

# INTRODUCTION

We Redemptorists have a common language. It is found in our Constitutions and Statutes. There are words, however, that make us sometimes ask: ‘I wonder how that is understood in our history and tradition?’ You could say that it is in this context that the need for a *Lexicon of Redemptorist Spirituality* took shape.

Serafino Fiore, then Vicar-General, mooted this idea in 2007 and it was affirmed by the General Council. This was followed by the appointment of Fr Seán Wales as Chief Editor and Fr Dennis Billy as Associate Editor. As the then Chairman of the General Secretariat for Redemptorist Spirituality, I presented it to the fellow members of the Secretariat who helped to further clarify what this project could involve.

The *Lexicon of Redemptorist Spirituality* focuses on key words and concepts in a popular, meditative style against the background of our history, tradition and spirituality. The editorial team prepared an outline with instructions that was intended to help both the authors and editors make the final work as clear and consistent as possible.

We opted for a lexicon that was based on sound scholarly research, yet easily accessible not just to confreres, but particularly to those in formation, the growing number of lay associates, and those belonging to the larger Redemptorist family.

In choosing ‘word-themes’, we turned largely to our Constitutions and Statutes, and also to our pastoral practice. This lexicon does not pretend to offer a comprehensive description of all the significant ‘word-themes’ for Redemptorist spirituality, but only those considered essential for a basic understanding of the Congregation’s spirit and charism. The debate will always remain as to why some words were included and others were not!

The ‘word-themes’ are treated from the perspectives of history, the C.Ss.R. Constitutions and Statutes, and how these are present in Redemptorist life and mission today. Since this lexicon is meant to be also a stimulus for further study, at the end of each entry, there are ‘Suggested Readings’ and ‘Reflection Questions’ to help the reader reflect on the ‘word-theme’ in private and group discussions.

The first edition of the *Lexicon* is presented in the English language. The hope is that this then serves as a basis for publishing the *Lexicon* in other languages.

However, a project as vast as this, throws up challenges of its own. One

of the challenges of a collaborative effort of several authors is the difficulty in maintaining a consistent style throughout the work. Further, certain ‘words’ are too complicated to be sufficiently defined when reduced to the limitations of a schema or number of words, a fact that some contributors had to contend with.

The contributors are from the different corners of the Redemptorist world, and a couple of them from the larger Redemptorist family as well. This diversity is evident in the style, presentation and the lens through which their understanding and experience of the themes is mediated.

We know that in a project as varied as this, there is always room to further discuss and even improve on some of the ‘word-themes’ presented here. We consider this *Lexicon* as not only a starting point, but also as a point of departure for those who want to further contribute and add to the thoughts and the themes presented here.

I would like to offer my gratitude to several persons who have worked to make this *Lexicon* Project a reality.

To the Superior Generals – emeritus and present – Frs Joseph Tobin and Michael Brehl respectively, who with their constant encouragement and support gave their blessings to this work.

To the members of the General Secretariat for Redemptorist Spirituality for the Sexennium 2003-2009, during which time this *Lexicon* began its journey, for their contribution to this project particularly at its inception when we were defining and outlining what this project would mean and how it can best serve the Redemptorist world.

To the contributors who have generously shared with us, in a distilled manner, the riches of their thought and experience so that the larger Redemptorist family could benefit from their expertise.

To the translators who made the wealth of the authors’ contribution accessible to readers in English. It is indeed a challenge to translate not only words but ideas and idioms.

To the printers and publishers.

And above all, to the editorial team of Frs Seán Wales and Dennis Billy who spent a lot of time and energy editing the vast amount of material. They did this while holding several other responsibilities within the Congregation, and beyond, at the same time. How they did it all is a testimony to their generosity, dedication, zeal and great love for the Congregation.

This *Lexicon of Redemptorist Spirituality* is not meant to be just an academic addition on the bookshelf. That is why there are the ‘Reflection Ques-

tions' at the end of each entry. May this lexicon be a means for us to discover the richness of our own Redemptorist Spirituality and a call, so that we may dedicate ourselves even more fully to the Most Holy Redeemer and the abandoned, especially the poor, in and through whom he reveals himself.

*With the Redeemer is plentiful Redemption!*

*With Mary is Perpetual Help!*

**Fr Juventius Andrade C.Ss.R.**

General Consultor

ROME

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## PREFACE

*Confreres, Sisters, Lay Associates, and others interested in Redemptorist Spirituality:*

It is with great joy and eager anticipation that we welcome this valuable addition to our library of resources in Redemptorist spirituality. The Constitutions and Statutes, along with the writings of St Alphonsus, are the primary resources and references for our spirituality. However, each generation of Redemptorists and those who share the charism of our Congregation must incarnate in contemporary terms the essence of our *vita apostolica* (Const. 1). This Lexicon will be an invaluable resource for all of us in this ongoing process of formation.

A quick glance at the table of contents reveals the wealth of scholarship, reflection and experience contained in this volume. Its preparation involved the collaboration of more than 70 Redemptorist confreres and Sisters. While this Lexicon does not pretend to be an exhaustive and definitive work on Redemptorist spirituality, it will be an important contribution to the ongoing exploration and discussion of what it means to live the *vita apostolica* in fidelity to our Redemptorist tradition and the signs of the times (cf. Const. 2).

I strongly encourage each confrere and every community to use this lexicon for personal and communal reflection. Share the articles with those Sisters who share our charism. Encourage our lay associates to use this book as they deepen their understanding of the Redemptorist vocation. In particular, I urge all formators and formation communities to become more and more familiar with the themes contained in this important work.

As members of an international congregation, we have become very aware of the role which culture plays in our communities and in our ministry. The articles and topics in this lexicon are important in developing our Redemptorist culture which transcends the limits of national, linguistic and ethnic identities. This Redemptorist culture will facilitate the development of a common language among confreres and those who minister with us, so that interprovincial and international communities can offer a prophetic witness of communion in a divided world.

On behalf of the Congregation, I would like to thank the General Secretariat for Redemptorist Spirituality which worked so hard to make this resource available to all of us. This Secretariat has contributed a great deal to the library of resources available to us. Thank you also to the many men and women who collaborated on the articles contained in this lexicon.

Redemptorist spirituality is above all a way of life formed and marked by the compassionate love of God for the abandoned and the poor. This compassionate love of God became incarnate in the mission of Jesus, sent by the Father (cf. Const. 6). We have been called by God to participate in this mission of Jesus the Redeemer ‘as helpers, companions and ministers’ (Const. 2).

As we preach the Gospel ever anew, may the Spirit of the Redeemer renew our hope, our hearts, and our structures so that we may be ever more faithful to the mission to which we have been called! (XXIV General Chapter 2009, Decisions, 7)

In the Redeemer,  
*Michael Brehl C.Ss.R.*



## ABANDONED

The Congregation is an expression of the missionary identity of the Church. When the Congregation uses the language of the Church, it expresses itself in its own ‘terminology’: charism, mission and spirituality. We respond with missionary thrust to the pressing pastoral needs and we devote ourselves to the evangelisation of the most abandoned, especially the poor (Const. 1).

The mission is historical. It includes a past, a present and a future. In the time of Alphonsus, the needs of the most abandoned determined even the manner of choosing the location for Redemptorist houses. Clement, in his dogged determination to implement the Alphonsian charism and given the conditions of his Josephist environment, considerably broadened the approach to the mission.

What does the expression ‘the most abandoned’ mean in our present Constitutions? They are those who still have not been touched by the proclamation of the good news of the Redeemer, nor been made welcome by the Church (Const. 3). Therefore, they are those left to their own fate, often in dehumanising situations of injustice and cruelty. They can be the forgotten ones in a world of riches, prosperity and privilege. And among the most abandoned, we have a special concern for the poor. The Congregation’s mandate to evangelise the poor is directed to the liberation and salvation of the whole human person (Const. 5).

Each Redemptorist foundation is called to be an Apostolic Community. Redemptorists do not live for themselves. We are community for the sake of the abandoned. The evangelisation of these is a sign of messianic activity, and Christ, in a certain sense, wished to identify himself with them (Const. 4). Caring for the most abandoned is derived from and nourished by the missionary practice of Jesus (cf. Luke 4:16-19). Through our mission to the most abandoned, we witness to the coming of the kingdom. By giving our lives, we experience that we are evangelised even as we evangelise (cf. Luke 24:48).

Constantly learning through our intimate relationship with the Risen Lord and moved by the Holy Spirit, we commit our lives to those who are totally ignored or abandoned. We break the Word and the Bread with them. This evangelical way of caring makes the Redemptorist Apostolic Community live in a perpetual process of conversion or transformation, even with respect to its geographical location, until the arrival of the definitive transformation.

The Redemptorist Apostolic Community experiences God through the charism of caring for the abandoned. In them the mystery of plentiful redemption is made present. Perhaps it would be better to say: with them ‘God breaks through’. Together with them, we experience the building up of the kingdom

of God. To say, then, that the missionary dedication to the most abandoned is proper to us requires, under the present circumstances, that we take a new and broad way of looking at today's reality. If you take into account that many Units are well over a hundred years old, this demand becomes uncomfortable. It questions and challenges us. It points to a very high ideal of the charism and so proposes a different path. The force of this charism for the most abandoned can change the social location of many Apostolic Communities and even of some Units. This means, without doubt, that our *identity is in a dynamic process of transformation*.

We are used to thinking that what is authentic and genuine in the Redemptorist way of life is stable and structured. However, transformation is indispensable in the context of Becoming. In the current circumstances, we use the language of re-founding, restructuring, rediscovering the charism, and redirecting the path already taken. We must continue this process of transformation without fear of reviewing the familiar places where we have always been and where our sentimental attachments hide.

Many Apostolic Communities have lived for a very long time in particular places and situations. How should we understand these places in the light of this charism and the guiding ideal that pushes us in the direction of the most abandoned – especially when they themselves have since moved? Where are they today? Maybe they no longer are where we continue to be. The missionary dilemma of an *identity in process of transformation* consists in the discovery that the abandoned have no place in today's world. This is the challenge. We are forced to redefine ourselves in order to confirm the charism of the Congregation today and its relevance in history. This is how our hope will have a future.

Confirmed as missionaries, we will find our way as long as there is continual transformation – conversion – coherent with the guiding principles of creative fidelity: *distacco*, mobility, and evangelisation. It is time to 'take off our shoes' and put our feet on the ground, and see the reality of the most abandoned. Our shoes look good and feel so comfortable, they fit well, they give our feet protection and help us walk with confidence. But that is not enough. The future demands that we leave the security and comfort of the places where we have been for decades and centuries. We cannot be sedentary; we must be on our way.

Perhaps this is the time, the hour of God, for us to walk on new paths which will take us unerringly to the abandoned, those who have 'no place' in this world. We are on the threshold of a new era. Jesus presented the kingdom as a movement and a proposal. We follow Jesus, not places or things. We journey in the midst of a people to whom we propose a liberating redemption. This means that we will



have to leave aside other paths. Alphonsus himself left his beloved Naples. Clement wandered, expelled from one place to another. What about us?

The charism for the most abandoned requires a new look at reality. We must examine this reality and try to discover where are the people who have 'no-place', the totally abandoned – the people who are the painful reality of poverty, those who are destitute of any kind of redemptive presence.

This new vision will affect all of us. There is no way to cover up reality or silence our comforts and arrangements. The integrity of the Redemptorists is at stake. We move ahead with the faith of one who is sent. We trust that the Holy Spirit will show us the whole truth of our charism (John 16:13). With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we receive from him redemptive courage (cf. Heb 12:2-4). We journey with the risen Jesus in ways that are truly divine and truly human. Our charism is what builds us into one body and unites generations of Redemptorists. So, tell this generation to move forward (cf. Ex 14:15).

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Theberge, Rodrigue: 'Preference for the Most Abandoned' in *To Be A Redemptorist Today*, N. Londoño (ed), Liguori 1996

Durrwell, F.X.: '*A Pauperibus Evangelizari*' in *Readings In Redemptorist Spirituality* Vol 5.

Kirchner, L.D.: 'The Most abandoned People: The Pastoral key to understanding Alphonsus'. In *Spiritus Patris*, August 1999 Vol 25 pp39-42

Kirchner, L.D.: 'The Most abandoned and the Sects' in *Spiritus Patris* August 2003 Vol 29 pp49-51

Pelletier, Annette: 'A reflection on St Alphonsus and the most abandoned poor'. In *Spiritus Patris* August 2002 Vol 28 pp48-50

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What criteria do you use to determine who are the abandoned in your country?
2. Does zeal for the abandoned influence your prayer in any way?
3. Would you be willing to make a move, just for the sake of the abandoned?

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## AD GENTES

The term ‘*Ad Gentes*’ is taken from the beginning of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Mission of the Church. The term is used as a short hand for referring to the missionary outreach to those who are not yet Christian; it highlights the distinction between *missio interna*, i.e. the ministry intended to reawaken the spirit of faith in those who already believe in Christ, and *missio externa*, i.e. the preaching of the Gospel to those who have never heard the Church’s message or at least did not receive it as good news (Const. 3).

Despite a hostile climate, despite the association of ‘foreign missions’ with various forms of colonialism (Gold, Glory and Gospel!), the mission *Ad Gentes* is a *conditio sine qua non* of the Church’s very existence.

In the Church’s Missionary Decree the theological basis of the mission *ad gentes* is rooted in the very life of the Trinity. The *Missio Dei* leads to existence of the Church and therefore to mission *ad gentes*. God’s saving plan is for the whole human race as is the scope of Jesus’ missionary mandate (Mt 28:19, Mk 16:15). An important aspect of the mission *ad gentes* is a respectful attitude of the missionary *inter gentes*: to be among the peoples means to enrich each other, to reform each other and to recognise the ways in which God is already present in all peoples. The spirit of contemporary respect for the world of unbelief is hinted at in the following anonymous lines: ‘Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on another’s dream. More serious still, we may forget...that God was there before our arrival.’

### The *Missio ad Gentes* and the Redemptorists

Alphonsus took pains to enkindle a generous understanding of mission among the first Redemptorists, proposing a special vow which would have obliged them to preach the Gospel to non-believers (Regula 1743). In his own preaching and writing Alphonsus tried to proclaim God’s mercy to all people. Today’s Redemptorists are asked to be ready to proclaim the Gospel to Christians as well as to non-Christians – wherever the Church is in need (Cc.5 & 18).

The mission *ad gentes* takes on a new urgency with many believers becoming non-believers in the context of materialism, consumerism and secularism. In all approaches to the non-believing world, the Church and therefore the Redemptorists reject nothing ‘of what is true and holy’ in other world religions or secular movements (A. G. 3,9,11).

As with any other ministry of the Congregation, the mission *ad gentes* is

shaped by the preferential option for the poor (Const. 5). Following St Alphonsus all Redemptorists are called to the pilgrimage with the poor and most abandoned. We are to give witness that God always pays special attention to the poor, the humbled and the oppressed. Poor unbelievers should surely catch our special attention, since celebrating plentiful redemption with them can be a profound experience of liberation.

One of the most attractive ways in which Redemptorists can witness to unbelievers is through the quality of community life. Aware that the very existence of our communities is itself a mission, a vibrant community life can be a little sacrament of the Church, drawing people of goodwill closer to Jesus who is ‘at the heart of the community, to form it and sustain it’ (Const. 5). There is no doubt that our way of life as a community is in itself a chance and a moment of evangelisation, especially in today’s world of individualism and loneliness.

It remains a great challenge for us Redemptorists to show through our way of life and our pastoral works how God comes to all people without exception, especially to the poor and abandoned, and how God calls them in order to gather into one the scattered children of God. When the Bible speaks about salvation it is concerned with whole person and indeed the whole people. Along the way on this pilgrimage of grace, the Gospel has to confront and challenge what is deprived or unjust in world religions or cultures. Learning from others and being refined by others does not silence the truth or vision of the good news. The *copiosa redemptio* will not reach final fulfilment – for us and for the world – till the parousia.

Mission in all its aspects is a notion which saturates our Redemptorist calling. The Topical Index in the latest edition of the Constitutions and Statutes (Rome 2002) devotes five pages or references to ‘Missiology, Missionary, Mission, Missionary Activity’, thus providing ample scope for a profound Spirituality of Mission. All efforts at restructuring have the same goal: to enhance our missionary vocation, and in sharpening our missionary zeal to help the mission of the Church which is the mission of Christ.

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Documents of the Second Vatican Council: especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*.

Senior D. and Stuhlmüller C.: *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*. Maryknoll. N.Y. Orbis 1983

Panikkar R.: *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. New York 1978

Chiovaro F.: *The History of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* Vol 1.

Liguori. Mss 1996

Swanston H.: *Celebrating Eternity Now*. Liguori 1995

Muckermann N. (ed): *From the Heart of St Alphonsus Liguori* 2002 Rios M.G.: *Dialogues with Alphonsus*. Singapore 1958

Londoño N. (ed): *To be a Redemptorist today*. Liguori 1996

Raponi S.: *The Charism of the Redemptorists in the Church*. Rome 2003.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What does *copiosa redemptio* mean in practice for people in this modern world?
2. How can the Redemptorist encourage simplicity and gospel poverty as divine values? Can these values become a form of pride in the modern world?
3. How can the life and work of our communities offer an answer to highly individualistic societies?

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## AGEING AS A REDEMPTORIST

**H**umans grow old daily. I do. You do. Your Unit does. Ageing is part of life. Like it or not, most of us will be old one day. We need to learn to age gracefully.

By custom, old age is divided into three categories. Old, old age: 85 years and over; Middle, old age: 75-84 years; Young, old age: 65-74 years. One's capacity to engage in apostolic activity varies according to one's health and well-being. However, most of us discover that each category or stage of old age brings with it a gradual diminution of our ability to engage in vigorous apostolic activity. The effects of old age may be best considered under four headings: old age is a blessing; old age is a process; old age is a witness; old age is mission.

### Blessing

A misguided but dominant cultural view is that human fulfilment is the by-product of social success and/or relentless activity. Old people are often regarded as 'past it' and worthless. This is not a Christian view; nor does it represent our Redemptorist experience of old age.

Old age is a gift, a grace of God. Our Redemptorist experience of the elderly confirms this. Our aged confreres know that they have lived lives of service and faithfulness. They know they are loved by God and are of infinite worth. They accept responsibility for their lives. They live and act with purpose. Their lives verify St Paul's instruction to Titus: 'The older men should be reserved, dignified, moderate, sound in faith and love and constancy' (Titus 2:2). They are men whose lives have been transformed by the Gospel they preach. While their 'outer person may well be experiencing decay, their inner person is being rewarded day by day' (2 Cor 4:16).

Aged confreres are also a blessing for their Units. Age and experience gives confreres time and opportunity to acquire wisdom and balanced maturity. This is a precious resource to be used to guide a Unit and its members along right paths.

### Process

Old age may be a blessing but it is also a struggle. As we age, we are required to 'let go' of much of the past and to become open to the mystery of what is to be. The elderly become aware that much of what has sustained them in the past is transitory. One's days are numbered. Often there is a loss of personal

control and dignity – hearing loss, forgetfulness, loss of work capacity etc. Old age brings grief in abundance. Death claims siblings and friends. Sickness and disability force some out of the security of their religious community and into nursing homes.

However, not all is loss, doom or gloom. There is a positive side. In old age, one's grasp of the meaning of life deepens. One begins to understand and appreciate the blessings of religious community. Fears can be put aside. The heart can be more open to others. The deep things of God can be understood more clearly and the present moment savoured.

### Witness

Elderly confreres provide living proof that our Redemptorist vocation is real and satisfying. Ordinary confreres have sought and found God in the chaos and blessing of life and remained faithful and peaceful. Their witness is an encouragement to those who follow in their footsteps. In real and profound ways they pass on the Redemptorist charism, ethos and history to the next generation. They are the keepers of our spiritual inheritance. We need to learn to appreciate their witness, be guided by its wisdom and allow it to influence our lives and our discernments.

### Mission

Ageing can have profound effects on a unit's mission. A high proportion of old men implies that there are fewer to engage in vigorous and creative ministry. Priority-based missionary goals become more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, it is wrong to equate mission with workforce activity. Mission is a way of being as much as it is an activity. Mission involves a confrere's whole life up to and including old age, retirement and even death. Constitution 55 is a salient reminder of this fact. Elderly confreres, perhaps more than most, help us understand a fuller ecology of mission.

To appreciate the blessings of old age and to understand its struggles, elderly confreres need help and support. Medical assistance and an appropriate degree of physical comfort needs to be provided. This requires planning, finance and good management. Most especially, aged confreres need to be provided with the spiritual resources necessary to meet the primary task of ageing, viz. to discover ultimate meaning for their lives as Christians and confreres.

Our Redemptorist tradition provides a precious reservoir of resources to assist in making sense of life, of old age and of the ultimate questions. I wish to recall only two: Alphonsus' practice of *distacco* – the gradual detachment

from our self-filled inclinations by a searching examination of our hearts in order to discover who or what has ultimate claim on them. The second is the practice of contemplation. Contemplation is a process that requires silence, inwardness, patience and a familiar relationship with the One to whom one's life is being drawn. These two resources directly address the specific tasks of growing old. They need to be incorporated into our personal and community lives.

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats observed: 'An aged man is a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick, unless the soul clap its hands and sing.' As confreres and as community it is our privilege and duty to help make old, fragile souls clap their hands and sing!

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Catholic Health Australia: *Code of Ethical Standards for Catholic Health and Aged Care Services in Australia*. Canberra: CHA, 2001.

Hepburn, E. IBVM: *Catholic Care of the Ageing*. Canberra: CHA, 2005.

Lukeman, B.: *Embarkations: A Guide to Dealing with Death and Parting*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

MacKinlay, E. (ed.): *Spirituality in Later Life; on Humour and Despair*. Hawthorn Pastoral Press, New York. 2004.

McArdle, P., Tuohy A.: *On Being Pastoral*. Canberra, CHA.

Tobin, J. C.Ss.R.: *Discovering the Best Wine at the End: Reflections on the 3rd Age*. General Curia C.Ss.R., Rome. 2000.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Are we open to accept the wisdom of older confreres?
2. How might we support elderly confreres who suffer sickness, grief, loss?
3. What provision has our unit/community made to support elderly confreres?
4. Given the Congregation's commitment to solidarity, how might our Unit express practical solidarity with the ageing Units of the Congregation?

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## ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI

In order to approach the person and the works of St Alphonsus de Liguori (1696-1787) in a correct manner, it is necessary to weave different approaches, given the richness of his personality and the diverse fields of his activity. For Redemptorists, since it is of prime importance to be connected with their founder, it is essential to grasp the fundamental intent, because on that depends the specificity of the Congregation.

The journey of Alphonsus as founder began in 1723, when after unjustly losing a law case (concerning the feud of Amatrice), he decided to leave the court and dedicate himself totally to Christ. He experienced Christ as the meaning of his life and a sure foundation of values. The choice for the priesthood and his ordination in December 1726 caused him move to the world of the poor. He became the advocate of their right to the truth (evangelisation) and to holiness (the sacraments, beginning with reconciliation). The decisive step arose from the experience of the struggles of the abandoned, those that he came across in the rural areas of southern Italy. He decided to dedicate himself totally to their evangelisation to 'continue' the *plentiful redemption* of Christ. Thus, this group of men who gathered in Scala in 1732, with the pontifical approval in 1749, would be called Redemptorists.

The manner of defining the profile of the community was not very smooth. Alphonsus was soon abandoned by some of his first companions. But he knew how to remain faithful to his fundamental intention, enriching it with the contribution of those who shared with him in the birth of this new community. Maria Celeste Crostarosa contributed her project of a 'memorial' community; Mgr Thomas Falcoia helped with his experience of religious life and a strong missionary yearning, particularly towards the Orient; Gennaro Sarnelli brought his tireless and creative dedication to the poor, especially in the social dimension.

