Sad Budiando made two postulates precisely calling for the election of 5 assistants general representing the 5 major regions in which the Congregation works. These were not voted on because the Assembly followed the recommendation of the Commission on the Postulates, which stated: “According to our Constitutions, the Assistants General do not represent different continents. A vote relating to the number of Assistants, having taken place during this Assembly, the Commission judges that this theme should not be treated now. However, the Commission recommends that this theme could be discussed at a coming Assembly, thus taking into consideration the problem of the representation and number of Assistants.” *Libro dell’Assemblea Generale 2004*, vol. V, p. 907.

but in fact it is not. After all it is simply a logical conclusion derived from a careful reading of the history of congregational politics. And all of this, still within the bounds of the criterion of “*ex provinciis*” as well as “*saltem quattuor!*”

4. A Brief Summary, Some Questions and a Small Suggestion

After spending pages upon pages presenting and dissecting the multitude of arguments on the various aspects of our topic, it would be foolhardy indeed to attempt a synthesis. But bringing together some essential points may help. In this final section of the paper, I will first of all attempt to summarize very briefly the main arguments in each of the sub-topics discussed. Then I will end with a small procedural suggestion. I do so now on the strength of a conviction that this whole effort has been primarily an attempt to clarify the various aspects of the question, the better to reach a response to certain proposals on the matter, such as that of continental representation. My objective here is simply to put forward what seems to me as the most fair and just procedure and arrangement for the greater good of the world-wide Congregation and our more creative service of the poor.

On the Role of the Assistants General

Their role started out as a circle of advisors of the Superior General. Through the centuries, as the Congregation grew from its humble beginnings in France, this role expanded. Aside from the advisory duties, the Assistants were called on to help the Superior General in his responsibilities in government as well as in leadership, especially vis-à-vis the provinces. As the Congregation expanded to various continents, as interests and concerns continued to multiply, and as provinces demanded regular and more tangible connection with the Congregation’s central government, the Assistants started to be asked to undertake more tasks than was previously envisioned in 1642, or even in 1968.

Through these years, however, the General Assemblies have responded to these expanded responsibilities by insisting on the distinction between the essentials of the position, i.e., as advisors of the General, and what are considered extra duties and responsibilities that could also be and in fact were given over to and handled by other appointed or delegated confreres, temporarily or on a long term basis. Among these duties are links with the Vincentian Family, visitations of provinces other than by the Assistants themselves, etc. The question of course is whether this distinction in regard to the Assistants’ role is still operative in a world that has changed tremendously in the last 12 years, in a Congregation that has already begun to think of tasks and roles not only in another way but in an expanded manner, often dictated by emerging new realities and situations. If indeed the tasks and responsibilities have multiplied, how many Assistants would be needed?

On the Number of Assistants

From a small number of two, three, or even four, the Assistants General at one point in the last century increased to six. Understandably, it was probably the increase in the Congregation’s population that demanded the change. But

starting in 1968, the Assemblies steadfastly maintained the number, despite calls from both members of the central government and the provinces themselves who saw and experienced the benefit of a designated Assistant attending to their needs and more closely following up their life and work. Precisely, the expanded responsibilities, some thought, necessitated an increase in number. But time and again, the Assemblies have considered otherwise, preferring that the Congregation operate a General Curia that consists simply of a core of advisors and a group of other delegates, appointees and “*auxiliares*.” We may well ask, is this structure of small core of advisors, assisted by the group of curia officers and ad hoc appointees, what the Congregation needs today to provide an efficient service to the confreres and to the poor. How does this priority of a lean central bureaucracy stack up with the demands for more international representation? If the number is increased, how many would it be and will they be chosen at random or following a certain criterion, like their provenance or origin?

On the Provenance of the Assistants

The provenance of Assistants, at first, did not present a problem. Those closest to St. Vincent and later those who embodied his vision and charism were the most logical group of advisors to the Congregation’s leaders. But this was good for a one-country operation, or even a mainly European congregation. When the Community started to expand, the composition of its leaders at the center began also to change, at one point even with a pontifical prodding, admitting those from other provinces, other nationalities, and other continents to take part in the service of leading the Congregation. The past 10 Assemblies decided, rightly, that its core leaders should come from diverse provinces and diverse sectors of the Congregation. This diversity is an antidote to nationalistic tendencies that have characterized the Congregation’s past. It is also a recognition of the multiplicity and variety that are the hallmarks of the Congregation in the present age. Finally, this diversity is at the same time a means towards striking a balance between competing legitimate perspectives and interests within one Congregation.

