

# Sex

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“This Congregation ... includes in its bosom ... **faithful of both sexes**”), declares the 1817 Apostolic Decree of Approbation. We are a single Congregation of men and women. But we are not a mixed community. We split ourselves according to sex. A woman cannot enter the male branch and a man, no matter how much he insists, cannot be accepted by the sisters.

It is not so with the Secular Branch. Both men and women can enter it. Yes, the Secular Branch is a mixed community. The religious, however, can only join the branch of their own sex.

Sex is so important for us that each one of the branches, that of the sisters and that of the brothers, “has its own juridical autonomous personality, legislation, structures of government and formation, community life and temporal patrimony” (Const. 8). That is to say, depending upon your sex, you organize your life with one or the other.

On reading the Constitutions, you will see that the first chapter (Our Vocation and Mission) is the same for brothers and sisters. But everything else, starting from the second chapter, is different and specific to each branch.

Interesting the way that religious life has of honoring **sexual difference**, don't you think? Notice, here we are not talking about "sexual orientation", nor even "sexual identity", highly debated concepts that deeply affect each person and that trigger endless controversy. Here it refers to "sex", that is, something inscribed in our flesh, in the morphology of our body and in the chromosomes of our cells. Whatever my psychological or affective orientations, my desires or my tendencies might be, if I want to dedicate myself religiously in the Congregation, I can only do it in the group of those with my same sex.

Sexual difference is at the origin of creation, according to Genesis, "male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). So, being male and female, they are revealed as the image of God. The fulfillment of this image is found in the marriage covenant, which is not applicable to our case as an obvious consequence of our vow of chastity.

In the other biblical extreme, that of the eschatological consummation, "there is not male and female" (Gal 3:28). Religious life is moved by this eschatological thirst, as though we were crazies who already live in a future that is still unseen. However, this eschatological tension does not apply, as-is, to us, since, as I have pointed out before, our real organization in two branches is precisely based on the difference of sexes.

There is no doubt that we are a strange sexual figure. We cannot appropriate what corresponds to the relationship between man and woman in the context of the couple. Nor can we be an advance in the alliance between the sexes in society or in the Church, since we are not mixed, rather each sex has our own house and we organize ourselves on our own.

In spite of everything, it must be emphasized that, for us brothers, the sisters of the Congregation constitute an utterly exceptional group of women. Our relationship with the female sex certainly grows in many spheres where we can find companions, friends, confidantes, collaborators, neighbors, workers, parishioners, leaders... But this does not take away the fact that, even when we hardly have contact with them, **the SSCC sisters are unique and very special companions on the way**. Why? Because they, like us, have consecrated their lives according to religious vows in the light of the same charism and we have an identical vocation and mission.

The way in which we live this union of brothers and sisters in the Congregation has gone through different eras and depends on many factors. In general, one can say that for some forty years, through the Vatican II renewal and the transformation of the role of women in western societies, a renewed current of geniality was created between brothers and sisters. This translated into new ways of expressing mutual

respect, collaboration in mission, drawing closer in initial formation, joint celebrations and affection.

During the 80's of the last century, we held this unity in very high esteem, to the point of reading in the Constitutions (no. 8): "Aware that it constitutes a significant value, the brothers and sisters assume together the responsibility to maintain and strengthen their unity."

Now days we no longer live with that same enthusiasm of a few years ago. Perhaps we have drawn so close to one another that we now feel the need to maintain a certain distance. It seems to me that, almost everywhere, the affection and the enjoyment of meeting remain. But today reality shows that each branch, both at the general level as well as provincial or regional, has its own agenda of work and interests. These rarely cross in real life. It is true that, in some places, joint initiatives for initial and ongoing formation are maintained; but they are much less numerous than in the past. On the other hand, there is little joint activity in the area of apostolic service.

I am not advocating reproducing past initiatives, which had their lights and their shadows. Nor do I wish to invite, appealing to a sweet discourse about our fraternity, closing our eyes to the conflicts that often happen between brothers and sisters and which leave wounds in all of them. Speaking for myself, I know that there are sisters who could have felt attacked at some point by my way of acting and before whom I certainly deserve a severe judgement; as, on occasion, I have seen myself unjustly treated by them, and sometimes even manipulated. These things happen and will continue to happen: among ourselves, with the sisters, and with very many people. Life is like that.

What I want to say is that we are tied to these women –the SSCC sisters- by a **charismatic and spiritual bond** that goes beyond our styles and our moods, and that together with them we receive the call and the responsibility to humbly carryout the mission of our Congregation in the world.

Pope Francis warned, "Sin generates distrust and division between man and woman." (April 22, 2015), and cried out for the urgent necessity of "a new covenant between man and woman" (September 16, 2015). He said this, speaking about the married couple, in the context of his catechesis on the family. But, well-understood, they are fully applicable to the challenge of relationships within this group of unmarried persons, which we brothers and sisters in the Congregation are.

**Overcoming mistrust and growing in alliance.** Two good paths to explore. Can you think of concrete means to do it?

The root of our communion lies in the charism and the mission, that is to say, in the particular experience of faith and service that makes the Congregation exist. We can drink from a same fountain and delve deeper together, with our different sensitivities, in a same SSCC way of savoring God in the journey of life.

This is how we have understood it in the two General Governments; we put some days of joint reflection on our Congregational spirituality in our plan each year. It seems to us an interesting contribution for maintaining and securing the unity of brothers and sisters. Similar initiatives could be carried out in other places in the Congregation. And, where it is possible and minds are sufficiently open, let us also try and work together in service of others.

May the Lord help us to be faithful and good companions on the way!