Alphonsus was convinced of the specificity of his own community, vis-a-vis other missionary institutes. At the conclusion of this complex process of elaboration of the norms, he synthesised his 'intention' in these terms: 'to follow the example of our common Saviour Jesus Christ, to dedicate themselves principally...to help the rural towns of the countryside most destitute of spiritual support.' They will be like other missionary institutes, 'but with an absolute distinctiveness to always situate their churches and houses outside the areas of inhabitation and in the midst of the dioceses, so as to be ready to travel with greater readiness for the missions in the countryside; and to be present more easily for the convenience of the poor people who rush to hear the divine word and re-



ceive the sacraments in their churches' (*Spicilegium Historicum* 16 [1968] 385).

*To follow the example of the Redeemer* must be understood in the perspective of participation and renewal: it requires continuing the kenotic mercy of Christ, i.e. his incarnating himself so as to share in our condition of weakness; his actions which witness to the experience of God's love; his unceasing reaching out to those in need of truth and healing. All this is left to the guidance of the Spirit who leads the Church on the very path of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8).

From the 1740s, the radical dedication to the abandoned transformed Alphonsus into a writer as he strove to lead them in the journey to holiness. Therefore, he was concerned with the formation of the clergy, especially in the field of moral theology and evangelisation. He became, as John Paul II has written, 'the renovator of moral theology', succeeding in indicating the way for 'a correct balance between rigorism and liberty', synthesising with these 'memorable words: 'it is not necessary to impose anything on people under pain of grave sin unless the reason is evident... Considering the fragility of the present human condition, it is not always true that the narrowest way is the safest way to direct souls; we see that the Church forbids both excessive liberty and excessive rigour' (*Spiritus Domini*, in AAS 79 [1987] 1367-1368).

From 1762-75, Alphonsus was the bishop of Sant'Agata dei Goti, but he continued, at the same time, his task of writing and of animating the Redemptorist community. He died in Pagani on 1 August 1787. He was canonised by Gregory XVI on 26 May 1839. He was declared Doctor of the Church by Pius XI on 23 March 1871, and the Patron of Confessors and Moralists by Pius XII on 26 April 1950.

The fidelity of Redemptorists to the Alphonsian intent is thus expressed in the present Constitutions: 'Preference for situations where there is pastoral need, that is, for evangelisation in the strict sense together with the choice in favour of the poor is the very reason why the Congregation exists in the Church, and is the badge of its fidelity to the vocation it has received.' Such a task must concern itself with 'the liberation and salvation of the whole human person. The members have the duty of preaching the Gospel explicitly and of showing solidarity with the poor by promoting their fundamental rights to justice and freedom. The means employed must be effective and at the same time consistent with the Gospel' (Const. 5).

All this is possible only through an unceasing journey (exodus), on the level of the community and every single confrere. The steps are the same as that of the Founder: discernment of the abandoned, incarnating in their midst, unconditional dedication to their evangelisation. In this manner, Redemptorists seek to remind

the entire Church of the need to constantly plan its pastoral presence and action from a missionary perspective. Sharing in the difficulties of the abandoned, they are stimulated, like Alphonsus, to outline a proposal of Christian life, beginning from human fragility, in a manner in which all can rediscover and respond to the universal call to holiness.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Rey-Mermet, Th.: *Il Santo del Secolo dei Lumi*. Alfonso De Liguori (1696-1787), Rome. 1983, 147-543

Chiovaro, F. (ed): *The History of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, Vol. I/1. Rome. 1993 (particularly pp431-475);

Majorano, S.: 'Il popolo chiave pastorale di S. Alfonso', in *Spicilegium Historicum C.Ss.R.* 45 (1997) 71-89.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. The shared memory of the Founder is a motive for hope and of conversion for Redemptorists. We must ask ourselves how do we participate in the development of this shared memory.
2. The specificity of the charism, so alive in the consciousness of Alphonsus, needs to be constantly re-expressed in the light of different contexts and the signs of the times. It is necessary to ask if the memory of Alphonsus stimulates us to a passion for the poor, to a life-long engagement with evangelisation.

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## ASCETICISM

There are signs that asceticism is beginning to recover from years of neglect, when even to mention the topic caused embarrassment. Part of this recovery is linked to a greater awareness of the role of asceticism in all world religions. It is also helped by the relevance of an ascetic life to environmental and ecological issues. Even global economic crises contribute to the call for a more restrained lifestyle.

### Meaning

The words asceticism, ascesis and so on all come from the Greek ‘*askein*’, meaning ‘to practice, to exercise’. In the Jewish tradition, the observance of the Law and Commandments (*mitzvah*) is a perpetual training for God’s service. The very call to be holy involves practising moderation and self-restraint. St Paul continues that Jewish tradition in describing his personal asceticism in 1 Cor 9: 24 -27.

### History

In the early Church the words of Jesus in Luke 9:23-25 found highest expression in martyrdom. This was the supreme renouncing of self. To lose one’s life for Jesus’ sake was the best imaginable training for eternal life. After the age of persecution, virginity became the new martyrdom. New ways of dying to self and living only for God were constantly sought – especially, in the eremitical tradition, among the desert fathers and mothers. With the emergence of the coenobitic way of life, the discipline of community living and the demands of evangelical poverty became so identified with asceticism that a common understanding of ‘an ascetic’ was ‘a monk’. For some Christians, asceticism aimed at a passionless calm (*apatheia*) which has therapeutic value. Others, especially the Celts, considered asceticism as self-punishment for sins.

During the Renaissance ascetical practices stressed the role of the will. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius helped to ensure that Christians, as soldiers of Christ, were well trained and ready to overcome self-will (*agere contra*). When we come to St Alphonsus, we find many of the historical aspects of asceticism coming together.

The personal austerity of Alphonsus seems both daunting and dated. When we read about his flagellations, his hairshirts, his use of the cilice, eating his meals – seasoned with bitter herbs – on his knees, putting pebbles in his shoes and even, in extreme old age, devising new penances, we are left behind, uncomprehending

and even repulsed. It is important to distinguish between how Alphonsus treated himself and how he treated others. For himself, we should think rather of his mystical identification with the suffering Christ expressed in the religious culture of his time. But in his pastoral ministry he shows remarkable tenderness (*benignitas*) to those troubled by scruples, discouragement, doubts, fears etc and is careful to suggest ‘simple but attainable’ ascetical practices.

### Redemptorist Tradition

Such ‘simple and attainable’ ascetical practices have marked the life of the Congregation ever since. What we now refer to as the ‘old Rule’ was quite detailed concerning external ‘mortification’, with regulations about food, drink, beds, smokes, recreations, telescopes and small dogs! The current Constitutions and Statutes refer only once to ‘those ascetical norms which have been tested by the experience of the Church’ (Const. 60), but there are many references to mortification, self-denial and self-renunciation (Cc 20, 41, 42, 49, 51, etc.). The call to continual conversion is a call to continual self-emptying.

Redemptorist asceticism is not a form of spiritual athletics. It is neither a guilt-trip nor a quick fix-it technique. St Paul has already warned about a false asceticism based on unworthy motives (Col 2:16- 3: 3). Our asceticism is an aspect of our sharing in the mystery of the Redeeming Christ, and therefore it is always a grace. It is because we are inserted into the mystery of redemption that we welcome the gift of self-restraint and the grace of self-renunciation. Our life displays the pattern of Jesus’ life in dying and rising. It is grace which allows us to take up our cross; it is grace which frees us *from* many good things in order to be free for many better things.

### Asceticism of our vows

With the grace of each of our vows comes the grace of self-discipline. We ‘walk the same way as Christ, the way of virginity, poverty and obedience’ (Const. 50). We are ‘so captivated by what the kingdom of God offers’ (Const. 59) us that we readily choose the evangelical counsels and all that this sacrifice entails.

Our way of living poverty in obscurity is a training in self-renunciation. It can find expression in small practices, in seeking permission, in simplicity of life and language and in sensitivity to those who have no choice about their poverty. The ascesis of gospel poverty (Const. 67, Ss 011. 013, 057) reaches all aspects of our ministry to the most abandoned.

The discipline required to make community life a wholesome context for our vow of chastity is itself an ascesis. The classical norms to which the Constitutions

refer alert us to our use of the entertainment media, to a standard of respect and modesty and to the need for solitude.

Asceticism is always a matter of the will, not merely of external observances; in terms of the grace of obedience we are deliberately training ourselves to listen deeply to the Spirit in the person of our superiors and our community. The asceticism of obedience would have no place for murmuring or ‘snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces’ (Gal 5: 15). When we pray for the grace of perseverance we are praying to live, today and every day, not with our own life but with the life of Christ who lives in us (cf. Gal 2:20).

There are certain aspects of Jesus’ own asceticism which shine out in the life of his followers: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, aspects which touch on our relationship with God, with ourselves and with others. As Redemptorists we are to be grateful for the tradition and discipline of prayer expressed in meditation, vigils, spiritual reading (*lectio divina*) and contemplation. We are to be unafraid of fasting not only from food and drink but from whatever might draw us away from our primary concern with God and God’s kingdom. We are to be generous in almsgiving, giving our time, our care and our resources to those in greater need. Giving ourselves for plentiful redemption means that all our life and all our ministry is a perpetual training for the fullness of God’s kingdom.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What aspects of the consumer society have we adopted?
2. What role does asceticism play in our daily lives?
3. What personal graces of asceticism have I been offered?

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## BEATIFIED REDEMPTORISTS

From the origins of the Congregation, there always has been a concern to keep alive the memory of the most exemplary Redemptorists. The first to have shown an interest in this was St Alphonsus himself when he published a biography of Gennaro Maria Sarnelli, ‘a friend of the heart, and united in spirit’. Alphonsus also wrote about Vitus Curzius, the first coadjutor Brother of the Institute; and about Paolo Cafaro, his spiritual director. Moreover, he commissioned Fr Gaspar Caione to gather the memories of St Gerard Majella.

From the outset, these memoirs were collected from the historical manuscripts of the Congregation (1782), from the writings of Fr Giuseppe Landi, and then in the biography penned by Antonio Tannoia (1811). As early as the 1700s, Fr Landi published the biography of Fr Caesar Sportelli and of the student Domenico Blasucci.

After the death of the Founder (1787), Fr Tannoia published his biography in three volumes. Ten years later, in 1812, the lives of Frs Alessandro Di Meo, and Angelo Latessa, as well as of the lay brothers Gioacchino Gaudiello and Francesco Tartaglione were published.

Even though some of these Redemptorists were noted for their holiness while they were still alive, the Congregation – being more concerned with assuring its own future and because of the lack of funds – did not begin any process of canonisation before the death of the Founder. The Redemptorists’ first cause of canonisation was that of Alphonsus, who was already known in almost all of Europe for his holiness and his doctrinal teaching. It was not until the mid-1800s, after the canonisation of Alphonsus (1839), that the causes of Gerard Majella and subsequently those of Clement Hofbauer and Gennaro Sarnelli were introduced. At present, the Congregation has four saints and nine beati, five of whom are martyrs of the Greek Catholic Church.

Considering the historical period in which they lived, one can affirm that our beati cover the whole span of the 276 years of the Institute. If one analyzes how they lived their vocation, one can see how they developed the charism of the Congregation.

In the first 12 years of the Congregation, Gennaro Sarnelli (1702-44) was, like Alphonsus, a towering presence. Besides being a prolific writer, with a specific concern for the marginalised, Sarnelli made evident the social implications of the Redemptorist charism. He recognised in prostitutes, the imprisoned, the sick, the aged, and bonded child-labourers a humanity ‘most deprived and destitute of spiritual help’.

The expansion of the Congregation outside the confines of Italy, promoted by Clement Mary Hofbauer, opened the doors of Redemptorist houses in all the five continents to thousands of men who were called to be a sign of the mercy of Christ to the abandoned.

Among our beati, especially from the 1800s, we highlight the following:

**Blessed Petrus Donders** (1809-87) left the Netherlands to become a missionary among the slaves of the plantations, the indigenous, the blacks and the lepers of Surinam. He joined the Redemptorists in 1867 and lived an authentic experience of evangelisation in an apostolic community.

**Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos** (1819-67) left Bavaria as a seminarian to become a Redemptorist in North America. Collaborating with his confrere John Nepomucene Neumann, he immersed himself in prolific itinerant missionary activity, particularly among immigrants, without neglecting his offices as superior, parish priest and formator. He succumbed to yellow fever, which he contracted when helping the sick in his New Orleans parish.

**Blessed Kaspar Stanggassinger** (1871-99) knew the Redemptorists and was inspired by the writings of Alphonsus before he left the diocesan seminary of Freising, Germany, to enter the Congregation with the intention of carrying the Gospel to people outside Europe. His superiors instead assigned him to the formation of future Redemptorists. He thus witnessed to obedience, generously dedicating himself to the youth and preaching in the nearby town of Gars, where he died of peritonitis when barely 28 years old.

During the 20th century, the Congregation not only expanded to the five continents, but also witnessed to the proclamation of redemption to the point of shedding blood on account of totalitarian regimes and the violent propagation of atheism. Among the many beatified martyrs in the Greek Catholic Church there are five Redemptorists: four from the Ukraine and one from the Czech Republic, all killed under the Soviet regime.

**Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky** (1882-1959) left the Stanislaviv seminary at the age of 35 to become a Redemptorist. He dedicated himself to missionary activity until he was nominated a bishop. Following the Soviet occupation, he worked as a stone cutter, continuing his apostolic activity clandestinely until he was arrested and forced to live in some 30 camps and prisons. He survived a total of 600 hours of torture and interrogation. He was released from prison in 1956, because he was believed to be near to death. He lived for another three years, dying in 1959 of cancer of the duodenum (or small intestines).

**Blessed Vasyľ Velyčkovsky** (1903-73) entered the Congregation after his dia-

conate. He preached for almost 20 years on the popular missions until he was arrested and forced to work in coal mines. Released from jail, he was secretly ordained a bishop in 1963 – in a Moscow hotel. Six years later he was arrested again, but released a few months later because of a heart ailment. He was expelled from the Ukraine in 1972 and sent to Yugoslavia, where he was allowed to escape. He first went to Rome and then to Winnipeg in Canada. The following year he died from slow-acting poison administered before his release from prison.

**Blessed Zenon Kovalyk** (1903-41) was an elementary school teacher before becoming a Redemptorist and dedicating himself to preaching missions, while also being responsible for the finances of the Metropolitan. He was arrested by the Bolsheviks during the night of 20-21 December 1940. All trace of him was lost until 29 June 1941, when German troops found his corpse crucified on the wall of a prison corridor in the Bryghidky jail.

**Blessed Ivan Ziatyk** (1899-1952), after being assigned to formation and teaching in the Redemptorist seminary of Peremyshl, was nominated vice-provincial and vicar-general of the Greek Catholic Church. After his arrest he was subjected to 72 nights of interrogation, during which he was tortured to induce him to switch to the Orthodox Church and collaborate with the police. He resisted the coercion and was deported to a Siberian camp where he was clubbed to death on 17 May 1952.

**Blessed Metodij Dominik Trčka** (1886-1959) was involved in popular missions in the Latin Church before being sent to serve among the Greek Catholics in the eparchy in Slovakia to found the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Michalovce. He became the first superior entrusted with the foundation of new houses and in the formation of new confreres. When the Vice-Province was suppressed by the Soviets, he was jailed and condemned to 12 years of imprisonment. He was subjected to extensive interrogation and terrible torture. He was transferred to the prison of Leopoldov and died in his cell of rigours, as a consequence of pneumonia, on 23 March 1959.

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*Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli*, Redemptorist. Liguori, Missouri. 2003  
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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. We understand the holiness of individual confreres. How we understand the holiness of the Congregation?
2. What is the modern profile of Redemptorist holiness?
3. Do we have or encourage a desire for holiness?

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## BEAUTY

Early in the 21st century the now retired archbishop of Brussels-Mechelen, Cardinal Danneels, made a remark in a consistory which was quoted round the world. He spoke of a contemporary mindset which ‘is hesitant before the true, resistant to the good but is captivated by the beautiful’. His plea for a greater sensitivity to the beautiful by those who would commend the Christian gospel found resonance among many people for whom more ‘churchy’ language has palled.

Perceptive writers in the Christian tradition have long noticed that many ‘unchurched’ contemporaries retain a hunger for justice, a longing for spirituality, and an affinity with beauty. These attitudes are not the last relics of a receding faith, but echoes of a profound need for meaning and significance which can open unto truth and goodness. They are echoes of the restlessness of the human heart, of which St Augustine wrote, till our hearts rest in God.

### Scriptures

Although the Scriptures can at times seem wary of beauty, ‘Charm is deceitful and beauty empty’ (Prov 31:30), a gentler judgment prevails in Wisdom 1:9 which notes: ‘Small blame attaches to them [those who fail to go the source of all beauty] for perhaps they go astray only in their search for God and their eagerness to find him; familiar with his works they investigate them and fall victim to appearances, seeing so much beauty’. The psalms, however, give free rein to delight in the beauty of God and God’s creation. The psalmist prays: ‘One thing I ask of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple’ (Ps 27:4). In psalm 8 it is the beauty of nature that calls forth praise: ‘How majestic is your name in all the earth’ (v 1).

It is not unlikely that, like Mary and Joseph, many of Jesus’ first followers ‘did not understand what he meant’ (Lk 2:50), but their hearts were captivated by the goodness and beauty of everything about him. Indeed we know that in the biblical languages ‘goodness’ and ‘beauty’ were often interchangeable. Hence we could read in Genesis 1:31 that ‘God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very beautiful’. Likewise Peter’s exclamation of awe during the transfiguration could read: ‘Lord it is beautiful for us to be here’ (Mt 17:4).

Using the language of nature and evoking the beauty of the simplest domestic or rural situations, Jesus revealed the inner beauty of his being. He spoke about the beauty of the lilies, the providential care for the ravens; his

parables abound in references to the simple and beautiful things of creation.

### Tradition

It is the beauty of God that lies behind the Christian celebration of beauty. St Gregory of Nyssa, preaching on the beatitudes, says that if our hearts have been purified we will see the image of the divine nature in our own beauty: 'If you wash off by a good life the filth that has been stuck on your heart like plaster, the divine beauty will again shine forth in you.'

After the triumph over the iconoclasts in the 9th century, the Eastern tradition in Christianity never wavered in its profuse celebration of divine beauty. In architecture, icons, music and mosaics Eastern Church art and liturgy continued to be a glorious meeting of heaven and earth and a moment of transfiguration for spirit and senses. Something of this abundance has entered our Redemptorist bloodstream with the gift of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and with the spiritual heritage of our confreres from the Eastern tradition.

The beauty of holiness still shines out in the medieval religious art of the West. The mystical paintings of Fra Angelico become the bible of the poor and stand as representative of all that is best in art, music and literature, drawing the senses, the mind and the heart into the beauty of God. After the reformation and during the enlightenment beauty became more and more subjective in the West and so more and more detached from its roots in the beauty of God.

### St Alphonsus

In St Alphonsus we have a man of heightened sensitivity to things of the spirit. Educated at the peak of the Baroque period he was introduced to the world of music, painting, architecture and poetry. His biographers make much of his life-long love of music and his gift as a composer. He was less successful as an artist, yet his engravings were much admired. We are all familiar with some of his poems/hymns and of course we are at least aware of his prodigious output as a writer. Rey-Mermet concludes: 'Throughout his long life Alphonsus allowed nothing the Lord had planted in his garden to wither. He actively invested all his talents for the glory of God and no tool rusted in his hand and no idea withered in his head'.

What is significant for Redemptorists today is that Alphonsus left a heritage of refinement and appreciation of beauty which he saw as an aspect of a world redeemed. The Congregation has certainly followed Alphonsus in the

‘apostolate of the pen’ and while not necessarily producing works of great literature, the simplicity of language which marks Redemptorist writing has enabled many hearts to experience the closeness of God’s love and care.

There have been significant contributions from Redemptorist artists down the years. Many will remember the liturgical and devotional work of Br Max Schmalzl which used to decorate our oratories and rooms. More recently the spiritual discipline of writing icons has found a home with us. The point of sensitivity to beauty is not that all Redemptorists should be musicians, artists or poets but in our life and ministry we should radiate the beauty of God.

### Ministry of beauty

The statement, ‘The world will be saved by beauty’, spoken in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Idiot* (1868) may have brought consolation to lonely artists or to penniless poets, but they bring a challenge to all Christians, especially to those facing suffering and injustice. When asked what sort of beauty will save the world, no reply is given. For Dostoevsky, as for us, the beauty that saves is transfigured beauty: the beauty of the glorified Christ who has drunk the cup of human injustice and suffering to the full.

Every Christian is called to reflect the brightness and beauty of the Lord, ‘all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect’ (2 Cor 3:18). We are custodians of the beauty and the glory on the face of Christ. Hence we need to be sensitive to every shade of beauty, to nourish and celebrate beauty of mind and speech, of cloister and hearth, the beauty of fellowship, goodness and truth. ‘There is a beautiful way of celebrating Eucharist, of preaching the Word, of being present to the hurting, of embracing sinners, of dancing with the limping on this precious earth’ (O’Leary).

In a surprising statement the then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that ‘the only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely the *saints* the Church has produced and the art which has grown in her womb...If the Church is to continue to transform and humanise the world, how can she dispense with beauty in her liturgies, that beauty which is so closely linked with love and with the radiance of the resurrection?’ His conclusion we can adapt to our context and we can say: we must make our Congregation into a place where beauty – and hence truth – is at home.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do we consider beauty as a decadent luxury of no relevance to our ministry?
2. Have we ever detected the echo of the divine in people's appreciation of simple beauties?
3. Have we a care for our own churches, communities and properties so that they can hint at 'God's better beauty, grace' (Hopkins)?

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## BENIGNITY

I do not know of any use of the expression ‘pastoral benignity (kindness)’ referring to the moral theology of St Alphonsus before it appeared in the title of a book, *Facing Rigorism, A Morality of Pastoral Benignity* (1986). This expression was endorsed by John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, written on the occasion of the second centenary of Alphonsus’ death (AAS 79[1987] 1365-75).

This apostolic letter is the latest document of the magisterium that has singled out, with great emphasis, the role of Alphonsus in the history of moral theology and his option for a moral theology of ‘pastoral benignity’. After affirming that Alphonsus was a renovator of moral theology (*rerum moralium restitutor*) and that his moral works ‘have made him a master of Catholic moral wisdom’ (*magistrum sapientiae moralis catholicae*), the pope underlines the *via media* of Alphonsus as between with rigorism and laxism. He concludes with an exhortation, that, as Redemptorists, we should be guided in our ministries by the criterion of pastoral benignity: ‘in the ministry of the confessional and in spiritual direction of souls, and especially in the pastoral life of the sanctuaries that have been entrusted to the care of your Institute, pastoral benignity should always guide you without diminishing the wholesome teachings of Christ’ (*semper veluti ductrix habeatur benignitas pastoralis*).

### General Meaning

In the more than 50 dictionaries that treat the diverse areas of theology (biblical, dogmatic, moral, liturgical, catechetical, etc.) that I have consulted, I have found not one entry dedicated to the theme of benignity, nor does this expression appear in the analytical indices of the said dictionaries.

According to Forcelini, the Latin word for benignity (*benignitas*) refers to the attitude of the soul to do good, while ‘liberality’ (*liberalitas*) refers to the external doing of good and ‘affability’ (*comitas*) is expressed through gentle and kind words. In the detailed classification of the virtues according to the medieval theologians, (for example, in the well-developed Aristotelian schema of Thomas Aquinas), there is no virtue known as benignity. The virtues closest to it would be magnanimity, compassion, liberality and affability.