The central question in regard to provenance has always been this. Assuming that varying sectors of the Congregation have to be represented in the central government called the General Council, what are these sectors and how are they to be equitably and fairly represented?

Finally, it may seem that the easiest answer to all this would be to do as the proponent for “*coetus provinciarum*” wanted: divide the world-wide Congregation into groups of provinces, and then ask each group to nominate three candidates, from among whom the General Assembly would elect an Assistant General. But if this is done, there are still questions that beg for answers. Like, if every continent is to be represented in the General Council, meaning that there will be five (U.S., Europe, Latin-America, Asia, Africa), would one Assistant be enough for Europe and be proportionate to its place in the Congregation in terms of number of confreres and of tradition? What process should be followed so that the true choices of each continental group are properly recognized?

A Small Suggestion

Every discussion and eventual decision will depend much on the framework that is agreed upon. In the past Assemblies, several frameworks were used in giving answers to the proposals on the election of the Assistants General. Here I am suggesting that, while keeping in mind the Constitutional prescriptions “*saltem quattuor ex diversis provinciis*,” the primary framework that should guide the Assembly in this discussion is the **future of the Congregation**. In view of this, the Assembly, it seems to me, would do well to address the following questions:

1. Which areas in the world today would the Congregation consider as priority vis-à-vis its mission to serve the poorest of the poor?
2. What must the CM do, in the next six years, in order to respond to this priority?
3. What structures need to be changed so that we respond optimally?
4. What role does each confrere, each province, each continental group play in this response?
5. Particularly as leaders of the worldwide Congregation, what roles do the Superior General and members of his Council play in this response?
6. How many Assistants does the Superior General need in order to achieve this optimal response?
7. How should they be selected?

It is my hope that after the General Assembly of 2010 will have addressed these questions and answered them to the satisfaction of the whole Congregation, the matter of continental representation for the Assistants General will have been put in its proper place.

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a fitting reminder from St. Vincent on what the imitation of Christ implies:

“Now, the little Congregation of the Mission wants, with God’s grace, to imitate Christ, the Lord, in so far as that is possible in view of its limitations. It seeks to imitate his virtues as well as what he did for the salvation of others. It is only right that if the Congregation is to do the same sort of work, it should act in the same sort of way.” (CR I, 1)

Manuel Ginete C.M.

Rome

2010 February

Appendix 1
THE ASSISTANTS GENERAL ACCORDING TO OUR CONSTITUTIONS
(1954-1984)

