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# Congregation of the Mission, Circular Letters 04 Pierron, 1697-1703.docx

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# **Congregation of the Mission, Circular letters**

**Nicolas Pierron, Superior General, 1697-1703**

## **A Topical Outline**

**by**

**John E. Rybolt, C.M.**

## **Introduction**

M. Pierron was born in the diocese of Sens in 1635, and was received by M. Vincent into the Congregation on 14 May 1657. His virtues and talents caught the attention of his superiors, and they assigned him to teach at Saint Lazare. Later, he was superior at several seminaries, and became visitor of the province of Ile-de-France in 1694.

At the death of M. Jolly, the vicar general was M. Faure, the pastor of Fontainebleau. Since he was from Savoy and thus not a French citizen, the king was persuaded to exercise a veto of his possible election as superior general. Louis XIV retracted this change limiting the election to French citizens alone, but the Italians and Poles still protested that their freedom to be elected was being altered. At the general assembly, M. Pierron was elected, and the pope issues a judgment validating the election, which had been challenged, but decided that henceforth a citizen of any nation could be elected superior general. In fact, only French citizens were elected until 1948.

## **Circular Letters of Nicolas Pierron**

*The original published letters are found in Recueil des principales circulaires des supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation de la Mission, vol. 1, 1877. These are supplemented with texts of unpublished circulars kept in the Archives of the Mission, Paris.*

1697, 10 August, #1, p. 211.

Announces his election as superior general, after making extreme resistance to this, and using tears and requests. God may take his glory from this, and he asks prayers. He also asks for compassion, support in his defects. He hopes to imitate his predecessors. – He will send a summary of the decrees and resolutions of the assembly.

1697, 21 September, #2, pp. 212-213.

He sends the decrees of the last assembly and a circular letter on the subject. It is clear that the provinces do not take care to read the decrees, and so he asks the superiors to be sure to do this. – Pope Clement X granted to the superior general the faculty of designating a certain number of approved priests to open letters from the Roman Penitentiary. We designate the superiors to do this. He also sends a small book on the subject of how to interpret the decisions of the Sacred Penitentiary.

He lists his assistants, and M. Faure as the admonitor. You may send your remarks to him about the behavior of the superior general. – He also sends the patent of superiority according to custom.

1697, 21 September #3, pp. 213-215.

God blessed the general assembly, and it ended in peace. The delegates examined the question of whether the congregation had maintained its primitive spirit. Several issues follow.

1. Complaints arose about inferiors being disobedient to superiors, and to the various decrees and ordinances of visitors and the superior general. Inferiors give little respect to their superiors.

2. There is too much conversation with women, whether they are consecrated persons or otherwise. Superiors should give good example in this and restrict the liberty that some have exercised in this regard. Do not allow dining with them in our parlors, nor let them into our gardens. This can give rise to scandal.

3. Problems with observance of the vow of poverty, such as being too free with money, making notable expenses, or purchasing of curiosities or other useless items.

4. Some speak too openly to externs of the defects of confreres.

5. Dissipation has been introduced, as the use of improper language, the way we dress, or the style of hair and beards, the use of tobacco, even scented tobacco.

6. The novices (seminarists) should be well formed in the practice of virtues and the acquisition of the knowledge proper to our state. Some have neglected receiving the interior communications of the confreres, or of giving conferences on the rules.

7. I am to remind the confreres of the decree of the 1668 assembly concerning the brevity of mission preaching, and the use of clocks to gauge the time. – Portable confessionals should be used for churches when there aren't enough regular confessionals during missions.

These are the main points. May God give us the grace to be faithful to our rules, obey superiors, be discreet in our conversations, live frugally, and practice piety and fervor.

1697, 26 October, #4-1, p. 216.

The assembly wanted us to use due diligence in undertaking the beatification of our venerable founder. We need information about the holiness of his life, his heroic acts of the Christian virtues, and the miracles done through his intercession. Approach people with information, including the Daughters of Charity, and send me the information or send it to the vicar general of the diocese. We will act quietly and simply. Copy this letter in the regular register of circulars.

1698, 1 January, #4-2.

(Virtually verbatim the same as the circular of January 1700)

Prays for the confreres to receive God's blessing in the new year, and to observe the rules exactly. Since it has been some time since news has been sent to the houses about the congregation, he is doing so here.

Saint-Lazare: very numerous, with 50 students, and 51 novices, with another 13 or 14 living in other houses. The internal seminaries of Lyons, Cahors, and Angers have more students that we can support because of conditions in the world. Few can pay their own way. The novitiate at Toul did not succeed, so it will transfer to Dijon when we have the resources. Programs of studies will open in Lyons and Cahors.