This absence in the moral treatises about virtue contrasts with the presence of the term in the Greek Bible (LXX, NT: *chrestótes*) and in the Vulgate (*benignitas*). The Kittel Dictionary is aware of this biblical term and, despite the silence of other dictionaries, offers an entry about the word. From a gathering of the New Testament texts in which the expression is used, we can deduce benignity to be

the category to express the form of relationship, in the fullness of grace that God establishes with humanity in Christ Jesus (Rom 2:4; 11:22; Tit 3:4; Eph 2:7); it also is used to formulate a specific Christian attitude in interpersonal relationships (Gal 5:22).

This theological content has not been identified with the sources of ethics (the virtue of ethics) but rather with the interpretation of ethical norms. As a matter of fact, the use of the Latin term *benignitas* is applied mostly in the area of applying norms rather than in the area of the ethical virtues. The jurists are the ones who have used *benignity* in the moment of interpreting laws and applying punishments.

In accordance with this last understanding of the word, benignity is more the attitude of the one who applies a normative orientation, having taken into consideration the particular conditions of the person when referring to the norm. Benignity would be like flexibility and equity as forms of interpreting and applying law according to the exigency of an evangelical spirit (*aequitas canonica*). This *sapiens aequitas*, praised by Pope Paul VI (*Allocution to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota*, 8/II/1973), was defined as ‘justice moderated by kindness and mercy’.

### Application to the Moral Theology of St Alphonsus

I believe that among the many characteristics of Alphonsian moral theology, the best is the one that expresses its distinctiveness as a ‘middle of the road moral theology’ between the excesses of laxism and the harshness of rigorism. This moral option is guided, as motive and as goal, by the desire for salvation; and is preferentially applied to the areas of conscience and sacramental practice.

There is a clear salvific orientation behind the use of the term pastoral benignity. The Christianity understood and lived by Alphonsus was always one of abundant redemption for all.

The application of benignity takes place in the double area where the Alphonsian moral theology is preferentially active: in the area of conscience and in the practice of Penance. According to a biographer of the 19th century (J. Jeancard, 1828), Alphonsus brought about a ‘Copernican Revolution’ in the practice of the sacrament of Penance. This revolution took place through the application of benignity in the practice of sacramental reconciliation (without forgetting the sacrament of the Eucharist: Communion).

More than in concrete examples, benignity manifests itself through the general approach of the confessor who applies this benignity in diverse situations, particularly in relation to the requisites of Penance (confession, absolution, sat-

isfaction), and in his attitude toward occasional, habitual and recidivist penitents.

As its final goal, pastoral benignity should ‘calm’ the penitent’s conscience without ‘watering down’ gospel values, by creating a false sense of tranquility or losing the necessary tension of striving for evangelical perfection.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What meaning does benignity have in the New Testament? Review the texts provided in this article.
2. What do you think about the absence of benignity among the virtues in the Aristotelian schema of Moral Theology?
3. Benignity: somewhere between an ethical attitude and criterion for interpreting and applying norms. How can these two dimensions be integrated?
4. Why did St Alphonsus opt for ‘pastoral benignity’? What meaning did it have in his pastoral practice and in his theological thought?
5. How do you think we should interpret the phrase ‘here and now’, using pastoral benignity as a guide in our ministry, according to the recommendation that Pope John Paul II made to the Redemptorists?

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## **BROTHERS**

**T**o understand and embrace with one's heart and mind the vocation of a Redemptorist Brother is, without a doubt, a great gift from God. A few days after the foundation of the Congregation, Vito Curzio joined Alphonsus and his companions, thereby becoming the first young man willing to place himself at the service of the mission of the Redeemer as a lay Brother. The doors of the Congregation opened and remain open to welcome all those who desire to follow the Redeemer, live and grow in community, and evangelise the poor and the abandoned as a Redemptorist Brother.

In the most recent General Chapters, the issue of 'Brothers' has always been present in the discussions. The General Governments have sought to awaken, promote and give greater value to the vocation of the Redemptorist brother. The General Secretariat for Brothers and the Regional Secretariats have called on the Brothers in all the regions and encouraged them to attend meetings, congresses, and other celebrations. Seeds were sown; many beautiful things happened and much fruit is being harvested.

There is a growing consciousness that the brothers are essential to the Congregation, in order that she continue faithful to her mission of witnessing to and announcing the liberating message of the Redeemer. There is a growing conviction that we, priests and brothers, by our religious profession, form a single missionary body with the same Redemptorist vocation, with the same mission to evangelise and with the same missionary dynamic. In our midst we see great challenges, but also many signs of hope in respect to the vocation of Brothers. We are concerned with the diminishing number of Brothers in the Congregation, the great number of elderly Brothers and the small number of recent professions.

The profile of the Redemptorist Brother can be understood in the following manner: 'A consecrated man called to follow Jesus Christ as a disciple and missionary, who lives in a fraternal community as a prophetic sign and witness to the kingdom of God. He seeks to inculturate himself in the environment where he lives and attempts to form an integrated personality in union with the Church. He lives in constant mission and formation. He is a man of prayer and fraternity, a brother among brothers. He lives spirituality proper to the Brothers. He values the earthly realities and dedicates himself to the most diverse forms of apostolate in the Congregation.'

The Congregation was born on 9 November 1732 in the humble oratory of the guest house in Scala, Italy, with the presence of six members. In this group there were no Brothers. Only nine days after the foundation, on 18 November, the first Brother arrived in the Congregation: Vito Curzio. From that time on, many others

followed this ideal, such as Genaro Miguel Angelo Rendina, Francisco Antonio Tartaglione, Joaquim Gaudiello, Antonio Lauro, Geraldo Majella (the most famous), Marcel Van and hosts of others.

So Brothers have existed in the Congregation since the very beginning, but the emphasis has been mostly on the clerical vocation. This clericalism was reflected in the early titles given to the Congregation and in its official documents. Forms of clericalism survived to recent times in the ways the Congregation described itself, even in signposts outside our houses.

Despite this insensitivity, the General Chapters, from the earliest times to today, have concerned themselves with the welfare of the Brothers. Sometimes this concern seemed trivial (the use of the *zimmara* and the white collar), but the General Chapter of 1936 decided to 'suppress earlier allusions to inferior culture' and to promote adequate formation for the Brothers. The Constitutions and Statutes (Rome 2002) speak about all Redemptorists regardless of their status and distinguish only between ordained and non-ordained when strictly necessary. The General Chapter of 2009 elected a Brother as one of the six Consultors General, the first such election in the history of the Congregation.

Down the years, the Brother was identified by some terms that characterised his mission in the Congregation. In the beginning he was called a 'Coadjutor Brother', later, a 'Serving Brother', and then, a 'Lay Brother'. At the Chapter of 1946 he was again called a Coadjutor Brother or Lay Brother. The term 'Brother' is important to Redemptorist Brothers such as myself, because it identifies our vocation and our mission in the Church. It is, of itself, charged with meaning. A brother is one who makes himself neighbour, companion and friend, who shares the same dreams and projects, who joins in to celebrate the victory and to share the weight of the cross. To be a brother is to express fraternity, simplicity, presence, warmth, availability, service and sharing. It is to be a gift, a message in person!

Beginning with the General Chapter of 1967-69, the Brothers started to participate in the Provincial and General Chapters. Invited, they did not desire special treatment, but rather equality of treatment in the new Constitutions. Thus our Constitutions treat all the members with equality, having the same rights and dignity.

By their religious profession, all Redemptorists are truly missionaries. In community all the confreres are fundamentally equal and each one contributes, in his own way, to the mission of the Congregation. The Brother is an integral member of the missionary body which, consecrated by religious profession, has the purpose of continuing the example of our saviour Jesus Christ, preaching the word of God to the poor, as he said of himself: 'He sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.' All have, as their duty, the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and solidarity with the poor.

If in the past the Brothers occupied themselves more with the internal activities of the houses, today the great majority occupy themselves in external missionary activities, whether on the missions, in communications media, or in other apostolic activities. Nowadays they are closer to the people, and more accessible to questions and challenges. For this reason, the visibility and understanding of this vocation is increasing. Although their numbers are small, today's Brothers are better prepared to participate full time in the mission of all the Redemptorists. The witness of consecrated men, who are mature, happy in their vocation, dedicated to promoting the kingdom of God and sensitive to the cry of the people, will be the best vocational calling card, capable of attracting other youths to live with us this ideal of life.

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. If the vocation of every Redemptorist is established by Religious Profession, why is there still difficulty in offering the Brothers an adequate formation for their mission?
2. What does it signify to promote the importance of the Brother in the Congregation?
3. What does it take to make the vocation of the Brother better known and more accepted by all?
4. How can we present the vocation of the Brother in a way that is positive, attractive, fully and completely Redemptorist and engaged in evangelisation?

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## CHARISM

A charism is a gift of the Spirit granted by God to the recipient not primarily for his own sake but for the benefit of the community, ‘in order to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up’ (Eph 4:12). Paul gives it a quasi definition in 1Cor 12:7: ‘the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.’

The five principal charisms are: to be Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers (Eph 4:11-12). To these are added gifts for governing and guiding, as well as serving, and finally there are the extraordinary or miraculous charisms (1Cor 12: 1-7). What is essential with regard to charisms in the New Testament are the following: 1) The common source of all charisms is the Holy Spirit; 2) The superiority of love over all charisms; 3) The orderly interaction of the hierarchical and charismatic traditions in the Church.

Interest in the concept of charisms as a focal element in the renewal of religious life followed closely on the documents of Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*). Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio* uses the term to mean ‘the proper characteristic of each institute’ and ‘the dynamism proper to each religious family’. He called on religious congregations to develop a new sense of their origins through a renewed study of Sacred Scripture, a deepening of their understanding of the spirit of their founders and a sensitivity to the signs of the times.

Today when we speak of the charism of a religious institute we mean therefore the specific ‘gift’ received from the Spirit through its founder to realise a specific mission in the Church.

### The Redemptorist Charism

A few ideas come together in discerning the charism of our Congregation. First, the charism of the founder St Alphonsus is the gift and call given by the Spirit to him to found the Congregation as a particular religious family. Second, the dynamism of the charism throughout the history of the Congregation can be explored through the lived experience of its members, the decisions made and the roads taken and not taken. Third, the charism of the Congregation today, the ensemble of its gifts, is organically related to the founder, but it necessarily will exhibit some differences.

The sources for understanding and explicating the charism of the Congregation are the Scriptures, the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation, the theology of religious life and charisms, the Founding Texts, the archival data,

and the history of the Congregation. To these must be added an examination of the contemporary needs of the People of God together with a realistic assessment of the present members' capacity to respond to these needs.

### The Charism Itself

In Constitution 25, we note that the Redemptorists are constantly docile to the working of the Holy Spirit who conforms them to the person of Christ and who through the charism enables them to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. Redemptorists serve the Body of Christ by proclaiming the good news, through word, deed and life. The original group of Redemptorists with Alphonsus came together with a precise 'intent', namely, to evangelise or to go out to the most abandoned and proclaim the good news to them. Evangelisation therefore has a primacy in the missionary life of the Congregation. Evangelisation of the poor is at the very heart of the life and spirituality of a Redemptorist. Therefore, the proclamation of good news to the Poor is in essence the charism of the Congregation, the gift that it, as a Religious family, offers to the Church and through which the Congregation builds up and serves Church.

There are three interrelated categories or key concepts, each of which, in its own way, expresses the richness of the unique charism of the Congregation.

- a) **Vita Apostolica:** this concept underlines the unity that connects the two aspects of the one missionary vocation, ministry and interior life. This is the title of the Constitutions and Statutes.
- b) **The Example of the Saviour:** this phrase recalls the text of St Alphonsus – 'Its purpose is to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor, as he declared of himself: "He sent me to preach the good news to the Poor"' (cf. Lk 4:16-22) (Const. 1).
- c) **Evangelisation of the Poor:** this evokes the dynamic purpose of the Redemptorist vocation in today's Church (Cs. 3-5; Ss 09-025,044) 'The Mission of Christ': this constitutes the ultimate reason for Redemptorist missionary life sealed by religious profession. It is the root from which the missionary life of the Redemptorist draws its vital life (Cs. 46-54).

### Pastoral and Practical Conclusions

The charism of the Congregation thus means the following: First, a community and personal dedication to Christ the Redeemer who was sent to preach the good news to the Poor. Second, this dedication is manifested in a proclamation of the word of God. The Redemptorist is above all a preacher of the Gospel. The Gospel is nothing other than the saving Christ himself coming into the world through

preaching. The Redemptorist ‘follows Christ’ through preaching the Gospel. This preaching becomes real in the various forms of proclamation as determined by the needs of various places (Const. 16). Third, the privileged recipients of the proclamation of the word of God are the poor and most abandoned. The Redemptorist proclaims the word of God to the poor with a genuine compassion that feels their needs and responds wholeheartedly to these needs. Fourth, the dedication to the mission of Christ in proclaiming the word of God to the poor is realised and fulfilled through Community (Const. 2 & 21). The Apostolic Community moulds its members into a well-structured team, while at the same time it respects and promotes the personality of each person according to the variety of charism and abilities.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Since the mission of Christ is at the very centre of our Charism, is our personal

lifestyle and our communities such that they foster a total giving of ourselves to Jesus?

2. The Proclamation of the Gospel is the pastoral goal of the Congregation. What is the content of the Gospel we proclaim? What is the style of our proclamation of the Gospel? What are the most significant and relevant means to proclaim the Gospel in our particular context (country, state, province, city, parish, etc. Cs. 16 & 17)?

3. Since the Poor are the privileged recipients to whom our Charism is directed, have we moved from talking about the poor (analysing who are the poor) to an actual proclamation of the word of God to the poor through our preaching and life witness?

4. Since our Charism is lived and carried out through our Apostolic Community how do we relate and incorporate individual charisms with the One Charism of the Apostolic Community?

5. The Charism of the Congregation is at the service of the Church (Const. 18). How do we respond to the needs of our local Church? How do we reach out to those most abandoned by the Church and who do not feel a part of the Church?

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## CHASTITY

It would be proper to define the concept of ‘chastity’ and distinguish it from similar notions such as virginity and celibacy. Celibacy merely indicates the fact of not contracting marriage. Virginity strictly means not partaking in sexual intimacy or being in affective dependence on another person. ‘Consecrated Chastity’, in a religious institute such as ours, is understood to be *the perfect state of continence, lived in community, according to the will of the Church, in which there is a total giving of oneself to Christ for the building of the kingdom.*

Initially St Alphonsus did not found a religious community but rather a group of priests and brothers at the service of the poor. Bit by bit the community began to structure itself and gave itself a canonical and organised sense. The vow of perseverance first appeared in the Congregation (1740), and then the other vows (1743).

The Rule of Benedict XIV spoke of consecrated chastity as the imitation of Christ, virgin and chaste, and insisted above all on the mortification of the senses and caution in relations with seculars. When the Redemptorist community crossed the Alps and extended throughout Europe, the concept of chastity was set within an almost monastic style of life that resonated with the slogan: ‘We Redemptorists are Carthusians at home and apostles abroad.’ Thus consecrated chastity evolved perhaps more as a grouping of norms and laws that reflected a flight from the world and a canonical obligation rather than a personal love for the Lord and a love for the spreading of his kingdom among the poor.

The idea of a dynamic and apostolic ‘consecrated chastity’ on behalf of the most abandoned (St Alphonsus, St Clement, St Gerard) turned into a chastity founded in great part on obligations and norms (Passerat, Desurmont, Colin).

However, the vision of religious life has changed radically since the Second Vatican Council and with the revision of the constitutions and statutes of the Congregation made between 1967 and 1982. Actually for Redemptorist missionaries, chastity is clearly based on the mystery of love of Christ (Const. 57) and on working for the kingdom of Heaven (58). Our consecrated chastity is the fruit of an act of love for the Lord and our neighbour, or it is not chastity.

### Principle Aspects of Consecrated Redemptorist Chastity

The radical and total giving of oneself as a response to the love of God (Const. 56) is the indisputable and non-negotiable base of chastity.

– For love of the kingdom of Heaven (transcendent chastity), especially for the building of the kingdom among the most poor and abandoned (immanent



chastity) (Const. 58).

– Lived in fraternal community (Const. 60) and in union with the Church (Const. 59). Without love for those who live with us under the same roof, chastity either cannot be lived or it becomes ‘apostolic evasion’.

– With total confidence placed in God’s help and the patronage of Our Mother of Perpetual Help (S. 042), chastity is, above all, a gift that God grants to the humble and to those who seek it.

– By means of chastity, we give eloquent witness, answer and protest before a consumerist, hedonist and individualistic world.

– Being witnesses to a fruitful death by means of freely accepting the cross do not deny the aspect of renunciation, struggle and suffering that are always present in the heart of a chaste Redemptorist.

– It is, nonetheless, a renunciation that permits a true ‘sublimation of chastity. This occurs within an affirmation of self, the establishing of deeply personal relationships, along with an enthusiasm for the proclaiming of the kingdom, with the wisdom of setting ‘limits’, and the internal assuredness of feeling loved unconditionally by Jesus.

– Thus we use all the natural and supernatural means to grow in chastity (Cc. 59 & 60), since ‘grace builds on nature’.

– Lastly, consecrated chastity presupposes psychological maturity (Const. 85) that manifests itself, in a special way, in healthy, non-dependent relationships, in the balanced use of the media (television, internet, cellphones) and in an honest, joyful and sane life. Depending on these ingredients, chastity becomes a gradual, integrating process over a whole lifetime.

### Pastoral Application

Our missionary charism is the font of joyful chastity. Apostolic labours at the service of the most abandoned are the precious ‘cultivating source’ for its development. Our chastity is not monastic but missionary: its reality is in apostolic contact with evangelised and evangelising people. Simple relationships with people make us respectful and affectively sensitive receivers, with no desire to possess or dominate. Missionary chastity gives us that certain ‘Christian resilience’ that only the poor and abandoned produce in the soul of an apostle. For the authentic missionary, the humble people have never been the occasion of betraying one’s commitment of chaste love for the Lord or his kingdom.

### Actual Manifestations

Fr Paul Hitz, the famous Redemptorist of the Strasbourg Province, once wrote:

‘As privileged companions of Christ, we Redemptorists are witnesses in this life to the future world, the world of Resurrection, of the complete redemption inaugurated by Christ on Easter morning. This is the meaning of our vow of chastity and virginity.’ The Brazilian Redemptorist Ulysses da Silva beautifully affirms this: ‘For the Redemptorist the vow of chastity should be a vow of explicit affection for Jesus Christ and tenderness for his people. The way one treats people determines positive chastity.’ For the Colombian Redemptorist Noel Londoño, ‘chastity is like a medieval cathedral: deep foundations, in construction over many years and always oriented to God’.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In your intimate life, what place does your personal relationship with Christ occupy and how do you develop it?
2. Do you feel that your consecrated Chastity has helped you spiritually to engender new Christians for the kingdom?
3. What advice would you give to Redemptorist formators to help them with their formandi in acquiring and developing consecrated Chastity?
4. Where is consecrated Chastity heading in the Redemptorist Congregation?

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## CHURCH

The Church has its primary origins not in the coming of the Spirit to the early followers of Jesus at Pentecost, nor in their experience of the Risen Lord on Easter morning, nor even in the reality of the Risen Lord himself, but in the divine purpose which brought all of these things about: the vision of God (*visio Dei*). Properly speaking, its origin lies in God's providential vision of creation and its end in that process of sanctification which ultimately leads to the beatific vision. The Church, in other words, has its beginning and end, its Alpha and Omega, in the very mind of God. It subsists in the Catholic Church, is hierarchically structured, espouses a spirit of communion (*communio*), extends to all peoples, embraces various rites or liturgical traditions, involves various degrees of incorporation, and is essentially missionary in its nature.

### Description

The Second Vatican Council developed its teaching on the Church in *Lumen gentium*, (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and *Gaudium et spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). As their titles indicate, these documents look at the Church respectively from dogmatic and pastoral standpoints. While the teaching of these documents stand in marked continuity with Church Tradition and its ecclesial self-understanding, it places a new emphasis on the Church as the People of God in dialogue with the world in order to bring about its spiritual renewal and material transformation.

In addition to the Church as the People of God, the documents emphasise the mystery of the Church as the sacrament of salvation, its hierarchical structure of authority, the universal call to holiness, an enhanced role of the laity, the radical following of religious, and Mary's role as its mother and sign of hope for a pilgrim people. They affirm the dignity of the human person and give the Church an active role in proclaiming the Gospel and inculturating its values in all cultures and in all areas of human endeavour.

The documents assert that, just as Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God, so is the Church the sacrament of Christ. As such, it is also the sacrament of salvation and is essentially missionary in nature. It consists of the community of believers, living and dead, who, by virtue of their origin and end in the mind of the Father, interpret (i.e. contemplate, celebrate, formulate, proclaim, and serve) through Christ and in the Spirit the mystery of their own communal life and the gift of humanity's divinisation. The Church's missionary mandate is: 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation' (Mk 16:15).

The mystery of the Church cannot be exhausted by human words and concepts. As such, the above description offers a broad synthesis of the various ‘models’ used by the late Avery Dulles SJ to portray a multifaceted ecclesial reality. The Church, in his mind, is institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. This description of the Church invites critical theological reflection as a means of reinterpreting the meaning of Church in changing historical circumstances. It also allows believers of different theological tendencies to recognise their preferred images of Church without excluding the possibility of other, equally important metaphors that reveal the ecclesial mystery.

The Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes reference all aspects of the Vatican Council’s teaching on the Church, but have a special predilection for the Church as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ that is ‘missionary by its very nature’ (Const. 1). With respect to Dulles’ ‘models’, the Redemptorist charism places a heavy emphasis on the Church as ‘herald’ and ‘servant’.

### Pastoral Application

Redemptorists serve the Lord in and through the Church which, as the sacrament of Christ, has been instructed to go and to preach the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. They share in the Church’s missionary mandate and, as an apostolic community, have taken this Gospel mandate to heart. As consecrated religious, they strive to think with the Church and bring its message of salvation to every corner of the world. They do so specifically by going to those for whom the Church has not been able to provide sufficient means of salvation, especially the poor and abandoned. Their pastoral application of this mandate manifests itself in a variety of ways and depends a great deal on the needs of the Church in the area they have been called to serve.

### Current Manifestations

Redemptorists are loyal sons of the Church who ponder its teaching with care and subject it to critical analysis. The most common way in which they fulfill the Church’s missionary mandate is by the explicit proclamation of the word (e.g. area and parish missions, preached retreats, the communications media, and the apostolate of the pen, etc.). They also work diligently to promote social justice and are deeply conscious of the various dimensions of human existence – the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, institutional, environmental, and spiritual – in need of God’s liberating word.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. With which model(s) of the Church do you identify with most?
2. Which model(s) of Church do you least understand or feel most challenged by?
3. Are there any model(s) that you need to emphasise more?
4. Does your Province or local community lean toward are particular model? Are there any that it needs to emphasise more?
5. Do you agree that Redemptorists should embrace an understating of Church as 'herald' and 'servant'?
6. How do the Redemptorists in your part of the world share in the Church's mission? What does it mean for them to proclaim the Gospel message to the poor and most abandoned?

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## CLASSICS OF ST ALPHONSUS

Can any of St Alphonsus' writings be considered classics? If so, which ones and for what reasons? What makes them so special? Why do they have a special place of honour in his literary corpus? The answers to these questions depend on how the term is understood and what criteria are used to make the determination.