Constitutiones et Statuta 1954	Schemata Constituiones et Statuta 1968	Constitutiones et Statuta 1968-69	Constitutiones et Statuta 1984
<p><i>(Role of Assistants General)</i></p> <p>C.35 Consilium Superioris Generalis constituitur ex Assistantibus generalibus.</p> <p>C.40 Assistentium partes sunt: 1° Opera et consilio Praepositum Generalem in regimine Congregationis iuvare, tam in rebus pertinentibus ad doctrinam, quam in agendis; 2° Sincere et fideliter, coram Domino, a partium studio alieni, proprium suffragium seu sententiam pandere, secundum nostrae Congregationis doctrinam et praxim circa omnia quae a Superiore Generali in Consilio sint proposita, et de omnibus servare secretum; 3° Providere in iis quae respiciunt victum, vestitum, sumptus, necnon curam corporis Superioris Generalis.</p>	<p><i>(Role of Assistants General)</i></p> <p>C.207 Assistentes generales Consilium Superioris Generalis constituunt; ex eorum activitate et peritia quamplurimum pendet, ut unitas et vis Congregationis promoveantur, decisiones Conventus generalis ad effectum deducantur omnesque Provinciae in operibus Congregationis promovendis collaborent.</p> <p>S.158 Assistentium est: 1° opera et consilio Superiorem Generalem in regimine Congregationis iuvare, tam in rebus pertinentibus ad doctrinam, quam in agendis; 2° sincere et fideliter, coram Domino, a partium studio alieni, proprium suffragium seu sententiam pandere, secundum nostrae Congregationis doctrinam et praxim circa omnia quae a Superiore Generali in Consilio sint proposita, et de omnibus servare secretum; 3° intimas et frequentes instituere consuetudines cum provinciis operibusque Congregationis, quibus providendi Superior Generalis curam eis forte commisit, cum peculiaribus facultatibus.</p>	<p><i>(Role of Assistants General)</i></p> <p>C.151 Assistentes Generales, qui Consilium Superioris Generalis constituunt, opera et consilio in regimine Congregationis eum adjuvant, ut unitas et robur Congregationis promoveatur, Constitutiones et decisiones Conventus Generalis ad effectum deducantur, omnesque Provinciae in operibus Congregationis promovendis collaborent.</p>	<p><i>(Role of Assistants General)</i></p> <p>C.115 Assistentes Generales sunt sodales Congregationis qui Consilium Superioris Generalis constituent, opera et consilio in regimine Congregationis eum adjuvant, ut unitas et robur Congregationis promoveantur, Constitutiones et decisiones Conventus Generalis ad effectum deducantur, omnesque Provinciae in operibus Congregationis promovendis collaborent.</p>
			<i>(Election)</i>

			C.116.1 Assistentes Generales a Conventu Generali, ad normam iuris proprii, eliguntur.
<p><i>(Election, Number, Term, Re-election, Qualifications)</i></p> <p>C.36 Assistentes ad plura medietate suffragia eliguntur a Conventu generali.</p> <p>C.37 Assistentes in suo officio durant usque ad proximum Conventum generalem, ad normam art. 69, §§1 et 2; semper tamen possunt denuo eligi. Conventui intersunt ad finem usque, etiam ab officio exeuntes.</p> <p>C.38.1 Eligendi sunt sex, de numero sive eorum qui Conventui intersunt, sive absentium, et singuli Assistentes eligi debent ex diversis nationibus.</p> <p>C.38.2 Ad validitatem autem requiritur ut eligendi saltem decennium post primam votorum emissionem in Congregatione exegerint.</p> <p>C.38.3 Sint viri ad exemplum et obsequii divini zelatores ; inordinatis affectibus, quantum humana fragilitas patitur, immunes ; boni amatores ; studio et zelo Instituti conservandi eiusque primaevum spiritum promovendi ardentis, et in Instituto rebusque Congregationis bene versati.</p>	<p><i>(Election, Number, Qualification, Term, Re-election)</i></p> <p>C.209 Assistentes generales ad plura absolute suffragia eliguntur a Conventu generali octo numero per sex annos, salvo praescipto art. 202, 1, Constitutionum, et semel reeligere possunt iuxta modum Statutorum nostrorum. Requiritur ad validitatem ut ipsi saltem decennium post professionem perpetuam in Congregatione exegerint.</p> <p>S.157 Assistentes generales eligendi sunt, de numero, sive eorum qui Conventui intersunt, sive absentium, et singuli Assistentes eligi debent ex diversis nationibus, hoc modo: 1° Conventus generalis dividit Congregationem in tot coetus provinciarum quot Assistentes eligendi sunt; 2° unusquisque coetus provinciarum, per suos congregatos in Conventu generali, designat tres candidatos ex provinciis huius coetus; 3° Conventus generalis eligit de unoquoque coetu provinciarum unum ex candidatis, qui erit Assistens generalis; 4° ordo inter Assistentes erit ordo vocationis.</p>	<p><i>(Election, Number, Qualification, Term, Re-election)</i></p> <p>C.152.1 Assistentes Generales, quattuor numero, ad sex annos a Conventu Generali eliguntur; et semel reeligere possunt.</p> <p>C. 153 Assistentes Generales eligi possunt de numero, sive eorum qui Conventui intersunt, sive absentium, et debent esse ex diversis Provinciis.</p>	<p><i>(Election, Number, Qualification, Term, Re-election)</i></p> <p>C.116.2 Assistentes Generales, saltem quattuor numero, ex diversis Provinciis, ad sexennium eliguntur, et semel possunt iterum eligi. Expleto tamen secundo sexennio consecutivo, nequeunt immediate in Vicarium Generalem eligi.</p>
		<p><i>(Understanding of 6-year term)</i></p> <p>C.152.2 Sexennium vero computatur usque ad acceptationem electionis</p>	<p><i>(Understanding of 6-year term)</i></p> <p>C.116.3 Sexennium vero compleri censetur acceptatione officii, a successoribus facta, in</p>