Internal seminaries of Rome, Genoa, and Warsaw are doing well. Italy has opened two houses, in Ferrara and SS. John and Paul in Rome. The pope favors our being there in Rome; we did not request this new house. Details about the arrangements, including finances, partly provided by the pope. In Corsica, good progress is being made, and an external seminary has begun.

Poland: many difficulties in the kingdom, with disasters in property and income.

North Africa: M. Lorence is overloaded with work.

Boulogne-sur-Mer: house has been enlarged for the sake of missions.

China: Appiani appointed vice-visitor apostolic, sent by the pope. He has yet to arrive. Three of his traveling companions, not listed [but Muellener was one] asked to be received into the congregation.

1699, 28 March, #5, pp. 217-218.

Innocent XII condemned the book, *Maximes des saints*, for its false doctrine. Our congregation must be preserved from such dangerous thoughts. The visitors and superiors should take care about this and other condemned books. Cling to the decisions of the Holy See and the teachings of our venerable founder.

1698, 28 April, #5a, to the province of Ile-de-France.

He names François Watel to succeed him as visitor. He was superior of Amiens.

Asks for prayers.

1698, 21 July, #5b, to confreres in Italy.

When I assumed office, I understood some of the problems confronting the congregation. I realized that some of you were agitated by whispering, by matters that were pure inventions. The French confreres wish to maintain peace with the Italians, so do not be afraid. The main problem was the election, and the intervention of a cardinal with the king of France [who wished that only French subjects be elected superiors general]. I am trying to listen to Jesus, who prayed “peace be with you.” Let us maintain peace and harmony.

1698, 5 September, #5c, to the houses of the congregation.

We share the affliction that was reported to us by the superior of the house of Turin. A lightning strike set the explosives on fire in the citadel. Our house was very badly damaged, and our confreres were left out in the open. None of our men died from this disaster.

He asks for aid for this house and the newly-built church.

He reports also that the two confreres in Algeria are also suffering from illness and plague. He recommends prayers for them.

1698, 17 September, #5d, to the superiors of the houses of France.

He is sending two French confreres to Rome at a time when the Italians are greatly upset over the election of Pierron and the interference of the king.

1698, 21 September, #5d, to the superiors.

A problem has arisen concerning the time of vacation for teachers while they are in a country house. The superiors should watch out that they should spend their time well.

Two weeks of vacation in a country house is sufficient, but rise at 5:30, followed by morning prayer, Mass, reading the New Testament, and then breakfast together.

At 11:00, examen and dinner, with a little entrée; followed by Angelus and recreation; at 1:00, spiritual reading in private, then a walk. Supper at 6:30, with a little entrée.

Examen at the usual time, with reading of the subject of the next day's meditation.

The hours of the breviary will be celebrated in private, with Little Hours in the morning, vespers and compline after dinner, and matins and lauds before supper.

1699, 10 April, #6, pp. 218-222.

Information concerning the office celebrated in common, and the particular examen.

Details about various points, as when and how to start, which psalms are recited alternatively, and how the leaders carry out their duties. The speed at which one recites is detailed, as is when to make the sign of the cross. Keep holding the office book and do not recite by memory.

Concerning the particular examination of conscience: it looks at the faults committed during the day, the virtue one wishes to acquire, and the vice to root out. Then five points follow on specific suggestions.

1699, 10 April, #6a.

Pope Innocent XII confirms the election of M. Pierron. Some Italian and Polish confreres were upset that the king of France, Louis XIV, had effectively diminished the freedom of action of the delegates in a general assembly. After examination, the pope determined that the election had been legitimately held and that M. Pierron was the true superior general. The pope's response was in a letter [see next].

Pierron thanks various individuals involved in the case. He asks that the letter be read to all the members of the house and transcribed in the register of circulars.

Brief of Innocent XII to M. Pierron, 17 March 1699.

After all the attention the pope has given to the congregation, he was upset that difficulties arose about the election. We wish to maintain peace and unity in the provinces of Italy and Poland.

He wishes that the congregation be reestablished by removing all discord. He knows that Pierron has not used any human means to advance his dignity. So as to remove any discord, we remove any defects that may have taken place. In future elections, the assemblies will follow canon law and the congregation's constitutions.

We exhort the confreres to act in a manner worthy of their vocation, keeping the unity of spirit by the bond of peace.

1700, 1 January, pp. 222-225.

Prays for the confreres to receive God's blessing in the new year, and to observe the rules exactly. Since it has been some time since news has been sent to the houses about the congregation, he is doing so here.

Saint-Lazare: very numerous, with 66 students, and 45 novices, with another 13 or 14 living in other houses. The internal seminaries of Lyons, Cahors, and Angers have more students that we can support because of conditions in the world. Few can pay their own way. The novitiate at Toul did not succeed, so it will transfer to Dijon when we have the resources. Programs of studies will open in Lyons and Cahors.