### Origins

The term 'classic' refers to a piece of literature that is generally recognised as having widespread, perennial value. Although rooted in a particular historical context and cultural milieu, the classic transcends space and time by touching upon universal themes that elevate the human spirit and give the reader a deeper sense of what it means to be human. A classic belongs not to the author, or to the historical epoch in which he or she wrote, but to all time, all places, and all of humanity. The works of Shakespeare are classics in this sense of the term, as is Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The Great Books series is a collection of excerpts from these and similar works that have been widely acclaimed as literary classics.

The term has also been applied to religious literature. The sacred writings of the great world religions – the Bible, the Koran, the Upanishads – are often described as classics, as are some of the more illuminating commentaries on these writings. Certain works of Christian theology have also been recognised as classics: Augustine's *Confessions*, Aquinas' *Summa theologica*, and Cardinal John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* wear the title well.

### Description

Although it may be debated if any of Alphonsus' 111 works can be considered 'classic' in the above sense, a number of them most certainly would be when employing an extended understanding of the term. Today the term 'classic' has grown beyond its original designation and taken on a variety of analogous senses.

To mention just a few possibilities: in addition to works of perennial value dealing with universal themes of human experience, works are today called classics if they stand out in a particular historical period, if they exemplify a certain literary genre, or if they represent the best of writing of a renowned author or concrete and well-defined literary corpus. Although derivative in nature, these secondary senses of the term confer a level of respect and legitimacy on a piece of literature that make it stand out from other writings in its category.

When seen in this light, a number of Alphonsus' writings can rightfully be

termed classics. From the perspectives of literary genre, quality of content, and historical impact, his *Moral Theology* is widely considered *the* classic work of Roman Catholic moral casuistry, an approach to moral theology that focused on the application of law to concrete cases and which held sway for the 17<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly his *Confessor's Guide to the Correct Pastoral Exercise of His Ministry* is generally held up excellent handbook for confessors and was widely used by pastorally-minded priests long beyond Alphonsus' lifetime.

A number of Alphonsus' ascetical and spiritual writings are equally deserving of the title. Books such as *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* (1745), *The Glories of Mary* (1750), *The Way to Converse Always and Familiarly with God* (1754), *Conformity to the Will of God* (1755), *Preparation for Death* (1758), *Prayer, The Great Means of Salvation* (1759), *Dignity and Duties of the Priest* (1760), *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* (1760-61), and *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* (1768), not only had a great impact in 18th-century Italian Catholicism, but also were translated into many languages and made available in numerous reprints and subsequent editions. To cite but two examples, over the years *The Glories of Mary* is said to have been translated into over 60 languages, while *The Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* have undergone some 2,000 editions in a variety of languages.

These works of Alphonsus had a tremendous impact on Catholic morality, spirituality, and popular devotion during his life and beyond, indeed well into the middle years of the 20th century. If it is true that since the close of the Second Vatican Council, Alphonsus' works have lost much of their popular appeal and have fallen into a kind of literary limbo, there are clear signs of a resurgence of interest in his thought and hope that his works will once again reach a wide readership. The appearance of an anthology of his writings in the prestigious series *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (1999) is one indication that his works are on the cusp of a literary renaissance; the inclusion of his *Visits* in the *Classics with Commentary* series (2007) is another. It also bears noting that at least one of Alphonsus' musical compositions (*Tu scendi dalle stelle*) enjoys 'classic' status as the most popular Christmas carol for Italians both at home and abroad.

Redemptorists should be familiar with Alphonsus' classic texts (especially his ascetical and spiritual works) and make them known to the people they serve. This can be done through their mission preaching, retreat ministries, as well as through their publication houses, popular devotions, book clubs, workshops, and prayer groups. They should also consider the apostolate of the pen as an important part of their charism and look at Alphonsus' deep zeal and passion for writing as something they should admire and seek to emulate in their service to the Gospel.

Redemptorists continue to put out new editions, translations, and commentaries of Alphonsus' classic works. Many of these are often read in small groups or used privately for spiritual reading. They are also used by Redemptorists in their various missionary apostolates. When Redemptorists foster a love for and knowledge of Alphonsus' writings in their own lives, they come to know their founder more deeply and are able to share that love and knowledge with those they serve. In recent years, special efforts have been made to make Alphonsus' writings better known among the Redemptorist Lay Associates. Religious Congregations that share in the Alphonsian charism have also made strong efforts to study his writings and make them known to a larger audience.

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*Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology*. Selected and Edited by Carl Hoegerl. Rome: Collegio Sant'Alfonso, 1981.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Are you proud of Alphonsus's writings?
2. How familiar are you with them?
3. How often do you read them? Do you have any favourites?
4. Which are them do you consider classics? If so, in what sense?
5. Are any of them of universal, perennial value?
6. What effect have Alphonsus' writings had on your life? How have they impacted your ministry?
7. Do you share these works with others? If so, in what ways?

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## CLOSENESS TO THE PEOPLE

Throughout its history, beginning with the practice of Jesus, we always find the Church going out to meet the people and shying away from concentrating on specialised groups, whether religious or social. That was the way of Jesus, who was part of the simple people and did not belong to any social hierarchy. He was from Nazareth: ‘Can anything good come from that place?’ (Jn 1:46). His family was of common stock and his disciples were chosen from among the ordinary folk; his disciples were ‘this rabble’ which knew nothing about the law (Jn 7:49). It was such people that marveled at his teachings, because he spoke their language. The apostles continued Jesus’ experiment and were themselves of the people and for the people. The Church was made up of a majority of poor people. The saints were men and women who lived with the people in order to assist them.

The Second Vatican Council gave direction to the mission of the Church: ‘The Church... must become part of all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt’ (*Ad Gentes* 10). It continues: ‘In imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches... borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour’s grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life’ (*Ad Gentes* 22). Inculturation leads the Church not only to approach, but almost to be born within a people. Being close to the people represents a great Exodus for the Redemptorists, who go out of themselves in order to ‘be born again’ in the midst of a people. The model of the Second Vatican Council is a response to the need to get closer to the people.

### The Experience of Alphonsus

Alphonsus embarked on a permanent Exodus towards the people, particularly the most abandoned. He participated in some associations – ‘confraternities’ – which put him in contact with the needy, such as the sick in the hospices of the incurables, those condemned to death and their families, and priests reduced to being beggars or prisoners. After his ordination he began, with some friends, to evangelise the poor people of the city by means of his evening chapels (*Capelle serontine*). Prematurely exhausted, he escaped to the countryside where he discovered just how abandoned the peasants and the shepherds were. His outreach to the people was slow but constant. He decided to move resolutely into the world of the abandoned, leaving Naples once and for all, as Fr. A. Tannoia relates, and going to Scala to live in simplicity among the poor. His was a spirituality of a growing Exodus in the direction of the people. Getting close to them was both a spiritual and social process. It meant becoming the Church among the abandoned (Majorano, 1985). The same could be

said of so many other Redemptorists, such as St Clement M. Hofbauer, Fr Victor Coelho de Almeida, Fr Pelagio Sauter (in Brazil) and many more.

### The Idea of the Institute

In order to put this project – a new charism in the Church – into practice, St Alphonsus gathered together companions. According to the text of the primitive Rule presented for approval (the Cossali text), closeness to the people was a value which was to influence the location of our houses: ‘The houses should be situated outside of the inhabited areas and in the middle of the dioceses, so that they may always be free to give more responsive assistance with missions and spiritual renovation [...] but also to make it easier for the poor people of the interior to come and hear the word of God and receive the holy sacraments’ (cf. Londoño 2002). There would be an interaction between the local Redemptorists and the people of the area. Jesus is the centre; but he is encountered above all in the midst of the people.

The spirituality of being close to the people has to take into account the point of view of the common person. St Alphonsus took as his model the life and words of Jesus. Alphonsus’ simple way of living, his every-day language, his books on piety, his music and painting, his preaching, his books on theology, his pastoral missionary methods, the hearing of confessions – all of these were directed towards the people. Being for the people was his life and his pastoral path. He even said of himself: ‘I never preached a sermon that a little old lady in the pew could not understand.’ The ‘school of Redemptorist spirituality’ is the spirituality of the people. G. De Luca (1963) writes: ‘His claim to fame and significance was in knowing how to create in the people, particularly the simple people, the heart of saints, and great saints’.

### Guidance of the Constitutions and Statutes

Besides saying that the Congregation was founded for the most abandoned poor (Const 4.5), the Constitutions include an article titled ‘Dialogue with the World’. This is in harmony with the Incarnation of the Word and refers one’s experience of the world and dialogue with its communities, interpreting their anxieties and discerning the signs of the presence and plan of God (Const. 19). This dialogue is not conducted through words only, but through one’s style of life. Inculturation goes beyond the social position. It presupposes the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Constitution 17 requires that the means used to evangelise should be examined to see if they correspond to the needs of the Church and the world. The process of conversion is not only spiritual. It means examining ourselves to see if our lives and structures correspond with the project we have taken on. The tendency to become lax and to seek the good life moves us away from the people and creates structures that separate us from them; and with that we lose the spirituality proper to our charism.

Closeness to the people is a vital part of Redemptorist spirituality. Where we live, how we live, how we minister, how we do our theology, is all shaped by our proximity to the people, especially to the abandoned poor. The Congregation remains strong when it is close to the people.

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Oliveira, Luiz Carlos: *Continuar o Redentor; dimensões da espiritualidade redentorista*, Ed. Santuário, Aparecida 1996.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you recognise 'closeness to the people' as a principle in your life as a Redemptorist? How does it manifest itself?
2. Does closeness to the people influence the location and style of the Redemptorist houses in your unit?
3. What spiritual values do you see in closeness to the people: for Redemptorists, for the people?

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## COMMUNITY

Community is integral to our Redemptorist missionary life. It is one of the most striking characteristics of Redemptorist spirituality. Without community we are simply charismatic freelance preachers or social workers. From the beginning Alphonsus had a concept of community. It was, however, a concept that he experimented with regularly. The daily life was always adapted to the missionary needs of the early confereres. Indeed, as he wrote to Maria Celeste: ‘I have no practical experience of community life, Celeste. Moreover, I am an ignoramus.’

Alphonsus did not set out to create a monastic way of living; rather it was a life centred on the mission. So it included prayer together, reflection together, mission preparation together and relaxation together. The timetable was not rigid, and allowed much free time for personal reflection and for study. It was not, in this sense, about being around one another much of the time. Rather it was about spending quality time together over the things that mattered. It was in this way an aid to the apostolate, and not an end in itself. It existed to make our work among the abandoned more effective and focused.

That is why he walked out of the Chapter of 1764 in which already rule upon rule was being added to make our home life more structured. This tendency to highlight the home life grew under the Vicar General, Fr Passerat, and was strictly enforced under the near 40 year period of incumbency of Fr Nicholas Mauron as Rector Major, soon followed by a similar lengthy generalate of Fr Patrick Murray. By the middle of the last century community was identified precisely as the home life, as the body of men observing a rigid timetable in the one place. Redemptorist literature such as Achille Desurmont’s *The Harmony of Our Rule*, and the writings of Louis Colin attest to this.

After a period of experimentation between the 1969 and 1979 Chapters, a new understanding of community life emerged. The New Constitutions and Statues devote a complete chapter to the Apostolic Community (Chapter 2). They cite community as indispensable for the Redemptorist missionary endeavour, ‘an essential law of life for all the members is this; that they live in community and carry out their apostolic work through community’ (Const. 21).

The Constitutions invite us to discern whether certain works are in keeping with membership of a Redemptorist community, and challenge us to a new level of community. ‘Community does not truly exist when members merely live together; it requires as well genuine sharing on the human and spiritual level’ (Const. 21).

Our Constitutions make use of the post-Vatican II understanding of the human person, inviting us to personal growth and development, to friendship and intimacy, to maturity and responsibility. No longer are they external rules to be lived, but deep human values that have to be internalised.

In eight Articles, the 24 Constitutions and 15 Statutes on ‘Apostolic Community’ challenge Redemptorists to live more intensely a dedicated life together for the sake of the mission. They call us not simply to be men of prayer – but of contemplation, echoing the desire of Alphonsus: ‘The life of the members should be one of continuous recollection. To attain this, they shall have at heart the practise of the presence of God’ (Pontifical Rule Part II, Chapter III). Coupled with this is an invitation through community to selflessness, and therefore availability for those in need. ‘Spending themselves for others’ (Const. 41) is an experience of the kenosis, lived in Redemptorist community.

A noteworthy feature is the warning in the Constitutions that community must never allow us to turn in on ourselves, but always to remember that we are also members of other communities. Accordingly, any Redemptorist community must constantly be listening to, and looking at, the signs of the times to see where the needs of evangelisation are greatest. In other words, community is not an end in itself. It is always at the service of the Mission. Nevertheless it must be a real feature of the life of any Redemptorist.

The experience of the last twenty years has indicated a diminution of community living as outlined by the Constitutions. A minimalist approach has been followed in many places. Prayers are said and meals are taken together. This is not community as envisaged by the Constitutions. Carried to its extreme, individualism (often in the name of the apostolate) has become commonplace in many parts of the Congregation. In its acute form, individualism harms community life as suggested in the letter of Fr Pfab: ‘Those who do not intend to live according to our vocation should leave.’ Likewise Fr Lasso deplored the fact that ‘some confreres use our communities as hotels from which they go out to do their work’.

Young people coming to us seek community. It is inevitable that at times they idealise it; and community alone will never keep anyone in the Congregation. We are missionaries. Nevertheless, the cry of society today for meaningful relationships invites Redemptorists to reevaluate our understanding and practise of community.

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Raponi Santino: The charism of the Redemptorists in the Church. A commentary on the Constitutions. Rome 2003. Chapter Four: The Apostolic Community

Charism 2000: A Journey in Redemptorist Spirituality. Rome

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Charism 3: The Apostolic Community Dedicated to Christ the Redeemer

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Community means a certain presence to one another. How many people do you think constitutes a minimum for a real community life?
2. The concept of the Open Community and the Organised Community in our Constitutions provide us with a challenge in terms of non-Redemptorists sharing our life and our work. What is your experience of Redemptorist collaborative living, i.e. living with non Redemptorists in community?
3. How can I achieve a true balance of pastoral outreach and also quality presence to my brethren?
4. A Community of Conversion offer us the possibility of human challenge. How does this work out in practice in my life?

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## CONFESSION

Sacramental confession is the decisive event where Christians make peace with God. In it they work out a personal relationship with their Saviour. Redemptorists have always put confession at the centre of their missionary efforts aimed at leaving people bound lovingly to Christ. It is the turning-point in the process of conversion that reconciles those far from God back into his friendship and sets them on the secure path to sanctity. Redemptorist spirituality is pastoral precisely as a school that forms confessors in the image of the Redeeming Christ. ‘Sin is what puts distance between the believer and God,’ says Pope Benedict XVI, ‘and it is confession that brings the two back together.’ Confession is therefore the sacrament of forgiveness, mercy and compassion that reestablishes communion with God and the Church.

Tannoia was the one who formulated the Constitutions *De Confessariis* for the 1764 chapter. These have to be called classic since they remained in force with minor adjustments till the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council. They are not just a theological statement nor a how-to-do-it manual, but they describe the *praxis* of the early Redemptorists that became normative in the Congregation’s history. They give priority to hearing confessions over all other every activities. ‘Since it is by confession that men return to friendship with God, it necessarily follows that to hear confessions is the first and chief duty on a mission.’ Preaching a God of mercy yields its choicest fruit in the confessional in the unburdening of conscience. Zeal is the guiding virtue in this work. Confreses are to spare no effort in helping the most abandoned find peace with God, nor is any moral question too difficult when it comes to liberating the sinner from evil.

The priest is to welcome, encourage and understand how desperate a person may feel when approaching Confession. Confessors are to be available for all, without distinction, and care is to be taken to overcome the shame and anxiety that lead to sacrilegious confessions. ‘The more each devotes himself to this work with great zeal, the more he will show himself to be an excellent missionary, and a very faithful follower of Jesus Christ.’ In their home life superiors are to make sure that the same fullness of redemption is available especially for students and the brothers.

St Alphonsus embodied this *praxis* in his life and writings. The story that has been handed down that he never refused absolution underlines this. On missions the instructions prepared people for a good confession. The Ten Commandments educated them in how to examine their conscience. The instructions on the sacrament itself elaborated Trent’s Decree on Justification as the dual movement of rejecting sin on one hand and adhering to an all-merciful God on the other. Hence

the insistence on the sacrament's four parts: repentance or sorrow, confession of sin, priestly absolution and satisfaction or penance.

St Alphonsus wanted to reach priests in his three major works dealing with Confession. These were meant to sustain the spirituality proposed in his ascetical works. First he wanted to reform the parish clergy by motivating them to become good confessors for their people. His clergy retreat, the *Selva di materie predicabili*, furnishes both the models for talks to priests and the *loci* for finding convincing arguments. True sacerdotal spirituality grows out of the celebration of the Mass and Confession. Priests can employ the benignity of his moral system to sanctify their people. His *Pratica del confessare per ben esercitare il suo ministero* presented the portrait of a good confessor as neither too rigorous nor too lax. Citing Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* he notes that this 'art of all arts' calls for extraordinary spiritual resources. The priest in the confessional is like a doctor who, caught in the midst of an epidemic, must ensure that he never gets infected.

The priest is:

- 1) father reflecting the Eternal Father's love for his children,
- 2) doctor healing their diseases,
- 3) teacher instructing them in God's will, and
- 4) judge pronouncing Christ's sentence of forgiveness on the repentant sinner.

Besides treating the confessions of the uneducated, the nobility, civil and ecclesiastical authorities, youth, the ill and dying, and those condemned to death, St Alphonsus pays close attention to the help needed for those trapped in situations where they continually fall.

His genius shines forth in the chapter on spiritual direction. First, people need a rule of life that establishes a pattern of prayer and meditation. Then he summarises the whole mystical life for them with his own variations on St Theresa and John of the Cross. This illustrates that he saw the moral and spiritual lives as but the one path to sanctity not only to be taught but rather to be instilled through encountering a spiritual master in the confessional.

St Alphonsus' *Theologia moralis* is his great contribution to Christian thought and his role as a sure spiritual and moral guide was acknowledged when he was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1871. It provides the knowledge needed for solving moral cases.

The tradition he established continues (cf. Const. 12), but it has experienced a crisis since the Second Vatican Council. There is tension between a diminution in private confession and attempts at renewal. The sacrament has been made more personal by intensifying the dialogue between priest and penitent and by using



techniques of counseling and psychotherapy. Communal services have become popular in the wake of the 1973 *Rite of Penance*. These often emphasise sin's social dimension and the need for social justice and solidarity. There have also been public ceremonies of asking pardon after the Pope John Paul II's Holy Year model. General absolution has been used in parishes and on missions where the law provides. Penance services are a feature of Redemptorist community life particularly in Lent and Advent. Although the sacrament is now more often called Reconciliation rather than Confession, the reality of plentiful redemption remains the same.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you prefer community celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to private confession and if so why?
2. How would you describe a good confessor?
3. How often do you go to Confession? What do you recommend to others?

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## CONSCIENCE

No culture has yet been identified where the concept of conscience has not been recognised as central. The word ‘conscience’ was not always used: more common in early cultures were ‘heart’ and ‘loins’. Whatever the word used, the concept behind conscience pointed to the core of the human person. The lack of a consistent word for the concept of conscience has led to diverse explanations. Despite this, the concept of conscience has maintained a consistent reference to human freedom. Through freedom, the practical conduct of life was discerned, and humans were formed to live responsibly as individuals and within society.

### Origins

The Bible has no specific term for conscience, but by the New Testament there is an emerging spirit which emphasises that conscience is to be distinguished from the legal obedience typical of Rabbinic writings. A person’s character and decisions are shaped by the heart and interior dispositions rather than by exterior obedience (cf. Mt 15:1-20, Lk 11:37-54). The insistence on purity of heart, under the caring eye of God, animates St Paul’s presentation of Christian conscience. Paul does not give a systematic treatise, but clear emphases emerge from his writings. Conscience regulates a person’s moral activity, so that whoever acts against conscience commits sin: conscience must always be followed even when in error (Rom 14:17-23). Of course, love of God and neighbour are the superior norms for Christian living, and a person may be occasionally required to forego a freedom that would be legitimate in different circumstances (1 Cor 8:1-13), though the inherent dignity of conscience is never questioned.

### Historical Development

Given the variety of meanings and the lack of a systematic biblical presentation it is not surprising that the theological development of conscience is a maze of different views. For the tradition inherited by Redemptorists, the presentation of St Thomas Aquinas has a central importance. The analysis of Aquinas centres on the human intellect, operating through faith, which acquires the virtues necessary for a consistent life: pride of place is given to the cardinal virtue of prudence. Conscience becomes the spontaneous, indeed almost instinctive, application of prudential judgment to human living. Properly understood, this gives the possibility of identifying conscience with faith from which it primarily flows (*Summa Theologica*, Part One, Question 79).

## Description

Though the theory of conscience in St Alphonsus is based on the axis of charity and prudence, as explained by St Thomas, Alphonsus' practical description of the term differs from that of his mentor. Two factors explain this. Alphonsus was trained as a lawyer, and he discusses problems of conscience through legal terminology rather than the scholastic terminology of Thomas. Secondly, there is the pastoral context within which Alphonsus developed his description of conscience. This was a period of theological wars about the system of morality best suited to respond to a troubled age. It is significant that Alphonsus regards conscience as the entry point to the study of moral theology (*Theologia Moralís*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Monitum).

Alphonsus followed the legal method of the manuals, but his description of conscience gives a tonality that has identified the followers of St Alphonsus since that time. Law constitutes the remote and material norm of human actions, while conscience is the proximate and formal norm of morality. In this description, one notes the foundational role of law, but the reason why Alphonsus regards conscience as the entry point to moral theology is his pastoral interest in a particular question. The law exists, but has it been promulgated at the level of conscience? This cannot be presumed, and the description which Alphonsus gives to conscience is a complex system of principles and modes of application to establish this fact. Hence, in his description, one finds much discussion on doubt, error, scrupulosity, ignorance and the like.

Alphonsus gives sustained attention to these circumstances in order to establish whether the law, officially promulgated though it may seem, really applies in this case of conscience. Generally speaking, conscience should follow the dictates of the law, but the goodness of human action becomes known to a person through its approbation by conscience. The description of conscience in Alphonsus is a delicate balance of complex ideas. A person should always seek and follow truth in the exercise of human freedom. Conscience becomes the vital link in the chain between the truth of law and the necessary freedom of action for Alphonsus.

## Pastoral Application

Conscience still remains the entry point for Redemptorists to moral theology, though the current contexts of our mission require new emphases. Preaching conversion is the determining norm (Const. 11-12) and preference for the abandoned poor is the critical principle of where and when to preach (Const. 5). With this norm and principle, Redemptorists will move away from the legalistic casuistry

which replaced the dynamic description of conscience in Alphonsus. In our tradition, for instance in the *Codex Regularum et Constitutionum C.SS.R.* (1894), one notes how Alphonsus' prudential dynamism of conscience had been reduced to external forms of obedience. Conscience became reduced to routine lists of preparation for confession or the Particular Examen. Though conscience is mentioned but once in the Constitutions and Statutes (Const. 41-2), the pastoral application of conscience is implied in the whole Constitutions with their sensitivity to the centrality of Christ, the dignity of all human persons and the call to plentiful redemption. These determine how conscience is pastorally applied.