		a successoribus factam in sequenti Conventu Generali ordinatio.	sequenti Conventu Generali ordinario.
			<i>(End of Term)</i> C.117 Assistentium Generalium officium cessat ad normam iuris proprii.
<i>(Substitution)</i> C.41.1 Si aliquis ex Assistentibus moriatur, substitutus nominatur a Superiore Generali, cum voto deliberativo aliorum. C.41.2 Sed si tantum inter sex menses Conventus Generalis haberi debeat, Superior Generalis non tenebitur nominare substitutum.	<i>(Substitution)</i> C.211.1 Si quis ex Assistentibus a numere cesserit, substitutus nominatur a Superiore Generali cum voto deliberativo aliorum Assistentium; ipse substitutus eadem iura et obligationes ac alii Assistentes habet. C.211.2 Sed si tantum inter sex menses Conventus generalis haberi debeat, Superiori Generalis non tenebitur nominare substitutum.	<i>(Substitution)</i> C.157.1 Si quis ex Assistentibus a munere cesserit, substitutus nominatur a Superiore Generali cum voto deliberativo aliorum Assistentium; substitutus vero eadem iura et obligationes ac alii Assistentes habet. C.157.2 Sed, si intra sex menses Conventus Generalis haberi debeat, Superior Generalis non tenebitur nominare substitutum.	<i>(Substitution)</i> C.118.1 Si quis ex Assistentibus a munere cesserit, substitutus nominatur a Superiore Generalei cum voto deliberativo aliorum Assistentium; substitutus vero eadem iura et obligationes ac alii Assistentes obtinet. C. 188.2 Sed, si intra sex menses Conventus Generalis celebrari debeat, Superior Generalis non tenetur nominare substitutum.
<i>(Procedure of election)</i> C.36 Assistentes ad plura medietate suffragia eliguntur a Conventu generali.		<i>(Procedure of election)</i> C.154.1 Electionibus Superioris Generalis et Vicarii Generalis absolutis, Conventus Generalis ad electionem aliorum Assistentium procedit in distinctis scrutiniis. C.154.2 Ii electi habebuntur qui, demptis suffragiis nullis, plura absolute suffragia retulerint; hi ut electi a Praeside Conventus proclamentur.	<i>(Procedure of election)</i> C. 142.1 Electionibus Superioris Generalis et Vicarii Generalis absolutis, Conventus Generalis ad electionem aliorum Assistentium procedit, in distinctis scrutiniis. C.142.2 Ii electi habebuntur qui, demptis suffragiis nullis, plura absolute suffragia tulerint; hi ut electi a Praeside Conventus proclamentur.
			<i>(Assistant for the Mission)</i> S.57 Unus ex Assistentibus Generalibus specialem curam habet pro missionibus ad Gentes.
			<i>(Residence and « Quorum » in the Council)</i> S. 58. Assistentes in eadem domo qua Superior Generalis residere debent. Ad Consilium autem Generale constituendum, praeter Superiorem Generalem aut Vicarium Generalem, duo