Internal seminaries of Rome, and Genoa are doing well. Italy has opened two houses, in Ferrara and SS. John and Paul in Rome. The pope favors our being there in Rome; we did not request this new house. Numerous details about the arrangements, including finances, partly

provided by the pope. In Corsica, good progress is being made, and an external seminary has begun.

Poland: many difficulties in the kingdom, with disasters in property and income.

North Africa: M. Lorence is overloaded with work.

Boulogne-sur-Mer: house has been enlarged for the sake of missions. – A mission house at Fontenay-le-Comte, but it has been difficult to get it started.

China: Appiani appointed vice-visitor apostolic, sent by the pope. He has yet to arrive. Asks for confreres to consider a vocation to China. Appiani reported about his various travels and sufferings.

Share this letter with your house.

1700, April, #7a, to the visitors.

One of the visitors proposed that we should begin writing a history of the Congregation. First, we need one of our men skilled in this work. The visitors should work on a history of their own province, and then it can be assembled. So, ask the confreres for their help in this.

1700, 4 December, #7b, to the visitors.

Our third assistant, M. Terrarossa died, and we selected M. Viganego. Reviews his life and assignments. He does not yet know of our decision, so keep this information private until the visitors send in their support.

1701, 7 January, #7c, to the superiors.

Request for financial assistance for the deputies from Italy and Poland for general assemblies. This is based on a circular of 21 September 1697 from the last general assembly which called for sharing the expenses. We will keep repeating yearly this request.

1701, 8 October, #7d.

MM. Divers and Philopald were sent to Rome to have a French confrere there to maintain unity and peace between the Italians and the French. M. Divers will be procurator general of the houses of France. In their free time, they will give missions, as the duchess of Aiguillon stipulated in an endowment gift.

1702, 1 January, #8, pp. 226-229.

He had nothing to write about for the past two years, but each house worked to do its best.

Saint Lazare: 78 students, the hope of our Company, but this is very expensive. Internal seminary: 40 novices here and a few elsewhere. Internal seminaries of Lyons, Cahors, Angers have many. Those in Italy and Poland are also doing well with candidates. The pope received our two confreres sent to Rome with paternal goodness, and they had an audience with him for a half-hour.

He attaches a brief of the pope granting certain indulgences, including the one on the day of the first sermon of the Mission. The pope also granted permission to raise the height of Montecitorio, so as to have rooms for confessors and pastors of Rome on retreat. – Work on the beatification is proceeding We have considerable testimonies about the founder.

Poland: plans for an establishment in the second archdiocese [Krakow]. This will involve directing a diocesan seminary.

China: no recent news, except that M. Mullener was received into the Congregation in Bengal on the journey to China. Another, M. Nicolas Piepascoli, was also received by M. Appiani's brother.

North Africa: the three confreres are doing well, and some priests from other communities have arrived for the same work of mercy.

P.S. The pope is looking for volunteers for China and the Indies. Many French have responded, but only three Italians.

1702, 21 November, #8a, to the visitors.

Convokes a sexennial assembly to begin 2 July 1703. His illnesses keep him from working diligently on the affairs of the Congregation.

The congregation will need a vicar general and admonitor, and another assistant to replace M. Terrarossa. The provincial assemblies should be held in the second or third week after Easter, and the domestic assemblies are to prepare for the provincial assemblies.

1703, February, #8b, from M. Watel.

Reviews the information and purpose of the sexennial assembly, and reminds the local superiors of the details as written in their rules of office.

1702, 8 November, #8c.

A canon of the cathedral of Cremona has set up an agreement for an establishment of the Congregation in Cremona. It will be a mission house. Four priests and two brothers have already been assigned there. Pray for the benefactor.

1703, 30 March, #9, pp. 230-232.

The pope has condemned the work entitled "Cas de conscience," but Cardinal de Noailles of Paris rejected this. The pope responded with a letter to the king asking that he intervene and force compliance of the French clergy, including the majority of bishops. – This letter should be read to all the priests and clerical students, and they should avoid any subtleties about observance. Recall that M. Vincent was very devoted and obedient to the Holy See.

P.S. The book in question should be locked up with the other forbidden books, and this letter should be transcribed.

Note: The editors of the Recueil included the rule for vacations previously sent out by M. Pierron.

1703, 2 April, #9a, to the visitors.

Concerning the sexennial assembly, many confreres, especially those in Italy, have doubted whether such an assembly can elect a vicar general, since this is not mentioned in our constitutions. To avoid this, and with the approval of his assistants, he wants to make the assembly a general assembly, at which a vicar general or superior general can be elected. He also sends a statement of his resignation from his office of superior general. The reason for resigning is his various illnesses.

The act of resignation is attached, signed and sealed.