### Current Manifestations

Conversion-centred preaching, sensitive celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, gentle spiritual direction, passionate commitment to social justice and courageous theological writing should be among the principal manifestations of the Redemptorist commitment to conscience. These ministries could eliminate sterile tensions within the Church between conscience and authority. They could also serve as a counterpoint to the individualistic reduction of conscience to private rights, evident in many cultures. Christians are obliged to follow their conscience: this means that we should be clearer on what conscience properly means. Besides re-reading the classic texts of Alphonsus, we should study *Gaudium et spes* 15-17, texts of the Second Vatican Council that owe much to the contribution of two great Redemptorists, Domenico Capone and Bernhard Häring.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What does the Catholic tradition mean when it says that one is bound to follow

one's conscience?

2. What do you consider the main characteristics of the Redemptorist theological approach to conscience?

3. Why is there such tension within the Church between conscience and authority?

4. Is it correct to reduce conscience to the rights-claims of an individual?

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## CONSECRATION

The term ‘consecration’ comes from the Latin word *consecratio*, indicating a ‘ceremony of the divinisation of the Roman emperor or a member of his family’. It means a rite by which one dedicates to the service of God, people or thing by which they enter the category of the sacred: the consecration of a church, of altars, bishops, the Eucharistic species etc. Taking the etymological Hebrew sense of the term ‘sacred’, which signifies conferring validity, reality or doing something by which a thing becomes real, some theologians maintain that the sacred is that which separates. Others on the contrary hold that the Hebrew term rather expresses the notion of belonging to the divine, that which is close to God.

According to Christian doctrine nothing is profane except sin, because everything is related to God; everything can be sanctified thanks to the creation, the incarnation and the redemption. The Christian notion of the sacred in this sense is different to that of other religions because it is based on the person of Christ (Lk 1 35:4,3-4.18; Jn 6:69; 1 Jn 2:20; 1 Tim 2:5; Eph 2:18) who is consecrated to the Father (Jn 17:2) and brings us close to God and into communion with Him (Jn 2:19.21). The Church is a holy people consecrated and associated in the sanctity of Christ (1 Pt 2:9; Eph 5:26).

### Description

In the New Testament God gives grace, his kingdom and his glory to the faithful through Christ in the Spirit (Rm 5:15-17; 1 Cor 1:4; Eph 3:14-19). God so loved the world, says St John, that he sent his only Son (Jn 3:16). Christ in his manner of acting showed himself as one giving gifts: his Word (Jn 17:14), the Bread of life (Jn 6:35,51), Peace (Jn 14:27), His Mother (Jn 19:26-27), the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:34) and eternal life (Jn 10:28). He even gave his own life for the salvation of humankind in accepting his suffering and death. In the perspective of the purpose of the Congregation founded by St Alphonsus and in the light of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation, the Redemptorist consecration to the mystery of the love of Christ and God makes no sense except as a gift of self to the poor and most abandoned in imitation of Christ the Redeemer. This gift gives rise to, directs and explains the religious consecration of the Redemptorist.

### Pastoral Application

Consecrated to God in order to continue the mission of Christ the Redeemer, the Redemptorist simply confirms in a radical manner that he is a gift-giving person

and that his whole existence is to be a gift. To be a Redemptorist is to see oneself not only as a gift received from God in Christ, but also as called to the highest level of generosity, and as a result to find fulfilment only in the gift of one's life in dedication to the salvific mission of Christ the Redeemer. This presupposes that he has a receptive attitude, since in giving his life the Redemptorist has first to receive it. The Redemptorist identity is essentially and radically structured as a gift received from another in order to give to another. The more he gives, the more he receives, the more he gives up the more he possesses. The Redemptorist is defined by the measure in which he gives. It is in giving what he is that he gets to know himself. In self-giving he possesses truly. It is in losing himself that he finds himself. But is this disinterested gift of self really possible for a human being?

### Present manifestation

It is in the light of the Incarnation that we can single out three necessary conditions for the gift of self to another to be legitimate: that the donor remains an end in himself in giving himself to the other; that the recipient also be considered an end in himself; and that the union of the donor with the recipient be really for the good of the recipient.

In the mystery of the Incarnation we know that in giving himself to humanity, God remains faithful as the sole end that can satisfy human beings. He also considers human beings as an end in themselves. The gift of self only has meaning and reality if the self in question is that which the other needs to live, a living reality that produces in a being the desire of the infinite. In fact, in the Redemptorist consecrated life, love, as a gift of self to others is only possible in and through the grace of God in Christ. It consists in using completely and totally all one's capacities and resources, for the poor and most abandoned. It means first and foremost helping those who are the object of the Redemptorist mission to discover Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. This must be done in ways consonant with human dignity.

As well as the explicit proclamation of the Gospel to the poor and abandoned which is the object of their mission, Redemptorists, according to the logic of gift, enable these people to have a proper life as a result of their commitment to social and economic development. Through their teaching Redemptorists enable these people to be responsible for their own economic and social development. Finally, in their fraternal and effective closeness to them, they enable them to regard themselves as people with dignity irrespective of their social situation and moral state. Nonetheless their principal task is always evangelisation and this can best be un-

derstood as a mission of gift consisting in aiding these recipients to discover their identity as coming from God and destined to a life of union with him.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What sense do my surroundings give to my Redemptorist consecrated life?
2. What meaning do I give to my consecrated life?
3. What are my weaknesses and strengths as a consecrated religious?
4. What means do I use to overcome the difficulties that I meet in my consecrated life?

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## CONVERSION

Redemptorists are ‘apostles of conversion’. The chief object of our ministry is twofold: a) to lead people to make a radical choice of life in favour of Christ (fundamental conversion); b) ordinary pastoral care of those who have already made this radical choice (continuing conversion). In both, conversion comprises three separate elements: believing in the Gospel; really living the gospel; putting on the new self (Const. 11). One cannot effectively lead others to a place of conversion without having first been converted. The focus of conversion is thus upon both those to whom we minister, and those with whom we minister.

There are four distinct but inseparable dimensions to consider. First there is the ‘fundamental’ conversion of the individual Redemptorist. He makes a fundamental option in favour of authentic discipleship which orients his life to the proclamation of what has been experienced personally as good news. While this first occurs at baptism, it can also be experienced at specific ecstatic moments throughout life (death of a loved one, religious profession or ordination, a change of assignment). Fundamental conversion is also experienced powerfully as reconciliation with God, as a ‘turning back’ for one who has changed direction and turned away.

Second, there is the continual conversion of the individual Redemptorist as a call to holiness lived out by way of his ministry and religious community life. This second sense of conversion as ‘transformation’ is a call not only to the individual, but to the entire communal body of the Congregation as members of the kingdom of God. It is ‘putting on Christ’ as we seek to live the Gospel in concrete specific ways.

Third, there is finality to our ministry as a religious congregation. We preach the gospel of copious redemption so that others may come to conversion, offering an invitation to make a radical choice in favour of Christ and of return to the Father. The individual confrere preaches the Gospel as good news. He is a sign of hope to the poor and abandoned, the opportunity which divine grace will use to lead others to fundamental conversion, especially at those key moments in life when people are open to hear the call of conversion (adolescence, falling in love, loss of a loved one, illness).

Fourth, there is the ongoing ministry of care for those who have made this radical choice and are living their continual conversion. This form of conversion most effectively occurs in community, and so the Redemptorist works to build up Christian communities wherein people can come to fundamental conversion and find support in living the continuing conversion which ensues. The centrality of the Eucharist as foundation for our community life empowers us and guides us in this work. Thus, each of the two outward-directed conversion activities (apostolic

preaching and ordinary pastoral care), flow outward from the inward conversion experience of the Redemptorist who engages in ministry, but these also flow back into it. The Redemptorist evangelises and is evangelised at one and the same time.

Religious conversion is primarily the work of God. Divine grace brings about authentic religious conversion. It is essential that the conversion we live be authentically religious and authentically Christian. Conversion as the psychological phenomenon of self-transcendence can be intellectual, moral, or religious; authentic or inauthentic. One can be converted to an idea or an ideology, an ethical system or political agenda, just as easily as one can be converted to Christ. One can transcend the self by attaching to God, or by attaching to a false substitute for God such as religious nationalism, loyalty to a personal cause, a personal set of values, or a desire for 'self-fulfilment'.

Fundamental Christian conversion is the choice to transcend the self by way of accepting Christ as the centre of our lives. We enter the kingdom of God and reject any counterfeit kingdom which would keep us locked in the prison of our own selfish concerns. The process of religious conversion requires that the self-interested self be crushed and resurrected anew by Divine activity, changed into a God-centred and other-directed reborn self. It is a process of dying to self and rising with Christ. The Holy Spirit liberates us from cultural and social programming and any other false determinism, ordering our thirst for self-transcendence and self-realisation around love of God and neighbour. Authentic religious conversion is Christo-centric and other-oriented.

The process of lived conversion normally follows the genesis of the three theological virtues. Faith turns the mind to seek truth. Hope turns the will to desire authentic goodness. Both of these together culminate in love for God, the source of both truth and goodness. *Caritas* transforms us into lovers of the God who makes it possible for us to love ourselves and others because God has first loved us. *Caritas* expresses itself as love for the world, a desire to build the kingdom of God on earth and invite all people to enter as members of this kingdom. Our apostolic preaching of conversion becomes a unique manifestation of God's love for humanity in Christ.

The Redemptorist actively cultivates the intellectual, moral, and the spiritual dimensions of conversion. We believe the Gospel. We live the Gospel. We put on Christ. The focus on lifelong study of theology, so strong in our earliest tradition and so much a part of Alphonsus's life, guides our lived intellectual conversion. The conversion to truth flows out of study, but we also 'learn' what we study by communicating the truth to others by way of effective preaching, and by living the truth in our own community life. Our moral conversion is guided by Alphonsian *distacco*, freeing us to clearly focus upon the primary finality of the Congregation

in proclaiming reconciliation. Preaching to the poor and abandoned, solidarity with those who need to hear the good news, moves us beyond ideological theories to a more authentic understanding of what matters and what does not. Moral conversion moves us beyond seeing salvation as merely this worldly or merely other-worldly, producing a spiritual conversion. We become more sensitive to structures of sin and the suffering of the innocent and the guilty around us, while at the same time we come to understand that with Christ and only with Christ there is plentiful redemption for all. We spend our lives for the sake of Christ, and in the process not only become messengers of reconciliation, but we are transformed into a vehicle through which Christ reconciles others to God.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is our religious profession in truth a radical choice for the kingdom of God, or has it been replaced by the demonic or by a self-seeking and aggrandising motivation?
2. Do we in fact experience that interior freedom of the children of God, which enables us to leave our comfort zones and be of service to those most in need of hearing the good news of reconciliation and redemption?
3. In what sense are we 'putting on the new man' in such a way that we are able to effectively witness to the transforming power of God's activity in human life? How have we been transformed by divine grace and what are we witnessing?
4. Do our moral choices and our moral attitudes reflect an authentic religious conversion? Do we announce the message of reconciliation as good news, or has it been transformed by us into the imposition of a burden?

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## COPIOSA

The motto of the Redemptorist Congregation is: ‘*Copiosa apud Eum Redemptio*’ – ‘With him there is plentiful redemption’. What is the meaning of this *copiosa*?

‘*Copiosa*’ is used in connection with ‘*redemptio*’. To understand the full content of *copiosa* redemption, we have to know what ‘redemption’ is. Fr Paul Hitz says: Redemption is essentially and radically that marvellous miraculous intervention of God who delivers fallen human beings from slavery and damnation to introduce them into his kingdom.

Redemption is liberation from sin and guilt, from anxiety and despair, from social and political slavery and oppression. It is also reconciliation with God, with the world, with ourselves.

### St Alphonsus and *copiosa redemptio*

The abundance of God’s saving love so enthralled Alphonsus that it led to his conversion to Jesus Christ, to the abandoned poor and to the community. Jesus, whose incarnation, paschal mystery and Eucharistic presence together express the radical solidarity of God with human beings, becomes the centre of Alphonsus’ life and the reason for his self-giving to others. And the conversion of Alphonsus leads him to embrace the preferences of Jesus and to live the reality of God’s love in situations of social marginalisation or ecclesial estrangement. What is more, Alphonsus understands that this conversion to Jesus Christ must be realised in community, so he invites others who feel likewise to live together in a way that will ensure an ongoing connection with this abundant love and Jesus Christ’s preference for the poor.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter (2003) chose as a theme for the following sexennium ‘Giving our lives for plentiful redemption’. In their Final Message the capitulars said: ‘The overriding reason for our choice of this theme is faith in Jesus our Redeemer. We have been so captivated by the call of God that only by giving our lives for plentiful redemption can we respond to God’s love for us.’

Again the spirituality of abundance is clear: ‘The plentiful redemption we experience is rooted in the mystery of God becoming one with us. Such a solidarity transforms our relationship with God, and it gives meaning to our mission. We see the current focus on solidarity with one another in community, on solidarity in formation and in the work of re-structuring the Congregation for the sake of our mission as aspects of that plentiful redemption to which we have given our lives.’

### Copiosa as used in Scripture

The expression '*copiosa redemptio*' as such comes from psalm 130 which is the prayer of someone who prays from the heart's depth. It is an acknowledgement of littleness, of sin: if the Lord counts our sin, we are lost. We are convinced that he forgives: 'with you there is forgiveness'. Therefore, in spite of our sin, we look for the Lord, we wait confidently for the Lord because with him is love, with him there is *abundant redemption*.

Generally we are so inclined to emphasise the noun 'redemption' that the adjective *copiosa* is easily overlooked. It means: the Lord forgives, not a little bit, not once or on special occasions or only a restricted number of people; no, he forgives abundantly. He forgives always and far more than we would be inclined to do. *Copiosa redemptio* transcends our comprehension. It is shown in the father who forgives his son who was lost, and above all in Jesus who on the cross cries out: 'Father, forgive them because they do not know what they do.'

Plentiful redemption often appears in the Scriptures in literal or in equivalent terms. A few examples suffice to show this.

Matthew 13:12 'To those who have, more will be given, and they will have an **abundance**.'

Luke 6:38 'A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, **running over**, will be put into your lap.'

John 1:16 'From his **fullness** we have all received, **grace upon grace**.'

John 3:16 'For God **so** loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have **eternal life**.'

John 10:10 'I came that they might have life, and have it **abundantly**.'

Romans 5:17 'If because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the **abundance** of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.'

Romans 15:13 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may **abound** in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

2 Corinthians 9:14-15 'They pray for you because of the **surpassing** grace of God... Thanks be to God for his **indescribable** gift!'

Ephesians 1:3 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ **with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.'

Ephesians 2:7 '...so that in the ages to come he might show the **immeasurable riches** of his grace.'

Ephesians 3:8 ‘...this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the **boundless riches** of Christ.’

So ‘plentiful redemption’ according to Scripture is a transformation from death to life, from sin to justice. It is impossible to speak of it in an exhaustive way, though we make a beginning in the Liturgy. We will have eternity to express our amazement and our joy in the abundance of God.

The human being is called to share in the very nature of God. In Jesus the union is made complete; in his person we have the union of heaven and earth. St Athanasius says that God became man so that man can become God, that is, become partakers of the divine nature of God. We are called to share fully in the divine life. This fullness of life is not only something that is hoped for in some future time, but rather it is already experienced and received in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries – the Sacraments – especially in the Eucharist.

### Copiosa redemptio in our Constitutions and General Statutes

**Constitution 6.** ‘All Redemptorists...must be humble and courageous servants among people of the Gospel of Christ, the Redeemer and Lord... This message has for its special object **plentiful redemption**...’

**Constitution 20.** ‘Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, Redemptorists...follow Christ the Redeemer..., they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it..., that they may bring to people **plentiful redemption**.’

**Statute 06.** ‘The seal of the Congregation consists of a cross with a lance and sponge mounted on three hills; on either side of the cross are the abbreviated names of Jesus and Mary; above the cross is an eye sending forth rays; over all a crown. Around the seal is the motto: ‘**With Him Is Plentiful Redemption**’.’ (cf. Ps. 129:7)

Pope John Paul II ended his testament (6 March 1979): ‘*Apud Dominum misericordia et copiosa apud Eum redemptio*’.

‘*Copiosa*’ in connection with ‘*redemptio*’ means that Jesus not only redeemed the world but that he did so in a way that is overwhelming, beyond all our desire or imagination or in the words of St Paul: ‘And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 4:7).

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Can you recall one occasion when you were aware of the sheer abundance of the grace you were receiving?
2. Can you recall one occasion when you were aware of the sheer abundance of grace you were mediating to another?
3. Does our motto help you to face your own death?

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## **CORRECTION (Fraternal)**

**F**raternal correction, in a Christian context, is a new way of being and living in society, based on the love and respect of persons, according to the teachings of Jesus. When Jesus presented this new understanding of human relationships, he was fully aware that he was introducing a new and revolutionary principle. He changed the way we value others and threw new light on the kind of relationships we can have. He introduced a culture of fraternity and social co-responsibility. He proposed a radical change (cf. Mt 5:38-48). The Old Testament also promoted fraternal correction (Sir 19:13, 14, 17; Prov 9:89). However, it emphasised justice as the restoration of God's honour which had been offended by the sinner.

In the mind of Jesus, the motive for correction is love: love of God and love of neighbour. It was the establishment of a genuine, universal fraternity based on the precept of love, which is the primary characteristic of the true disciple of Jesus (Jn 13:35). In Matthew, the theme is preceded by the proclamation of the Beatitudes and is followed by the command to forgive offences and to love all (Mt 5:38-48). The new understanding of fraternal correction arises when Jesus introduces fundamental changes which distinguish his thought from earlier times and which opens on to a much wider horizon, going beyond the mentality of the people of Israel and of other nations ruled by might and power.

Fraternal correction is one of the consequences of the principles and practices which Jesus proposed (Mt 5:38ff; Lk 6:27-35). It passes from 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Deut 19:15) to 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15:11-13). The primacy of love is the basis and substance of Jesus' message. 'Fraternal correction' must be understood and practised in line with this vision. The desire for the spiritual good and the salvation of another person, through fidelity in following Jesus Christ (Jn 15:10), is the goal of our concern. That is what causes us to intervene and what justifies this intervention. God gives us the grace and the opportunity to contribute to the re-orientation or spiritual progress of one who has strayed from the path. In this sense, a word or gesture can carry the promise of eternal salvation.

### Fraternal Correction – Fraternal and Pastoral Charity

Fraternal correction begins with charity and becomes a personal responsibility and a moral obligation: that the brother attains the goal for which God created him, that is to remain faithful in God's love, and in the path that leads to him.

Our Constitutions demand that our apostolate be permeated with apostolic



charity. They also demand and firmly unite fraternal charity with pastoral charity (Cc 44, 21, 46), even though they speak little of ‘fraternal correction’ as such. Only two Statutes treat it: 032 (which indicates its importance) and 094 (which emphasises it as a special role of the Superior). They speak much about fraternal life and fraternal and apostolic charity, which are a sign of our apostolate and a mark of our communities (Cc 44, 21, 46, 48, 52, 53, 54). The formulae of temporary and perpetual profession indicate fraternal and apostolic charity as the purpose of our consecration (Const. 46).

As long as we are united as brothers and apostles through the dynamism of our missionary commitment, we will live more intensely our community and apostolic co-responsibility. It appears more fruitful to emphasise fraternal charity which provides us more adequate forms, and more opportune moments to express our love for our brothers, through wise and well-thought counsel. If there is no true love for the brother, it is better to refrain from fraternal correction until charity grows within us. This charity must be expressed with a profound humility, the conviction that anyone who wishes to correct another must himself be ready to be corrected by others.

Referring to the manner of fraternal correction, Jesus has already given us the necessary orientations to avoid lies, errors, bad intentions, pride and superficial judgements (Mt 18:15-21; Tit 3:10-11; 1 Cor 5:11-13; Mt 7:1-6; Lk 6:41-43; Rom 2:1-4). He has left us principles, even some examples, such as the dialogue with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42); the visit to Zaccheus’ house (Lk 19:1-10), the case of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), and so on. We could say that these are masterpieces of this apostolate that tradition calls ‘fraternal correction’.

### Community, Co-responsibility and Social Responsibility

The early Christians gave witness to a new life, of universal fraternity, based on the person and teachings of Jesus. The strong element of their fraternal correction was their way of life, their attitude of faith, brotherly love, their living and generous witness. St Ambrose said: ‘A friendly correction is more effective than a violent accusation. The first awakens repentance and the latter provokes indignation.’

In our days, we must also consider another very important aspect for Consecrated Life, Church and society: we are socially responsible. Social sin can be generated due to our own silence or indifference in the face of the great evils of society. As members of the Church and society, we have great responsibilities and duties, which are meant to build and protect the common good and to attain

the necessary development in order to provide for a dignified life for individuals and nations. 'This is what will permit the fullness of authentic development, a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human' (*Populorum Progressio* 20). Ecology is also a Christian responsibility. It is not simple solidarity, but a true social co-responsibility which compels us to ensure the common good. No one can escape this responsibility. The criminal actions which damage the dignity of the human person are considered 'crimes against humanity' and remain as dark pages in history. Many of these occurred because of our silence and the terror often created by the perpetrators of these crimes.

Fraternal correction must be seen in the context of community co-responsibility and fraternal communion, which are signs of an authentic faith and can be a seedbed of vocations. But in our times, this has to be extended beyond the community and the Church, to embrace social co-responsibility, reaching every needy brother, according to the example of the Good Samaritan.

Fraternal correction can be operative with great delicacy on a one-to-one basis. It should not be reduced to trivial fault-finding or to expressions of petty grievances. It can also find evangelical expression through the community. Where everyone has participated in a common project, it can be very helpful to review the community effort, to reflect on the deficiencies, even personal ones, which affect the implementation of the project. Such a 'review of life' can lead to necessary amendments and a better sharing of responsibilities. Thus a vigorous and dynamic attitude of co-responsibility may be born and grow, directed by those who are the leaders, and who thereby make of consecrated life a joyful fraternity, capable of attracting the new generations.

Fraternal correction is a sign of our community witness because it is not only concerned with a particular confrere but with the entire community, and the whole Congregation. We consider not only our personal defects, but also institutional deficiencies and our responsibilities towards society in order to put ourselves at the service of all. Thus, our work and the efforts of our brothers, in the hands of the Master, become seeds of hope.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How does fraternal correction build our community and strengthen our social commitment?
2. What is the prophetic dimension of fraternal correction?
3. Is there a fraternal ambience in our community which enables us to practice fraternal correction?

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## **CRIB, CROSS AND SACRAMENT**

The life and theology of St Alphonsus is eminently Christocentric. His spirituality is centred on the saving events of salvation as manifested in the life of Jesus: the Incarnation, his Passion and Death, and the Holy Eucharist. The essence of Alphonsian spirituality is succinctly summed up in the three words: Crib, Cross and Sacrament.

### Origins and Description

Possibly the first instance Alphonsus used this phrase is found in one of his earliest spiritual works, *The Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*. In the sixth visit, he prayed: ‘May the very names of crib, and cross and sacrament inflame my soul with the desire to do great things for you.’ Not only does he give the subjects of his devotion but also the effect that he hopes to experience from it: to be inflamed with a desire to do something very special for God.

The origins of these devotions are found in the very heart of Alphonsus himself. Devotion to crib, cross, and sacrament were the centre of his personal spiritual life. Through them he was drawn to love Jesus more and more by reflecting more and more on how much Jesus loved him. His whole inner life was nourished by them. Because they were so much a part of what it meant for him to love Jesus, he wrote many spiritual treatises, meditations, and prayers that centred on them. His love made him passionate that everyone in the world should also love Jesus. Many of the writings of Saint Alphonsus that treat of crib, cross, and sacrament are collected in the Centenary Edition of his ascetical works, edited by Fr Eugene Grimm C.Ss.R., Volume 4 has six treatises on the crib; volume 5 has seven on the Passion, and volume 6 has four on the Eucharist.