			saltem Assistentes praesentes sint oportet. S. 59. Absentibus tamen, justa de causa, Assistentibus Generalibus, ita ut numerus requisitus pro Consilio deficiat, Superior Generalis ipsum Consilium, cum jure suffragii, vocare potest unum ex Officialibus Curiae Generalis, hoc ordine: Secretarium Generalem, Oeconomum Generalem, aut Procuratorem Generalem apud Sanctam Sedem.
	<p><i>(Relation to Vicar General)</i></p> <p>C.205 Vicarius Generalis eligitur unus ex Assistentibus, ad plura absolute suffragia a Conventu generali ad sex annos et semel reeligi potest, salvo praescripto art. 202, 1° Constitutionum.</p> <p>C.206. Si cesserit a munere suo, novus Vicarius generalis eligitur ex Assistentibus, ad plura suffragia, a Superiore Generali cum suis Assistentibus.</p>	<p><i>(Relation to Vicar General)</i></p> <p>C.144. Vicarius Generalis a Conventu Generali eligitur ad duas tertias partes suffragiorum, eodem modo iisdemque condicionibus ac Superior Generalis. Electus vero in Vicarium Generalem ipso facto fit Assistens.</p> <p>C.148. Deficiente Vicario Generali quacumque de causa, de consensu sui Consilii auditisque saltem Superioribus Provincialibus, Superior Generalis ex Assistentibus quam primum Vicarium Generalem nominet.</p>	<p><i>(Relation to Vicar General)</i></p> <p>C.109. Vicarius Generalis a Conventu Generali eligitur ad normam iuris proprii. Electus vero in Vicarium Generalem ipso facto fit etiam Assistens Generalis.</p> <p>C.113 Deficiente Vicario Generali, quacumque de causa, Superior Generalis, de consensu sui Consilii auditisque saltem Visitoribus et Vicevisitoribus, ex Assistentibus Vicarium Generalem quamprimum nominat.</p>
<p><i>(Admonitor of SG)</i></p> <p>C.43 Admonitor Superioris Generalis erit unus ex Assistentibus, et eligitur a Conventu generali, sicut fit pro electione Assistentium generalium ad plura medietate suffragia.</p>	<p><i>(Admonitor of SG)</i></p> <p>C.213 Admonitor Superioris Generalis erit unus ex Assistentibus, excluso Vicario generali, et eligitur ab ipsis Assistentibus ad plura absolute suffragia.</p>		

Appendix 2
THE SUPERIOR GENERAL AND THE GENERAL COUNCIL 1947-2004

General Assembly	Superior General	General Council
1947	W. Slattery (Eastern, US)	L. Scamps, 1 st Assist., Admon. (French / Prov. Ecuador) A. Fugazza, 2 nd Assist. (Italian / Prov. Roma) A. Lopez, 3 rd Assist. (Spanish / Prov. Antilles-Cuba) L. Peters, 4 th Assist. (Belgian / Prov. Belgium)
1955	(same)	F. Contassot, 1 st Assist. (French / Prov. D'Aquitaine) F. del Campo, 2 nd Assist. (Spanish / Prov. Philippines) G. Lapalorcia, 3 rd Assist. (Italian / Prov. Naples) J. Zimmerman, 4 th Asst. (American / Prov. Western US) W. Knapik, 5 th Assist. (Polish / Prov. Poland) F. Godinho, 6 th Assist. (Brazilian / Prov. Brazil)
1963	(same)	F. Contassot, 1 st Assist. (French / Prov. D'Aquitaine) T. Marijuan, 2 nd Assist. (Spanish / Prov. Puerto Rico) G. Lapalorcia, 3 rd Assist. (Italian / Prov. Naples) J. Zimmerman, 4 th Assist. (American / Prov. Western US) G. Domogola, 5 th Assist. (Polish / Prov. Poland) A. Rigazio, 6 th Assist. (Argentinian / Prov. Argentina)
1968	J. Richardson (Western, US)	R. Sainz, Vicar General (Spanish / Prov. Madrid) C. Benoit (French / Prov. Toulouse) A. Rigazio (Argentinian / Prov. Argentina) F. Kapusciak (Polish / Prov. Poland)
1974	J. Richardson (Western, US)	R. Sainz, Vicar General (Spanish / Prov. Madrid -Zaragoza) F. Kapusciak (Polish / Prov. Poland) A. Sylvestre (French / Prov. Toulouse) V. Zico (Brazilian, Prov. Rio de Janeiro)
1980	R. McCullen (Ireland)	M. Perez-Flores, Vic. General (Spanish / Prov. Salamanca) S. Wypich (Polish / Prov. Poland) J. Gaziello (French / Prov. Toulouse) V. Zico (Brazilian, Prov. Rio de Janeiro) up to 1981 – J. Pires de Almeida (Brazil), 1981
1986	R. McCullen (Ireland)	M. Perez-Flores, Vicar General J. Gaziello (up to 1989) L. Palú (Brazilian, Prov. Rio de Janeiro) R. Maloney (American / Prov. Eastern US) L. Lauwerier (French / Prov. Paris) from 1989
1992	R. Maloney (Eastern, US)	J. I. Fernandez H. de Mendoza, Vicar General (Spanish / Prov. Zaragoza) L. Palu (Brazilian, Rio de Janeiro) V. Bieler (Indonesian/Dutch / Prov. Indonesia) I. Zedde (Italian / Prov. Torino)
1998	R. Maloney (Eastern, US)	J. I. Fernandez H. de Mendoza, Vicar Gen. J. A. Ubillus (Peruvian / Prov. Peru) V. Bieler (Indonesian/Dutch / Prov. Indonesia) J. Kapusicak (Polish / Prov. Poland)
2004	G. Gay (Eastern, US)	J. Kapusciak, Vicar General (Polish / Prov. Poland) J. A. Ubillus (Peruvian / Prov. Peru) J. M. Nieto (Spanish / Prov. Madrid) G. Tran Cong Du (Vietnamese / Prov. Paris)