The Congregation embodied these three devotions in its community culture. On the 25th of each month, the community meditation was to be on the Incarnation. The Rule for Novices contained a series of devotions for the 25th of each month, symbolic of the year of novitiate as an imitation of the infancy and childhood of Jesus. Each community was to have a crib with a ‘beautiful image of the Infant Jesus’ which was placed before the community altar on the twenty-fifth of the month. During the year the evening community meditation was to be on the Passion and Death of Jesus. On Fridays, at the end of morning meditation, the Steps of the Passion were recited and during Advent, the Steps of the Infancy of Jesus. Each confrere was to make a visit to the Risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament each day and to visit the Blessed Sacrament before leav-

ing and returning to the house. Every afternoon there were to be three hours of quiet, called the Little Silence, in memory of the three hours that Jesus hung on the cross.

### Pastoral Application

Constitution 6 of the Constitutions and Statutes states that the message which Redemptorists proclaim is summed up in ‘the love of God the Father, “who first loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”.’ Redemptorists, therefore, are preachers of the love of God for everyone as manifested in the life of Jesus, especially in the pivotal events of his life on earth; that is, in the Incarnation, the Passion and Death, and the Holy Eucharist. Crib, Cross and Sacrament are the subjects of Redemptorist ministry no matter what the format of that ministry. Crib, Cross and Sacrament are the signs of God’s love for us. They are the essential themes of our ministry as sons of Saint Alphonsus. How important this was to him is seen from his remark about the practice of the *vita devota* that was to be introduced among the people at the end of a mission: ‘It is indeed a great misery to see that preachers usually treat of everything else except of the love for Jesus Christ after God has done so much and suffered so much to gain our love.’ This applies also to the love manifested in the Incarnation, and in the Eucharist.

### Current Manifestation

While today community devotions to Crib, Cross and Sacrament are not expressed in the practices of former times, Redemptorist ministry still manifests them in a constant reference to God’s love for all people as it is recognised in the life of Jesus. Jesus coming into the world as a helpless baby, the horrible sufferings of his Passion and death, and the abiding presence of the risen Lord in the Eucharist are ever-recurring themes of our preaching, our spiritual direction, and our entire ministry. Redemptorists will always share with everyone, especially with the troubled, the needy, and the most neglected the good news of Crib, Cross and Sacrament.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

Volumes 4, 5, and 6 of the Centenary Edition of the ascetical works of St Alphonsus, edited by Father Eugene Grimm C.Ss.R., remain the most comprehensive collection of his writings in English in the area of Crib, Cross and Sacrament.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Does your ministry stress the spiritual value to people of the love of Jesus manifested in crib, cross, and sacrament?
2. Is it possible to teach members of the laity how to make mental prayer on crib, cross, and sacrament?
3. Would St Alphonsus have to call your ministry a ‘misery’ because you do not preach about crib, cross and sacrament?

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## DEATH

In no other religion does death have such a central position in the profession of faith as it does in Christianity. A Christian believes that salvation comes through the death of the God-man Jesus Christ, and the Church continues to proclaim Christ's death until he comes again. It is surprising then to discover that it was only in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that death became a critical concern for theology. Prior to that, over a period of several centuries, there was very little development in the theology of death and in the manuals of theology the purpose of the treatise on death was more often ascetical rather than theological in character.

### St Alphonsus' Preparation For Death

A good example of this is found in the work of St Alphonsus who in 1758, at the age of 62, published *Apparecchio alla Morte*. It consisted of a series of meditations on the eternal truths – death, judgment, eternity, hell and heaven. As the author himself explained, it was to serve two purposes: a source book for preachers and a book for meditation and spiritual reading for those desiring to establish themselves in virtue and advance in the spiritual life. It was different in spirit and tone from similar writings by contemporary Jansenists in that every meditation ended with a prayer for divine love and for the grace of perseverance. Far from being a book that instilled fear, it was full of hope based on the merciful love of God who desires our eternal salvation.

The underlying theology of death in St Alphonsus' writings and sermons followed the traditional teaching expressed in the following theses: death is the separation of the soul from the body; it is the consequence of sin; it is universal; it brings the earthly pilgrimage of human beings to an end and there is no longer the possibility of obtaining merit. That is why there is the urgent necessity to turn back from sin and respond to the loving mercy of God.

### Influence of Philosophy

Thanks to the influence of personalistic and existential philosophies, death was brought to the forefront of theological consciousness especially in the middle of the last century. Death is so inextricably a part of human existence that one cannot understand the mystery of the human without trying to understand the mystery of death. Death is not just a catastrophe that befalls us at the end of life but a reality that pervades all of life. We are beings oriented towards death. Death is not just an event that befalls us from outside. One lives an authentic existence by in-

corporating our awareness of ourselves as beings-on-the-way-to-death into our conscious daily life. This is the task of a lifetime and reaches its culmination in the final act of death.

### Scriptural Teaching

The Old Testament does not provide us with a consistent theology of death. Whereas the neighbouring cultures employed various rituals to ward off death, the ancient Hebrews accepted death as natural, especially if it came after a life blessed with old age and children (Gen 25:8). On the other hand, in the eyes of the Preacher, death seems to be absurd (Ecc 1:2 - 2:26). In seeking to find the cause of death, the OT writers see it as a punishment for sin (Gen 3). To cut oneself off from the living God and the God of the covenant is to bring on death. Yet God does not will the death of the sinner, rather that he turn from his evil ways and live (Ezek 18:23).

In the New Testament, the understanding persists of death as universal and the perception that it is a consequence of sin. But seen through the lens of the death and resurrection of Jesus its meaning and its direction are radically altered. Jesus turned what was a symbol of sin into an act that expressed a total Yes to the Father and a complete rejection of sin. In his flesh he experienced the horror and the dread of death.

Yet even as the forces of evil conspired together in the crucifixion of the Just One, Jesus embraced it as an act of surrender to the Father. 'By this process he transformed death into a sacrament, that is, an expression and efficacious sign of the absolute fullness of existence in God (R Latourelle). Death is no longer the wages of sin but the doorway to eternal life. By his death Christ has destroyed death, the last enemy, and is now Lord of the living and the dead (Rom 14:9).

### Theological Reflection

'The Just One descended into Sheol, to that impure land where no praise of God is ever sounded. In the descent of Jesus, God himself descends into Sheol. At that moment, death ceases to be the God-forsaken land of darkness, a realm of un-pitying distance from God. In Christ, God himself entered the realm of death, transforming the space of non-communication into the place of his own presence. This is no apotheosis of death. Rather has God cancelled out and overcome death in entering it through Christ' (Ratzinger).

Now death need not be feared but can be looked at positively – 'I long to depart this life and be with Christ' (Phil 1:23). This does not mean that the Christian is shielded from the pain and horror of death. It means that death does not have



the last word. Life does. In the face of the threat of death, one can rely on the grace of him who is the Resurrection and the Life. But for the Christian to die in Christ implies a call to die daily and to die to sin (Rom 6:7-10).

Modern theologians, with Karl Rahner at the forefront, have highlighted a new dimension in the theological understanding of death. Death is a human act, not merely something which one undergoes passively. Death is an active consummation brought about by the individual, a maturing self-realisation which embodies what each person has made of himself by means of his freely chosen actions.

The underlying philosophical basis is that in keeping with her nature, the person has to die her death in freedom. Yet she has to die. It is an ineluctable choice. It cannot be avoided. It is imposed on the individual. Freedom lies not in whether one dies, but how one dies.

Human life is an ongoing dialectic of passivity and activity and in death one experiences the dialectic most intensely. In death, not only is there a rupture imposed from outside but there is also an act performed by the person from within. Death is thus an act that brings to fulfillment all that a person has accomplished and become during the personal history that comes to a conclusion in death.

Apart from this philosophical explanation one can draw a parallel from the death of Jesus. The death of the Christian is patterned on the death of Jesus who underwent the Passion but also made an active surrender to the Father. The concept of sacrifice and covenant, biblically linked with the death of Jesus, implies such an active surrender. In death, the Christian who is summoned by God freely surrenders himself.

### Moral Theological Reflections

Judging from his treatment of the fifth commandment in the first volume of his *Theologia Moralis*, St Alphonsus would squirm at the developments taking place in the ethics of death and dying today with the clamour for legalisation of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. In keeping with the theological tradition and the teaching of the Church he would opt for an alternative ethic.

In practice this ethic would refuse to deliberately bring about death even in the name of mercy, but offer relief from pain and suffering, respect the patient's right to know the truth and to refuse treatment that is burdensome. It is an ethic that is primarily concerned with the dying person and that expresses its concern through personalised care, an ethic that enables a dying person to shape the last phase of her life in a human and meaningful way. It is an ethic of compassion that does not choose death but chooses rather how to live while dying. It is an

ethic that respects the right of human persons to be cared for with dignity in their dying, affirms the right of dying persons to be protected from intrusive and offensive treatments, and honours their lives by refusing to kill them. It is ultimately an ethic not of despair but of hope.

### Pastoral Accompaniment

Alphonsus' concern regarding death was primarily pastoral. Even while preparing for the priesthood, he became a member of the Confraternita dei Bianchi which ministered to prisoners and spiritually assisted those to be executed. Later in life he wrote a minor book, *Advice to Priests Who Minister to Those Condemned to Death*. This work begins with the statement: 'To assist spiritually those who are dying is a work of great charity.' The presence of a pastoral minister is crucial and a sign that the crisis of dying does not break the bonds of community.

Significant moments in life are sanctified by the sacramental ministry of the Church. Sickness and death are no exception. The Church is sensitive to the needs of the dying. One can see it in the provision made for viaticum, the final rite of passage through death to life. Three elements of the rite indicate how it is oriented to the dying. The renewal of the baptismal promises shows the link between the entrance into the community and leave-taking; the plenary indulgence is the symbol of God receiving the person into his forgiving embrace, and the Eucharist is the pledge of eternal life in the risen Lord. It is as if the Church accompanies the dying persons to the boundary and hands them over to God and the community of saints.

Accompanying the dying person becomes in itself a sign, a sacramental expression of *hesed*, a manifestation of the steadfast love and fidelity that characterises God's care as he accompanies his people in their pilgrimage through life.

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Bermejo, Luis: *Light Beyond Death: The risen Christ and the transfiguration of man*. Anand, Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash. 1985.

Latourelle, René: *Man and his Problems in the Light of Jesus Christ*. New York: Alba House. 1982.

Rahner, Karl: *On The Theology of Death*. New York: Herder and Herder. 1961

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Fear is the most common attitude towards death. Identify your fears: Do they concern the pain of dying, or the losses of life or what is to come? How do you deal with them?
2. Write your own epitaph, briefly describing your life and how you wish to be remembered. What does that tell you about yourself?
3. If you were told that you have just three months more to live, what are the five things you would want to do? Why are you not doing them now?
4. If you were to write a little booklet to help people to prepare for death, what points would you include?

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## **DEVELOPMENT AND MISSION**

**E**ven a casual reading of the New Testament reveals a surprising pre-occupation with food. The gospel of Luke in particular places great emphasis on meals. It can be argued that this gospel is centred around 13 subversive meals, and that most of the time Jesus is either going to or coming from the table. Luke establishes a very strong correlation between Eucharist and service by pronouncing the primacy of service in his account of the institution of the Last Supper (22:24-27). Then there is John's powerful connection where Jesus washing the disciples' feet (13:1-15), engaging in an action reserved for the lowliest in any household. This account is regarded as 'John's vivid way of showing the connection between Eucharist and service, it is a symbolic expression of what Eucharist is all about' (Bernier: 27).

### Millennium Development Goals

Development workers immersed in a humanitarian and secular narrative also have their 'scripture'. Drawn up in September 2000 and inspired by 189 nations, this 'scripture' affirms a set of international development goals in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Popularly known as the Millennium Development Goals, it is the template and 'bible' of the development sector. Like the gospels, it gives prominence to food. The first of the eight goals is committed to eliminating extreme poverty and hunger. The remaining goals aim to achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and finally develop a global partnership for development.

### Redemptorists Responding in Service

The Redemptorist charism demands that we both proclaim the Gospel in speech and action while also committing ourselves to projects that express solidarity and that deliver both meaningful dignity and hope. This involves strategies and solutions that lift the poorest and most vulnerable from poverty. The extraordinary leadership and courage displayed by St Alphonsus as bishop in selling assets so as to feed the poor both inspires and challenges. Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli's willingness to get his hands dirty in the service of the poor is a legacy of which we can be proud. We can add St Gerard's commitment to the craftsmen and peasants of southern Italy or St Clement's caring for orphans in Poland and Austria, and St John Neumann's initiatives to help the lot of immigrants to America. Great witness was also given by Blessed Peter Donders among the lepers and slaves of colonial Dutch Guyana.

### Mission as Total Interdependence

Vatican II has helped grow an awareness of the need to address the structural causes of poverty and injustice in addition to alleviating its symptoms. Carl Braaten offers the following vision for mission in today's world

‘Something more than saving souls and planting churches; it will mean something more than emergency relief and charitable works. Mission will assume the role of advocacy, tracking down causes of global injustice and violence... If faith is radical dependence on God, mission is total interdependence among people, overcoming all idolatry in the one case, and all systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation of the many by the few on the other.’

The eighth Millennium Development Goal aims to develop a global partnership for development. Matthew's call to ‘give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you’ (5:42) should act as a catalyst to religious communities to link with the global civil society campaign against poverty.

While religious speak of the option for the poor, the development sector speaks of pro-poor outcomes. The development sector emphasises strategic plans based on the culture of efficiency, targets, excellence and quality, while mission models operate in a culture premised on Church and extended family that emphasises love, concern and harmony as a way of life. Inevitably there will be clashes and misunderstandings when you try to combine both. Despite these differences, there are merging ambitions. For example, consider the vision for mission articulated by Braaten with its emphasis on advocacy and interdependence and compare this with the established characteristics of the trends in development accurately summarised as a move from 1) Needs to rights; 2) Projects to programmes; 3) Service delivery to advocacy.

### Sarnelli's Development Approach

It is instructive to evaluate Blessed Sarnelli's approach to helping poor people. Sarnelli stressed the importance of inspiration, liberation and personal responsibility. While caring for others was seen as an activity leading to personal holiness, there was little emphasis on changing the causes of people's misery or tackling social class or structure. What set Sarnelli apart was his incredible sensitivity to those who were marginalised. Sarnelli was an advocate for education, believing that it was the basis of all formative development of the human person and of formation

as a Christian. Sarnelli's approach was characterised by feverish and disorganised activity with little or no common denominator in the diverse activities to which he gave himself tirelessly. Sarnelli and his peers did not have a strategic plan or programme approach other than to convert women ambushed by evil and to guide people into personal holiness.

### A New Model for Redemptorist Development Work

The central and compelling force in every one of Sarnelli's initiatives was his obsession with the plight of the abandoned. He lived what he preached and he witnessed to what he believed in. In the midst of a feverish approach he delivered remarkable care to the weakest and poorest. Redemptorists today are still called to tackle the awfulness of poverty. As advances in theology have changed our approach to salvation and justice, so too advances in development practice call us to new ways of more effectively helping the poorest of the poor. A good missionary programme today will be a mixture of development, relief, advocacy, networking, capacity building and holistic development; all components and commitments emanating from the Gospel values of solidarity, trust and compassion. Pro-poor, it will be sufficiently flexible to accommodate changes that may occur to the participatory and reflective nature of the process. The characteristics of a missionary programme include the following:

- Be faith-based and inclusive of people of other religions and cultures
- Based on the charism of the individual missionary Congregation
- Have shared ownership
- Be people-centred
- Context driven
- Have a long-term geographical commitment
- Multi-dimensional and holistic
- Have a prophetic voice
- Involve capacity building for succession
- Demonstrate accountability
- Demonstrate resourcefulness and flexibility

### The Truth of the Eucharist

Redemptorists in Zimbabwe feed the poor; in the Philippines they offer skills training to street children; in Mozambique they provide life-saving water resources; in Brazil they fight for land reform, in Colombia they succeed in getting young people to trade bullets for books, and in Niger and Burkino-Fasso they deliver agricultural programmes to people from diverse faith backgrounds. We have a unique role to

play in sharing our talents and resources in liberating people from poverty.

We have also lots to learn. New models of development can help us to bring even better news to the poor. The person who celebrates Eucharist according to Jesus' understanding must be willing to become a servant to others, to be body broken and blood poured out for the sake of all. Finding practical solutions to the problem of poverty is part of our Redemptorist vocation.

It is our truth that we are a Eucharistic movement, called as servants to others, asked to pour out our lives in listening to the cry of the poor. We can have every confidence that our witness, our traditional approach influenced and improved by new development approaches is as relevant to the concept of human flourishing as any other model.

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. 'I need a lot of time for prayer and time for myself; I simply don't have time to get involved in social justice things.' Could the speaker be a Christian?
2. 'Prayer is wasting time that can be better spent at a meeting working for justice in a real way.' Could the speaker be a Christian?
3. 'Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing' (Dorothy Day). What could she have meant?

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## DEVOTIONS

The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy (2001) describes ‘devotions’ as ‘various external practices (e.g. prayers, hymns, observances attached to particular times or places, insignia, medals, habits or customs)’. Such practices focus on the Divine Persons, Our Lady or the saints. The term ‘popular piety’ is reserved for ‘diverse cultic expressions’ which are ‘inspired predominantly not by the Sacred Liturgy but by forms deriving from a particular nation or people or from their culture’.

Any acquaintance with St Alphonsus would confirm that he was a man of deep devotion and well attuned to popular piety. His day, his week, his month and his year were marked by devotional practices to an extent that might now appear excessive. The early Redemptorists however readily shared the pattern of Alphonsus’ devotional life. Over and above the rhythm of the liturgical life of the community there was the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the daily rosary, the Angelus at stated times, the common prayers – in the oratory and at table. Each Friday the Passion was commemorated, and on Saturdays, the Blessed Virgin was celebrated. The monthly virtues were associated with devotion to the twelve apostles. The liturgical seasons had their own special devotions: Advent had the Steps of the Divine Infant, Lent had the Steps of the Passion, towards the end of the Easter season there was the solemn Novena of the Holy Spirit. The annual round of favourite saints provided other novena devotions.

Pope John Paul I, as Cardinal Luciani Albino, in comments on St Alphonsus’ devotional life said: ‘After all he was a Neapolitan! He understood that a religion meant for the masses must appeal not only to the head but also to the senses and to the heart.’ Alphonsus had no hesitations in using his imagination and adopting colourful Neapolitan practices of piety, but he remained rooted in profound seriousness of the Gospel message. Indeed, John Paul I suggests that Alphonsus ‘seemed to look askance at the merely tourist interest in Our Lady’s shrines’.

The closeness of Redemptorists to ordinary people has meant that confreres have been able to connect with the emotional intelligence in the context of religious experience; simply put, this means that Redemptorists have been free to use imagination and fervour in the service of the Gospel. It has meant that the Redemptorist charism has been able to accommodate devotions and practices which particular situations or historical events have surfaced.

The most notable example of this latter ability is the place that devotion to Mary as Mother of Perpetual Help has assumed in the life of the Congregation.



The shrine of St Anne in Quebec is a good example of a local devotion which the confreres use to the great good of countless pilgrims. The development of shrines (e.g. Lord of the Miracles in Buga, Colombia, and Bom Jesus de Lapa and Our Lady of Aparecida, both in Brazil) are examples of what John Paul II called ‘permanent antennae of the good news’.

The good ordering of devotions in a well balanced Christian life has been greatly helped by the criteria for true devotion set out in *Marialis Cultus* of Pope Paul VI (1974) and echoed in the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. True devotion is rooted in the *Scriptures*. The prayers we use are consonant with the Scriptures, deriving from them and leading towards them. The central reality of all devotion – the pilgrimage of faith – is profoundly *biblical*. True devotion takes its cue from the supreme prayer of the Church, the liturgy. Devotions are not a substitute for liturgy, rather they dispose people for liturgy and they can echo the richness of the liturgy. Devotion is *ecumenical* in that true devotion serves the goal of unity; nothing in our devotions should foster division or disrespect for other traditions. Finally Christian devotion has an *anthropological* spirit ‘which both conserves symbols and expressions of importance or significance for a given nation while eschewing senseless archaisms’. Hence our devotions will be gender-sensitive, inclusive and unfailingly respectful.

For many Redemptorists a troubling question is not the pastoral implications of the devotional life. but the personal implications. The Congregation as such has risen to challenge of the emotional aspect of people’s needs. The very ‘simplicity of life and language’ (Const. 20) to which we are called has helped us to blend the devotional and the theological. What is less clear is the role of devotion in our personal lives. Nor can a simple solution be offered. A life steeped in the Scriptures (Const. 28), and nourished in the Liturgy (Const. 29) may at times feel no great need for devotional practices. There are however certain archetypal elements in our faith: the sense of pilgrimage, the need for healing, the delight in imaginative expression, which surface from time to time and can find meaningful expression in a warm devotional life.

Given our collective religious experience as Redemptorists, there are at least four aspects of the devout life which it would be reasonable to identify as significant in the personal life of a Redemptorist.

Rooted in the example of St Alphonsus and nourished by his classical writings on the practice, *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* have a prominent place in our devotional life: ‘members should have much at heart daily conversations with Christ the Lord in thanksgiving after Communion, in visits and personal worship of the Most Holy Eucharist’ (S 028). Although there is little mention of the resurrection in our Congregational devotional literature, it is in the Eu-

charist that we encounter the Risen Lord and it is through the Risen Redeemer that our own transformation is effected.

Again following the example of Alphonsus and encouraged by his little classic on the Way of the Cross, the Stations of the Cross hold a special place in our devotional profile. Especially on Fridays and during Lent many confreres benefit from this devotion. It has often been maintained that a mystic is one who ponders the Passion every day and the freedom to use our imagination can make the Stations come alive in ways that can feed our drooping spirits.

A third devotion which is almost synonymous with being a Redemptorist is devotion to Mary, Mother of God. This devotion needs no recommendation from anyone and has found multiple expressions among us and among God's people. For some it will be the daily rosary (or even just a decade), using again the freedom to choose what mysteries are appropriate for us on a particular day; for others it will be the visit to the Blessed Virgin Mary (after the visit to the Blessed Sacrament) or reverencing the icon of her who still serves the Church 'as the perpetual help of God's people in Christ' (Const. 32). Devotion to Mary can take the form of litanies, the Angelus, the Dolour Beads in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows, medals etc.

Finally we have inherited a tradition of devotion to the *saints*, and especially to the saints and blessed of the Congregations. Statute 05 includes a list of some of the confreres who now share in the glory of the God as saints or blessed. The recently beatified martyrs await their inclusion! We have a happy tradition of celebrating all these feasts and of developing a relationship with those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith. Devotion to our confreres in heaven can greatly encourage us on our pilgrim way.

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'Directory On Popular Piety And The Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines'. Congregation for Divine worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. 2001  
Luciani Albino, Cardinal: *Saint Alphonsus and Today's Priest*. 1972

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Do I think of devotions as mainly props for the pious?
2. Do I make room in my life for any devotions?
3. Which devotions, if any, help me in my faith journey?
4. What is my attitude to new devotions, e.g. Divine Mercy?

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## DIRECTION, SPIRITUAL

When understood under the general heading of the ‘care for and cure of souls’, spiritual direction encompasses virtually every aspect of the Church’s pastoral ministry (preaching, teaching, celebrating the sacraments, visiting the sick). Any activity whose ultimate goal is to help people draw closer to Christ can be thought of as a type of spiritual guidance or accompaniment. When taken in the more specific sense, however, of ‘a helping relationship focusing on a person’s growth in the spiritual life’, it displays unique characteristics in its own right and emerges as a highly specialised ministry.

### Origins

Christian spiritual direction has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament canon. It grew up among the desert fathers in Palestine and North Africa and from the 4th through 6th centuries came to be recognised as a special charism.

It did not develop in a strictly linear fashion, as if out of necessity, through a number of succinct (albeit clearly related and successive) stages, but grew out of a variety of diversely related spiritual traditions. A broad panoramic view of the development of Christian spiritual direction reveals a single river branching off into three directions: the Roman Catholic, the Protestant, and the Orthodox (cf. Edwards). Each of these streams has much to offer the present-day ministry.

Within the Catholic tradition, spiritual direction was for centuries strongly ‘directive’ and closely tied to the role of confessor. Even though the two ministries were not strictly identified, it was strongly suggested that one’s confessor and spiritual director be the same person – and therefore a priest. The Orthodox tradition, in turn, recognised the importance of sacramental reconciliation, but also highlighted the role of the *starets* or ‘spiritual father’. This experienced spiritual guide was often a monk with a reputation for sanctity who, being knowledgeable in the ways of the heart, could introduce his disciples into the practice of unceasing prayer (cf. 1 Th 5:17). In more recent years, the Protestant tradition developed and gave legitimacy to the role of the pastoral counsellor in the Church. Often a non-ordained layman or laywoman, the counsellor used therapeutic techniques as a way of helping a person to focus on and deal with concrete problems in his or her life. While the pastoral counsellor was not a spiritual director in the strict sense of the word, his or her use of modern psychology in a recognised Church ministry paved the way for its eventual integration into spiritual direction and other helping relationships

Today the ministry goes by many names: spiritual direction, spiritual accom-

paniment, spiritual guidance, spiritual friendship, to name but a few. Its ministers include men and women, ordained and non-ordained, from all walks of life, many of whom have little difficulty complementing their understanding of their ministry with insights from each of these important streams of Christian wisdom.

### Description

Of the many definitions of spiritual direction that have been proposed over the years, perhaps the most helpful is ‘the help one person gives another to enable him to become himself in his faith’ (cf. Laplace). Although this short definition is not without its limitations, it does successfully highlight the fundamental relational quality involved in this very important ministry of the Church.

As far as the Catholic tradition is concerned, it is important for directors to remember that diverse traditions of spiritual direction were (and still are) preserved in very structured and specific ways in the life of religious orders. The Benedictines, the Carthusians, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites, the Jesuits, and the Redemptorists, and others, all have something to offer the ministry of spiritual direction. The Benedictines, for example, emphasise *lectio divina* and the centrality of the liturgy to the spiritual life. The Carthusians stress silence and the way of unknowing. The Franciscans offer the witness of holy simplicity. The Dominicans, in turn, provide their rich teaching on the theological and cardinal virtues. The Carmelites supply their teaching on mysticism and the dark night of the soul. The Jesuits present their spiritual exercises, helping us to appreciate the role of the imagination for our spiritual growth and development. The Redemptorists focus on the importance of fundamental conversion and the important role of prayer for the working out of our salvation.

Members of these orders should be familiar with their tradition and able to make appropriate adaptations to their present situation. They should also be able to introduce others to the practice of spiritual direction within their tradition so that it remains a vital option for future generations as they seek to help others to navigate the deep and, at times, turbulent waters of the spiritual life.

### Pastoral Application

Alphonsus de Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, directed souls in both a general and more specific sense through his preaching, teaching, writing, and pastoral care of the Church. He also did so in the narrow sense as a confessor, seeking not only to forgive the sins of his penitents, but also to nourish their spiritual life by meeting them where they were and giving them a little bit more. Beyond the scope of the confessional, he also wrote many letters of spiritual

direction to people of various states of life in an attempt to lead them closer to Christ in the particular circumstances of their lives.

Redemptorists today would do well to think of spiritual direction in both the general and narrow senses of the term. They should strive to be excellent directors in both instances: in their preaching, teaching and writing, but also when hearing confessions and corresponding through letters. They should also seek to be creative in finding new ways of helping others become themselves in the faith (for example through media and internet). Recently, Alphonsus' method of mental prayer has been adapted to the direction process and has achieved promising results in both individual and group direction. Those involved in this type of individual or group direction should do so under proper supervision.

### Current Manifestations

The ministry of spiritual direction has undergone dramatic changes since the Second Vatican Council, especially when taken in the more specific sense of the term. This ministry now has a very ecumenical and interreligious outreach, one loosely organised under the auspices of Spiritual Directors International, a professional society with a journal, an annual convention and organised regional and local events (see [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)).

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Which kind of spiritual direction do you feel more comfortable one: the general or the more specific? Do you see the two as related? Do you look to the sacrament of reconciliation as a time for receiving spiritual guidance?
2. If you are a priest, do you give spiritual guidance to your penitents when you hear confessions? Do you consider yourself competent to take someone on for spiritual direction outside the confessional? Do you see the need for supervision?
3. What does St Alphonsus have to offer today's spiritual directors? In what creative ways can Redemptorists contribute to the ministry of spiritual direction today?

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## DISCERNMENT

Although Alphonsus never wrote a treatise dedicated specifically to the term ‘discernment’, his moral and spiritual writings are chock-full of sound pastoral advice intended for helping the Catholic faithful to distinguish the proper course of action they should take in their lives.

### Origins

The word ‘discernment’ comes from the Latin *discernere*, which literally means ‘to sever’, ‘to separate’, or ‘to set apart’ and which has been transferred metaphorically into ‘to distinguish’. The Scriptural basis for discernment is found in the religious discrimination of the Old Testaments prophets (Dt 18:21; 1 Sam 16:14; Jer 17:9-10), the New Testament emphasis on distinguishing true from false prophesy (Mt 7: 15-20; 12:22-35), and Paul’s distinction between the way of ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ (Gal 5:19-23), with his emphasis on the charismatic gift of discernment of spirits (1Cor 12:10), and his exhortation to live according to the life of the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 18).

In the early Church, the topic was taken up by Origen (184-254AD) in his *On First Principles*, John Cassian (c.360-435AD) in his *Conferences* (1:20-22, 2:10), and John Climacus (c.579-c.649AD) in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. In the Western Church, the insights of Cassian were fostered and promulgated through the strong emphasis given to his Conferences in Benedictine monasticism. Centuries later, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits, championed the topic in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

In Catholic thought discernment generally has three levels of meaning: a doctrinal dimension having to do with separating true from false teaching, a moral one having to do with telling good from evil, and an advanced spiritual sensitivity having to do with distinguishing between two goods in order to understand God’s will for one’s life and thus follow the more appropriate course of action. These doctrinal, moral, and spiritual spheres are intricately related and never exist in opposition to each other. They operate on both the communal and personal levels and are exercised for the good of the whole Church through the teaching and pastoral roles of the magisterium, and for the moral and spiritual welfare of individuals through the exercise of conscience, the reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation (confession), seeking guidance through the ministry of spiritual direction, and a life dedicated the practice of prayer and penance. The goal of discernment has to do with practicing the love of Jesus Christ in one’s life and living according to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## Description

Alphonsus presupposes the communal level of discernment as manifested in the magisterium's role of distinguishing between true and false teaching in faith and morals. While he uses magisterial teaching for his point of departure determining proper Church ordinance and the correct administration of the sacraments, he understands the obligation of pastors and theologians to scrutinise this body of knowledge with care and to interpret it in a way that will be truly liberating for the people they serve.

When it comes to personal discernment, he makes practical, eclectic use of the Church's rich theological and spiritual tradition and displays a deep sense of a person's capacity for growth in the moral and spiritual life. Discernment, for Alphonsus begins with a person's conscience and its capacity to distinguish moral good and evil (cf. Conscience). It is assisted by the sound guidance of an experienced Christian in the relationship of spiritual direction (cf. Direction, Spiritual). It deepens and matures through the spiritual insights gained through a dedicated regimen of prayer and penance (cf. Mental Prayer). It is perfected by living a life in the Spirit and conforming oneself to God's will in all things (cf. Conformity To God's Will). Each of these elements contributes to a process of discernment involving patient waiting and intent listening for the manifestation of God's will in one's life.

As might be expected, this process of discernment changes as a person grows in the spiritual life (cf. Purgative, Illuminative, Unitive Ways). In the beginning stages there will be a heavy reliance on one's conscience and following the commandments of God. As one benefits from spiritual direction and progresses in the life of prayer and penance, these early markers of the moral and spiritual life are deeply internalised and one receives further interior lights that illumine one's path and point out the way one should walk. In time, such light permeates one's soul so much that one becomes perfectly in tune with the promptings of the Holy Spirit and is able to see God's hands in all events and circumstances.

For Alphonsus, the goal of discernment is complete uniformity with the will of God. He understands that there is no simple recipe for arriving at this state, and he is deeply sensitive to each person's unique relationship with God and life-long spiritual search. Those wanting hard and fast rules for discerning God's will in their lives would do well to look elsewhere. He takes a more practical and pastoral ('meat and potatoes') approach to the topic. When in discernment, he simply says: (1) listen to the Church, (2) follow your conscience, (3) look for sound spiritual advice, (4) ask the Lord to light your way, (5) do penance, and (6) seek the will of God in all things.



### Pastoral Applications

Redemptorists cannot help others to discern the will of God in their lives if they do not first do so in their own lives. A first pastoral application emphasises the importance for Redemptorists to foster in their lives a discerning heart through the general guidelines offered by Alphonsus.

When dealing with people, Redemptorists must understand that they must meet people where they are and help them to discern in a way that they makes sense to them. A second pastoral application concerns making appropriate judgments about where people are in their relationship with God and how they can encourage them deepen that relationship.

In the process of discernment, some people are weak in or possibly overlook some of the elements emphasised by Alphonsus. A third pastoral application has to do with encouraging people to examine the weak links in the process and helping them to overcome them.

### Current Manifestations

Although discernment is a concept that spans doctrinal, moral, and spiritual categories, Redemptorists have typically pointed to Alphonsus's teaching on conscience and focused on the moral. This emphasis has helped them immensely in their capacity as discerning confessors who reveal a compassionate and understanding heart to those who come to them.

In recent years, attempts have been made to develop a specifically Alphonsian approach to spiritual direction that focuses more on the director/directee relationship and the process of spiritual growth. Redemptorists would do well to combine both approaches in their pastoral ministry, one that continues to offer sound practical spiritual advice when in the confessional, yet also offers those who need it a wider relational structure and context for discernment.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Do you seriously seek to discern the Lord's will for you in your life? If so, how do you go about it? Do you do so regularly or only on rare occasions?
2. What are the strengths in your approach to discernment? What are the weak links?
3. Does Alphonsus's approach makes sense to you? What do you agree with or disagree with about it? How can his insights help you to discern God's will? How can you use those insights to help others in their own process of discernment?

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## DISTACCO/DETACHMENT

In the Alphonsian vision, *distacco* is an indispensable demand of authentic love: 'Anyone who wishes to love Jesus Christ will need to drive from their heart everything which is dictated by self love, rather than by love of God. It means... not seeking ourselves but only what pleases God. This is what the Lord asks of us when he says; "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart"' (Mt 22:37) (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, in CWS p. 151). True love, in fact, asks that we 'not only conform but we should actually make ourselves one with whatever God ordains' in the sense that 'making the will of God and our will into one single will, as it were, so that we do not want anything but what he wills and so his will becomes ours' (*Conformity to the Will of God*, in CWS p. 72).

According to Alphonsus, the fidelity to this Yes, said with a trusting love, is impossible without the *distacco*: 'from inordinate affection', 'from the family (which often causes the loss of vocation)', 'from the praise of the world' and 'above all...from ourselves, our own will'. Thus we will be able 'to love God as God wants, not as it pleases us. God wishes people to empty themselves of everything in order to be united to him and be filled with his divine love' (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, CWS pp. 156-160). *Distacco* therefore does not mean contempt for created realities, but relates itself to reality as wished by the love of God for people 'to draw them to his love' (p. 112). Above all, it does not mean to put God and the neighbour in conflict, but rather to act in a way that the love of God is the foundation and authenticity of all our love towards others. It makes us avoid reducing love to a 'thing' to possess, to use and to consume selfishly.

In the more specific Redemptorist perspective, *distacco* is characterised by a clearly apostolic spirit, as a condition, and at the same time, expression of putting oneself radically at the service of evangelisation of the abandoned, which is the *raison d'être* of our community: 'Whoever is called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer', wrote St Alphonsus, 'will not be a true follower of Jesus Christ, nor will ever be a saint, if he does not fulfil the purpose of his vocation and he will not have the spirit of the Institute, which is to save souls and the souls most destitute of spiritual help, such as the poor people of the countryside. This was already the intention of the coming of the Redeemer...therefore everyone must nourish this zeal and this spirit so as to help souls' ('Exhortations to Religious').

For the Redemptorist, *distacco* above all means apostolic freedom, indispensable to discern and respond to ever new urgencies of the abandoned. It is an expression of maintaining the radicalness and the readiness of the self-emptying

mercy of Christ. Therefore it must mark not only the personal life of the confreres, but also the manner in which the community plans and lives its specific mission. The norms in our primitive Rules concerning the exclusion of certain apostolic works or concerning the refusal of ecclesiastical privileges which could damage our freedom can be explained by the importance given to *distacco* for the sake of the apostolate.

The present Constitutions, after having recalled that ‘the apostolic work of the Congregation is distinguished more by its missionary dynamism than by any particular forms of activity’ (Const. 14), adds that such a mission ‘demands of the members that they be free and unimpeded in their choice of the peoples to be evangelised and the means to be employed in the mission of salvation’. Therefore ‘they cannot allow themselves to settle down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary. On the contrary, they will diligently pioneer new ways of preaching the Gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15)’ (Const. 15).

In the light of our discernment concerning the most abandoned, and of our joy of ‘continuing’ for them their plentiful redemption, *distacco* finds full expression in the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. With this, in fact, the Redemptorists ‘are prepared to remain steadfast for life in their vocation. They renounce themselves with all they possess to become followers of Christ, and to be all things to all’ (cf. 1 Cor 9:22 and Const. 49).

A particularly urgent aspect of *distacco* today is the freedom from the lure of consumerism so as to foster a respectful use and sharing of goods. The constant emphasis on appearance, acceptance and approval, to the detriment of being, should lead to a greater attention to a *distacco* in its own right. It is also important that we must not allow ourselves to be imprisoned within our own vision and ideas, but we should feel the need to interact and dialogue. But above all, *distacco* must today translate into the task of avoiding every absolutism of freedom, knowing that it retains its character only in relationship with truth.

*Distacco* makes possible a trusting reliance on God’s plan for us and our history, enlightened by the certainty that it is dictated by the heart of a Father, who has placed our happiness in his own glory, as Alphonsus noted in his foreword to *The Wonderful Manifestations of Divine Providence*, the last of his wide-ranging writings and almost his testament.

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

To understand the Alphonsian vision of *distacco*, it is good to integrate the reading of Ch 12 of *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* with the *Conformity to the*

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. To remain faithful to the Alphonsian vision of *distacco*, it is necessary to deepen the relationship between *distacco* and the evangelisation of the abandoned, asking ourselves if indeed our personal and communitarian journey, is illuminated by being united with our ‘*vita apostolica*’. (cf. Const. 1).
2. It will be thus possible to question ourselves concerning the expressions of *distacco* in our contexts, and if they are always supported and directed to love.

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## ECCLESIOLOGY OF ALPHONSUS

A general article on the Church is easily available in any dictionary of theology. Elsewhere in this volume there is an article on ‘Church’ from a Redemptorist perspective. My focus in this article is on the Alphonsian perspective on the Church. I want to tackle the question: What did the Church mean for Alphonsus. And what must it mean for his followers today?

In our day, the Church would be primarily the people whom God calls and gathers together from every part of the earth. By faith and Baptism, they become members of the Body of Christ and they are built up by his Word. They experience forgiveness (cf. Mt 16:15-19), are unified in Christ and sanctified in the Spirit. Secondly, the visible Church on earth is a pilgrim Church. On its pilgrim way the Church is in communion with the Church in glory and awaits its full manifestation at the end of time. The pilgrim Church, to which we belong, has its hierarchical constitution (bishops, priests and deacons), but is primarily the people of God who have a mission to preach the good news to the whole world.

### What Did the Church Mean to Alphonsus?

Alphonsus would be quite comfortable with our notion of the Church as the ‘People of God’. But whereas, we would like the term ‘People of God’ to encompass a group of living people in whose midst we are, Alphonsus would enlarge upon the term so as to incorporate the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, so that truly the ‘People of God’ are in communion with those who have gone before us in the faith. This was because Alphonsus looked upon the Church as People of God but from an aspect wherein they needed powerful intercessors for their salvation.

Alphonsus saw the Church as God’s people, called to conversion. Just as all have the means of powerful intercession, all have access to means of salvation – especially prayer and the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. Whether we speak of intercession or means of salvation, these terms have much to do with the ‘affective’ practices Alphonsus inculcated in the faithful in their devotion to God. For example, Alphonsus would envision the Church as God’s house, where Jesus is the prisoner of love in the tabernacle awaiting, calling and welcoming those who come to visit him (cf. opening prayer in *Visits*). The house has its prominence from the one who dwells in it. It is the place of encounter with God in prayer and the sacraments.

Alphonsus advocated a ‘popular’ Church, one where the majority of people were poor, illiterate and most abandoned in terms of pastoral care. That is why

he insisted that in conducting parish missions, the word of God must be preached in the remotest villages. The preachers are to use a popular and apostolic style and, with the celebration of the sacraments, give the people an opportunity to experience the compassion of God.

The visible Church is hierarchically constituted but is in pilgrimage to the heavenly Church. As visible Church there is a need to work in collaboration with the hierarchy. Alphonsus always considered it of utmost importance to be sent by the local Ordinary. The missionary would bring the special faculties of the popular mission to the local Church. Thus, while respecting the rigid hierarchical ordering of the post-reformation Church these faculties were made more easily available by the missionary to the people who needed them. With Alphonsus' views on moral theology (equiprobabilism) and on the extraordinary signs of repentance these special faculties could be made even more accessible to the abandoned. The Church of heaven would always be in perspective (and hence the emphasis on the last things – *Sic transit gloria mundi* – only the heavenly/eternal lasts). The call through the Crib, Cross and Sacrament is to respond to love and journey to the heavenly.

### Pastoral Application

Alphonsus was aware of the Ignatian concept of *sentire cum ecclesia* – to be in one mind/to feel with the Church. Being faithful and obedient to the official Church's teachings and discipline, Alphonsus built up his spirituality for the marginalised, making the salvation intended by the Church more easily available. His goal was that all could be in communion with the Church, including those guilty of grave sin such as blasphemy, which was so common at that time.

His strategy was eirenic. Without opposing anyone or anything blindly, he recognised what was true in what was being said, but pointed out that the truth lay beyond what had been said. His arguments about the need and usefulness of the popular missions, the validity of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary are obvious examples. He was logical, but 'logic', as Newman has said, 'does not really prove; it enables us to join issues with others; it suggests ideas; it opens views; it maps out for us lines of thought; it verifies negatively...' And Alphonsus would see a certain 'truth even in fables, myths and legends of popular piety (e.g. the moving of the House of BVM by angels to Loreto).

Fidelity to her mission and commitment to the cause of the poor, following the example of Jesus, are non-negotiables in Church's pastoral ministry. Alphonsus was fully aware of this and his pastoral priorities were determined by this awareness. There is a sound balance of scripture, liturgy and devotions in Alphonsian spirituality.

### Current Manifestations

Returning to the roots and reading the signs of the times are necessary for the growth of every Religious Congregation, as it continues to find its place in the history of God's ongoing story of salvation. The Redemptorist Constitution 1 says that the Congregation shares the mandate given to the Church. This is done by following Christ and continuing his mission of evangelisation. Alphonsus' approach was 'popular' so that the abandoned majority with whom he worked could be incorporated, slowly but steadily, into the mainstream and be led on the path to salvation. In all this, the affective compassion of Jesus characterised Alphonsus' dealings especially towards the most abandoned. I would suggest that this was Alphonsus' notion of the Church as mediated through his spirituality, moral theology, preaching and in the *vita devota*. His evident bias was towards the most abandoned. Fidelity to his spirituality demands following his example and strategy.

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Puthenpura, G.: *Spirituality of the Proclamation of the Word – An Alphonsian Perspective*, Bangalore, St Peter's Pontifical Institute, 2002.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. We are custodians of many churches and chapels. Do we really make these places of encounter with the Lord who dwells there? Do the faithful, especially the abandoned experience in these places the love of the Crib, Cross and Tabernacle?
2. Are our various ministries aimed at reviving the Church or re-forming it? Whatever we do, in whose interest is it done?
3. Do we maintain the spirit of *sentire cum ecclesia* in our attitude to and interpretations of Church's teachings?
4. In our ministries do we empower *all* people within the Church, even those illiterate and powerless and persecuted and excluded – or do we tend to form a parallel Church of the elite?

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## EUCCHARIST

‘That all who read this may respond by their greater devotion and affection to the tender, the excessive love which our most sweet Saviour has been pleased to show us in his Passion and in the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament’ (*Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament – Dedication*).

St Alphonsus uses ardent, impassioned language because he is convinced that the Eucharist is a moment of actual love between God and the participant. Through God’s gift in the Eucharist we enter into full bodily communion with each other, through our communion in the body of Christ, ‘our most sweet Saviour’. The Eucharist is like a daily kiss of God, delivered as a sacrament. In the power of this embrace we are given – sacramentally – full and loving communion with each other, and with all of humankind, and especially with the most exploited, the poor, the excluded, the most abandoned. The giving is incarnate and personal.

‘People on their death bed often make a last bequest of an article of clothing or a ring to their friends as a token of their affection. But you, Jesus, as you were on the point of leaving this world, what was the token of love that you left us? It was not an article of clothing or a ring, but your body and your blood, your soul and divinity, your whole self’ (*Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, chapter 2, para 1). In awe of this gift, Alphonsus is ardent and passionate, with eloquence of gratitude, profoundly felt. The kiss of love is a kiss of peace and reassurance. We are reassured that we may enter because we are in the presence of the Lamb who has taken away the sin of the world.

At the time of Alphonsus many were saying: ‘Keep out until you are worthy.’ Possession of ‘proper dispositions’ must come first. Alphonsus was wary: ‘But what are the proper dispositions? If they understand by this that we should be worthy, who would ever be allowed to approach Holy Communion? Only Jesus Christ could worthily receive the Eucharist since only God could worthily receive God’ (*Direction of Souls Who Wish to Lead a Deeply Spiritual Life*, para 30). Trepidation about unworthiness goes beyond a review of personal frailty. There is also the guilt that we incur by our mere presence as participants in human history with its dismal stories of greed and fear and violence and exploitation. Accordingly, Alphonsus recalls that the reassurance given us in the Eucharist goes all the way down: ‘The Eucharist contains every other gift the Lord has given us – creation, redemption, the call to glory’ (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, ch 2, para 3). The Eucharistic Prayers proclaim the great deeds that God has done, gradually turning us from self-destruction, culminating in the gift of Jesus. The daily kiss of God is a visible sign of this whole sweep of salvation history, past,

present and future. ‘The Eucharist is not alone the pledge of Christ’s love; it is also a pledge that he wishes to give us paradise, or, as the Church says, “the pledge of future glory is given to us”’ (*Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, chapter 2, paragraph 4). In celebrating the Eucharist we proclaim that we belong to that world of the future and that this is all gift.