Appendix 3
C.M. GENERAL CURIA BY CONTINENTAL “GROUPS”

General Assembly	Europe	U.S.A.	Latin-America	Asia
1947 [^]	Belgium Rome	Slattery*	Cuba Ecuador	
1955+	French Spanish Italian Polish	Slattery Zimmerman	Brazil	
1963+	French Spanish Italian Polish	Slattery* Zimmerman	Argentina	
1968 [^]	Madrid Toulouse Poland	Richardson*	Argentina	
1974 [^]	Zaragoza Toulouse Poland	Richardson*	Rio de Janeiro	
1980 [^]	McCullen* Salamanca Toulouse Poland		Rio de Janeiro	
1986 [^]	McCullen* Salamanca Toulouse (Paris)	US Eastern	Rio de Janeiro	
1992 [^]	Zaragoza Torino	Maloney*	Rio de Janeiro	Indonesia
1998 [^]	Zaragoza Poland	Maloney*	Peru	Indonesia
2004 [^]	Poland Madrid Paris	Gay*	Peru	

* = Superior General

[^] = Election “ex provinciis”

+ = Election “ex nationibus” (countries or nationalities)

Appendix 4
CM PERSONNEL
Provinces and Number of Members
(Catalogue 2009)

Africa-Madagascar		Latin America		USA		Asia-Pacific		Europe	
Congo	37	Argentina	44	East	155	Australia	52	Austria	18
Eritrea		Curitiba	73	St.Louis	118	China	35	Paris	(80)
Ethiopia	43	Fortaleza	74	West	30	India N	77	Toulouse	61
Madagascar	83	Rio	74	South	19	India S	91	Germany	19
Mozambique	21	Central A.	48	NEngland	28	Indonesia	92	Hungary	10
Nigeria	65	Chile	24			Philippines	111	Ireland	62
		Columbia	158					Naples	47
(Cameroon)	28	Costa Rica	15			(Vietnam)	50	Rome	47
(Kenya)	07	Cuba	08					Turin	73
(Tanzania)	12	Ecuador	31					Netherlands	44
		Mexico	99					Orient	35
		Peru	52					Poland	267
		Puerto Rico	60					Portugal	50
		Venezuela	55					Slovakia	38
								Slovenia	51
								Barcelona	42
								Madrid	119
								Salamanca	91
								Zaragoza	121
								Ukraine	22
5 +(3)	296	14	894	5 (=3)	320	6 + (1)	508	20	1297

Some Notes:

1. Although Cameroon and Vietnam are regions of the Province of Paris, in the tabulation above they are considered separate since by virtue of their geographical location is in Africa and Asia respectively, they are more likely to be included in terms of representation with their respective continent. The same is true for Kenya, which belongs to the St. Louis Province, and Tanzania which is a mission of the India South Province. The number of confreres from their “mother” provinces has correspondingly been reduced, and their respective number included in the column of their continent.

2. The 5 Provinces in the US have become 3; now the Provinces of the West, South and St. Louis form the new Western Province USA.