The encounter with God’s love awakens, enables, and vivifies response. It is the source of our response, and ever-present to it. The kiss of peace is not simply a prelude. Throughout all of our response the kiss endures, sustaining and inspiring creativity. This insight is fundamental when Alphonsus speaks of the origin and the meaning the Redemptorist calling (as it is the key to his entire theology of grace). The Redemptorist calling does not originate as an exercise in human planning. It is not some kind of project for the betterment of humankind. Its origin is in the kiss of peace that comes to us in the Eucharist. The *vita apostolica* – which is what we mean by Redemptorist life – is not some great plan of action, conceived beforehand, then rolled out phase by phase until all is satisfactorily achieved. *Vita apostolica* is a surge of gratitude, constantly renewed, and it finds expression in all kinds of activity, constantly renewed.

Alphonsus delights in advocating frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. These he sees as prolonging the moment of actual love that occurs between God and the participant in the Eucharist. Advocacy of frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament is a preoccupation in his ascetical works, as it was to be a central theme in Redemptorist preaching for many generations, as well as an important feature in Redemptorist spirituality. Pleading the case for frequent visits Alphonsus sometimes uses a contemporary idiom which speaks of Jesus hidden under the sacramental veils, enclosed in the tabernacle, as a prisoner – all with a view to emphasising to the maximum the sense of His availability for our sake (‘My most beloved Jesus, hidden under the sacramental veils, it is because of your love for me that you remain night and day enclosed in this tabernacle’ – *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament*, sixth visit). In this idiom Alphonsus has constructed prayerful dialogues and these have helped many people.

However this ‘tabernacle theology’ should not obscure, as it easily can, the Eucharist’s primary significance. The meaning of bread is not incidental; rather it the sign that points to the central truth. Bread and wine are food and drink, the medium in which we communicate, come together, become more human. In the Eucharist this meaning is deepened. As we eat the Eucharistic bread, and drink the blessed cup, ‘the true bread which has come down from heaven’ comes among us, announcing that we belong together and communicate together and become more human together as we communicate in his bodily, risen life.

What was our bread has become the bread of heaven. It cannot any longer be described as ordinary bread; it would be sacrilegious to see it or treat it as ordinary bread. At all times, accordingly, this Eucharistic bread provokes our prayerful response.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In 1 Cor 11 Paul claims that there are some in the Church in Corinth ‘who fail to discern the body of the Lord’ during the celebration of the Eucharist; in what does their failure consist?
2. In the Eucharist, ‘a pledge of life to come is given to us’: what does this mean and how is it realised?
3. Should we be wary of St Alphonsus’ use of ‘Tabernacle Theology’ and its associated imagery? Should we retain his reverence for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament?

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## EVANGELISATION

**E**vangelisation, the Gospel proclamation, is the basic mission of the Redemptorists. They vow to ‘follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor, as he declared of himself: “He sent me to preach the Good news to the poor”’ (Const. 1).

In the course of their history Redemptorists have tried to fulfil this mission in different ways. The principal forms of proclamation were the popular missions, retreats, sermon weeks, special services in schools or in hospitals and through other pastoral activities, above all in spiritual accompaniment and in the celebration of the Sacraments.

From the ‘unfathomable riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8), only few aspects can be dealt with at any one time. Which aspects should be stressed? This depends on the circumstances, on the practical possibilities and necessities of a situation, on the cultural and political circumstances of a country or epoch; it can also be a function of the prevailing theology, of the social position of the Church; and, of course, the strengths and competences of the preachers themselves.

In the foreground of all Redemptorist proclamation stands Jesus Christ ‘the Redeemer and Lord, who is the head and model of the new humanity. This message has for its special object plentiful redemption; it proclaims the love of God the Father, “who first loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”’ (Const. 6).

As the successors of St Alphonsus, the Redemptorists also see as their task to teach the people the ‘way of salvation’. To achieve this purpose, in the past they often proclaimed the so-called ‘Eternal Truths’. They often preached somewhat scary sermons, as it was the style of the time (they were known in some areas as ‘Hell-Fire Preachers’). However, Alphonsus repeatedly pointed out that fear cannot be the foundation of conversion. Only love can ground genuine conversion, a love that is a response to the prior love revealed in the Incarnation of God in Jesus.

The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ also involves explaining his teachings and ideals. One of the basic human questions is: ‘How can I live a life of integrity?’ The explanation of the guidelines which Jesus has given for life and action are a vital part of the proclamation of the Gospel. The Constitutions and Statutes also exhort Redemptorists to emphasise the destiny of the individual person and of the whole human race. From this destiny, as ‘chosen, redeemed and gathered together in Christ’ (Const. 7), comes new insight

into the dignity of each person, and should bring up the dignity of the person.

The particular emphasis in any proclamation will however depend on the circumstances, on the ‘signs of the times’. Constitution 9 speaks of a ‘practical familiarity with conditions in the world’ which leads to ‘missionary dialogue’ for the sake of evangelisation.

The proclamation of Redemptorists is also subject to some criteria and basic conditions. Constitution 10 describes our ‘special mission in the Church’ as the ‘explicit proclamation of the word of God’. There will certainly be situations when direct evangelisation is not feasible; but whenever possible, the Gospel should be proclaimed loud and clear.

Redemptorists are called to bring the good news to the poor and most abandoned. This term ‘poor and most abandoned’ has been understood in different ways in the course of history. In the time of Alphonsus, special emphasis was given to the rural poor who were largely neglected by the official structures of the Church. St Clement focussed on the townspeople starved of spiritual help. In Canada and in the United States the early confreres saw immigrants as the most abandoned. The prevailing understanding of ‘poor and most abandoned’ concerned those bereft of spiritual help and vision: those with no awareness of God and Jesus Christ, those addicted to sin, those at risk of ‘eternal death’. In speaking about the ‘Option for the Poor’, recent General Chapters have drawn attention to the economic and social aspects of human misery. Redemptorists today proclaim the Gospel of human dignity in all apostolic endeavours.

Hence, the proclamation of Redemptorists should be ‘prophetic and liberating’. This means that they must critically name the political or economic structures which oppress the people, they must encourage liberation and together find means and ways to it. Constitution 5 widens the scope of liberation and salvation to include the whole human person; this means that Redemptorists must not only announce good news, but also denounce whatever prevents genuine human liberation.

In 1985 the General Chapter alerted the confreres to the gospel truth that evangelisation is a two-way process: the evangelisers are themselves evangelised by the very people to whom they are sent. They should allow themselves to be influenced by the Gospel of the poor. To proclaim the Gospel today is to experience the unity of our *vita apostolica*, the unity of Mission, Community and Spirituality.

In the last years of his life St Clement M. Hofbauer often said: ‘The Gospel must be proclaimed anew’. *Anew* – that is with fresh voices, new urgency and

Spirit-filled enthusiasm. Redemptorists cannot be silent about the good news of the Redeemer and his Plentiful Redemption.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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John Paul II: *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What should we proclaim from the ‘unfathomable riches of Christ’, considering the place and time in which we live?
2. What critical and prophetic element is there in our proclamation of the Word? How can we give expression to our hope in Christ?

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## FAITH

The Scriptures describe faith as ‘the assurance of things hoped for’ (Heb 11:1). Along with hope and charity, it is one of the ‘three things that last’ (1 Cor 13:13) and is recognised by the Church as one of the three theological virtues given at baptism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1813). Rather than providing a systematic presentation, the Scriptures generally offer a wide spectrum of viewpoints on faith, ranging anywhere from personal trust to an intellectual assent to divinely revealed truth. Both Scripture and Church tradition recognise faith as a gratuitous gift from God that is necessary for salvation.

### Description

The Fathers of the Church, like Sts Ambrose and Augustine in the West and the Cappadocian fathers – Sts Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus – in the East, look upon faith as a sapiential quest for holiness. They identify it with what Jean Leclercq, when speaking of monastic theology as the continuation of the patristic tradition, describes as ‘the love of learning and the desire for God’.

This yearning for the experience of the divine became one of the identifying features of the monastic approach to learning. Faith, according to this perspective, leads to wisdom; wisdom, to a face-to-face encounter with God. Here, the focus of faith is not on the content of revelation, but on the experience of the divine. Learning in the monastic tradition was rooted in prayer and the epistemological role of love. It was a kind of *lectio divina*, the ultimate goal of which was to give person a firsthand, experiential knowledge of God.

Scholastic theology, by way of contrast, generally presents faith as a disposition of the intellect given by God through an infusion of grace to help a person offer religious assent to the truths of the faith. As such, it is considered essential to the science of theology, which Anselm of Canterbury describes as ‘faith seeking understanding’. Thomas Aquinas says that faith is both explicit and implicit and these aspects suggest the difference between learned faith and simple faith. Centuries later, Karl Rahner takes this simple distinction and extends it to those who are men and women of good will who follow their consciences and seek to do good, but who have never heard the Gospel message. His notion of the ‘anonymous Christian’ allows for an implicit faith that lies beneath the level of human consciousness, where the person encounters God in the very depths of his or her being and decides to embrace or reject the ground of his or her existence.

Generally speaking, today’s theologians understand the phenomenon of faith in an intellectual, fiducial, or performative sense, depending on whether or not

they associate it primarily with rationality and intellect (in the spirit of Thomistic thought), affectivity and will (in the spirit of Lutheran belief), or human solidarity and action (in the spirit of liberation theology). Since the Second Vatican Council, many have also emphasised the social character of faith, offsetting what in the past appeared to be an overemphasis on individual piety.

In his magisterial study, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith*, Avery Dulles goes so far as to identify seven models of faith: propositional, transcendental, fiducial, affective-experiential, obediential, praxis, and personalist. In his mind, each of these models contributes something unique to the Christian understanding of the concept of faith, but cannot stand alone. He maintains that they complement each other and must be considered together in order to achieve a proper understanding of the meaning of faith and the mystery it seeks to convey. According to Dulles, 'Faith should make a person doctrinally orthodox, trustful, obedient, and socially committed.'

### Pastoral Applications

St Alphonsus manifested a number of 'models' of faith in his life. Although he understood faith primarily in the Thomistic sense of an infused theological virtue that enabled the intellect to assent to the truths of divine revelation, his deep devotion gave him an honest appreciation of a person's need to enter into a trusting (i.e. fiducial) friendship with God. His emphasis on practice and prudential judgment, moreover, enabled him to see the importance of backing faith up with action.

Following in the footsteps of their founder, Redemptorists embrace a number of models of faith in their lives and encourage others to do the same. In their pastoral practice, they try to meet people where they are, regardless of the model, level, or intensity of faith, and then give them a little bit more. They view faith as a wonderful gift from God which can always be expanded and deepened to include new insights into the mystery of God's redeeming love. Through their ministry of preaching and teaching, and in their role as confessors and spiritual directors, they seek to sow the seeds of faith wherever they go.

### Current Manifestations

Today, faith manifests itself in people's lives both explicitly and implicitly, in many forms, using many models, in a variety of combinations. Redemptorists believe in a God of variety and expect to encounter a spectrum of individual and social expressions of faith in their ministries. They are also deeply aware of the increasing *lack of faith* in the world today, due at least in part to the rising influ-



ence of secularisation. They seek to offset this influence through their personal and communal belief in and witness to the power of Jesus Christ to transform the human heart and the structures of human society.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Leclercq, Jean: *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Translated by Catharine Misrahi. New York: Fordham University Press, 1982.

Thomas Aquinas: *Summa theologiae*, II-II, qq. 1-16.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What do you understand by the word 'faith'? Is it intellectual, fiducial, or performative? Does it correlate with any of the models discussed in the article?
2. Is it possible to define faith? Is there something elusive or intangible about it?
3. What do we mean when we say that faith is a gift from God? Is it possible to believe without God's help?
4. How does faith manifest itself in your everyday life?

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## FOLLOWING JESUS

‘Following Jesus’ is essential to the message of the New Testament. After his baptism Jesus began his public life with the programmatic announcement: ‘The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news’ (Mk 1:15). His message is unique: it consists of his person. He does not just announce something that is to come, but his presence is the event. He says: in me the kingdom of God has come; in my person you may see God himself. ‘Repent’ in the New Testament sense therefore means: turn to Jesus, listen to him, join him, and accept what he is giving. It is personal union with him, receiving his gift.

This basic conversion and openness to Jesus induces one to follow him. St Alphonsus insistently identified conversion with following Jesus. In his view the follower has to live in such a way that, whatever he may be doing, he goes forward with Jesus and carries out his will. This requires a converted heart that is free from attachments to the world, and lives totally in union with Jesus. Alphonsus recommended this prayer after Holy Communion: ‘My most sweet Saviour ... change this heart of mine, detach it from all earthly affections, give me a heart united to your holy will that seeks nothing but your greater pleasure’ (*Acts for Holy Communion*, *Ascetical Works IV*, 406).

Furthermore ‘Following Jesus’ means to accompany him on his way, to share what happened to him. It means carrying our cross with Jesus. This spirituality of following Jesus to the cross is characteristic of the founder of our Congregation. In a meditation on the Passion, Alphonsus wrote: ‘My soul, embrace the cross for love of Jesus, who for love of you suffered so much. See how he goes forward with his cross and invites you to follow him with yours’ (*Considerations and affections on the Passion of Jesus Christ*, *Ascetical Works V*, 166).

This spirituality is expressed throughout our Constitutions and Statutes, and is the fundamental criterion of authenticity in our Congregation. The first Constitution points out that ‘following Jesus’ is the goal of our Congregation: ‘Its purpose is to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer’. Therefore it is logical to consider the following of Jesus as ‘the fundamental norm’ of our Congregation (Const. 74). It is the prerequisite for everything else. Whoever has not decided to consider seriously ‘following Jesus’ as ‘the fundamental norm’ for his own life cannot be a Redemptorist. Hence the aim of the novitiate is to have ‘candidates consider more thoroughly whether they are really called by God to follow Christ by making religious profession in the apostolic life of the Congregation’ (Const. 86, 2).

Finally, this becomes clear in the formula of Profession when we say explicitly: ‘...by following closely Christ, the Saviour of the world. For this purpose I now freely choose the Christian life sealed by the evangelical counsels...’

Accordingly, the Redemptorist is committed to following Jesus, not only in some circumstances, but always and everywhere. This basic attitude ought to inspire each one as well as the whole Congregation. As at the very beginning of the Congregation, the Redemptorist today must follow Jesus by paying attention to prayer and organising his whole life according to the evangelical counsels. In this way following Jesus becomes effective in concrete circumstances. We follow Jesus with the liberty of God’s children, who renounce worldly and self-ish aspirations, as Alphonsus insisted. This basic attitude gives the Congregation a unique profile in its missionary dynamism and in the life of its communities.

Just two further specific aspects may be pointed out. Our Congregation, by following Jesus, tries to choose *his* priorities, and so our Constitutions repeat explicitly that as missionaries we have to pay ‘special attention to the poor’ (Const. 4). Jesus was so totally dedicated to the poor and to sinners that he was ready to die for them. ‘Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty’ (2 Cor 8:9). Therefore for the Redemptorist, the option for the poor is essential. It belongs to our identity. It is characteristic of us, that we do not only teach the poor but also even learn from the poor, and so following Jesus we want to be in full solidarity with them. ‘*Evangelizare pauperibus et a pauperibus evangelizari.*’

‘Following Jesus’ means that our community life has to undergo a constant conversion. ‘It is most important that the members regard the community as something which must aim at continual progress through constant interior renewal’ (Const. 40). This ‘constant interior renewal’ is the answer to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘Repent and believe the good news.’

Therefore following Jesus means to accompany him on his way, always attentive to observe him and to listen to him in order to correspond authentically to him. So, with Jesus, the Redemptorists embody and actualise the good news. ‘Since the members are called to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of redemption in the world, they choose the person of Christ as the centre of their life and strive day by day to enter more intimately into personal union with him’ (Const. 23).

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

*Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.* Rome: General Curia 2002.

Heinzmann, Josef : *Erlösung in Fülle*. Freiburg: Kanisius 1985.

Londoño, Noel B.: *To Be a Redemptorist Today: Reflections on the Redemptorist Charism*, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1996.

Raponi, Santino : *The Charism of the Redemptorists in the Church. A Commentary on the Constitutions*. Rome: The Centre for Redemptorist Spirituality 2003.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. The vows serve the purpose of following Jesus. Do I live my profession explicitly in order to follow Jesus? Concretely, from this standpoint what do poverty, chastity and obedience mean for me?
2. How do I live ‘following Jesus’ as ‘constant interior renewal’? How do I review this in my examination of conscience?
3. How do I live the Alphonsian detachment in order to practice in an authentic manner ‘following Jesus’?
4. Does ‘following Jesus’ fill me with gratitude and joy? How is that revealed in my life and my ministry?

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## FORMATION

The Redemptorist Constitutions 77 and 78 state that formation is one of the priorities of our life. The content of these Constitutions can be synthesised as: Formation is the process that introduces the new members to the Congregation and is prolonged during one's whole lifetime. The aim of formation is in harmony with the apostolic endeavours and guarantees the human and Christian maturity of the confreres.

### Meaning for Redemptorists

During the course of history, we Redemptorists have had a specific kind of formation and it has always been considered one of our top priorities. Formation was a primary concern of St Alphonsus and it has always been united with the spirituality of our Institute. This is evident in examples such as the formula for Profession and the Constitution about the Rector Major (1743), the Constitutions about the officials and the simple style of preaching, and the Rules for the Missions (1747).

The constitutional history of the Congregation, from the time of Benedict XIV, who approved the first Rule in 1749, up to the present text of 1982, offers a rich experience of formation in which the purpose of the Institute is interwoven with the universality of its members and with its response to change. This has been clear in the last two centuries, especially since the Second Vatican Council.

Formation is a historical current that binds a community around its charism and its labours as well as a service to each member. We accept the following definition of formation: Formation is an internal process in which people, mindful of having received a special gift from God, with the help of the Church and conditioned by many psychosocial variables, become responsible for their vocation. Those being formed are not only the receivers of a 'formative process' but they are also the principal agents of their own formation (Prada, 2007:51).

### Redemptorist Formation Today

In the years after the Second Vatican Council, the theme of formation was discussed by all the General Chapters, many documents were redacted and the *Ratio Formationis* or the General Directory of Formation was approved in 2003. This *Ratio* is the document that allows us to know what Redemptorist formation consists of today.

The first area is the *Initial Formation*. It lasts from six to nine years, beginning with vocational promotion up to definitive commitment with perpetual pro-

fession and priestly ordination. This is followed by Continued Formation – the stage of transition to ministry which lasts for five years, and then the formative project, which covers a lifetime.

Initial formation has a synchronised structure because it forms part of a unique process with its agents, stages, dimensions and other factors. The principal agent is the one being formed, accompanied by formators in diverse formative structures, companions and various associated agents. The Ratio gives a profile of each formative agent. The general criteria are personalisation and differentiation.

All the stages of formation are integrated on the basis of gradualism and progressiveness: from vocation promotion to time as postulants, then the novitiate and juniorate, with special programmes for the ordained ministry and for the Brothers. The stage of transition to ministry focuses on ministerial practices and community life. The rest of life is considered as a permanent formative process.

The dimensions of formation are: human and Christian maturity, consecration to Christ the Redeemer, community life, academic, professional and pastoral formation. Each dimension has to be integrated with the overall formation programme.

The factors by which formation is achieved are of a personal and holistic nature: the grace of God, physical and psychological characteristics, the family, the socio-cultural surroundings, the local Church and the Congregation, places and structures. Questions of inculturation and universality lie at the heart of many of these issues.

In the Congregation there are many profitable experiences to be drawn from for the formation of the Brothers and Continued Formation. Each Unit applies the norms for formation in its own Directory.

### Future of Redemptorist Formation

A closer look at formation helps us to understand its relation to the personal and communal living of the Redemptorist charism. Statistically, where initial formation exists, the median age is lower and the number of confreres is higher. Theologically, the Redemptorists can count on a rich spirituality, with a specialised contribution in moral theology and with a very wide experience in pastoral practice.

It is a constant that in the Units of the Congregation that have actively dedicated resources and personnel to formation, they have been compensated with greater quantity and quality of new members. Through formation, the Congregation, like any society, decides its future: ‘The vitality with which the Congregation pursues its apostolic mission depends on the number and quality of the candidates who seek admission to the Redemptorist community’ (Const. 79).

The shared formation in faculties and university institutions presents the problem of how to form the candidates in the Redemptorist charism and guarantee a specific identity. This requires time, personnel and finances.

The experiences of restructuring in many Units indicate the importance of the new Redemptorists being aware that while he makes his profession of vows in one unit, he is also being prepared for and open to life in the whole Congregation. ‘They should learn progressively what the following of Christ demands of them...and thus become true missionaries’ (Const. 78).

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Basic Redemptorist Texts:

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Durrwell, François-Xavier: ‘Vous avez été appelés,’ in *In Libertatem vocati estis*, Miscellanea Bernhard Häring, in *Studia Moralia*, 15, (1977), 345-357.

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Raponi, Santino: *Il carisma dei Redentoristi nella Chiesa: Commento alle Costituzioni*. Historical Library, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, 15, Roma 1993, 214-234.

**www.c.ss.r.com**: General Government/Secretariates and Commissions/General Secretariate for Formation.

**www.fcontinuac.ss.r.com**: Formation of the Formators and continued formation.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between the discipleship of the Apostles and Redemptorist formation?
2. How do you relate the figure of St Alphonsus de Liguori to the emphasis on the formation of youth for ministry?

3. Has St Clement Hofbauer anything to say about formation in the spreading of the Congregation?
4. Gather information about three houses of Formation (different stages) and analyse their positive aspects and limitations as a formation process.
5. Are you happy with initial formation and continued formation in your Unit as we face the challenges of a continually changing world?

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## FRIENDSHIP

**A** Redemptorist confrere recently wrote: ‘As Redemptorists, we know well one another’s flaws and failures, our eccentricities and annoying traits. We have long histories together and can hold a grudge or resentment for years. Yet, we do get to live with some wonderful people. We have the opportunity to dine daily with some remarkable men, to pray with men who love Jesus, and to share memories with confreres with whom we share a common history. And along the way, some of these men are not only confreres or members of our community, but in the wonder of grace, they become our friends. What a gift God has given us in these relationships!’

This grace of friendship is an integral part of our experience of living in community. It touches deeply the depth of relationships that by God’s goodness accompanies many of us from our first days in the Congregation until our last. It was clearly the first-hand experience of Clement Hofbauer who from his first days as a novice shared his journey as a Redemptorist with his friend Thaddeus Hübl. In a letter he wrote to Pablo Chiodetti after the death of his friend he stated:

‘I am convinced that our Father Hübl is in heaven and shares the victory of Christ. And even though I abandon myself to the will of God and always wish to accept his divine disposition, at times I am not able to overcome the sorrow that sweeps over me. I must admit that since his death I have not been able to have one hour of happiness. I know that he has lost nothing; but we have lost a great deal.’

Carl Hoegerl in a lecture on St Clement spoke of how the grace of friendship in Clement’s mind was not only a gift for living in community but essential for ministry: ‘In his care of people, Clement did not push people before they were ready. He became their friend first, and then he would invite them to faith. Friendship was a key to his ministry.’

### Friendship as a grace

One of the most positive aspects of living in community is that you often become friends with your confreres. As the above citations indicate, these relationships of friendship develop over a long shared history, from hours of being together, of talking, sharing, listening, accepting each others’ limits, forgiving hurts and working together on common projects. Community brings us in each others’

company and allows for the possibility of friendship. What is often characteristic of our relationships as men is that we may have great friendships with our confreres, but we rarely speak about these, except perhaps at their funerals.

Rey-Mermet points out how important friends and confidants were to St Alphonsus when he worked in the hospital for the incurables. Friendships continued to play a central role throughout his life, especially with Sarnelli, Sportelli and Villani. Of course, his relationship with Marie Celeste is also well known. Alphonsus rarely speaks of his friendships in his letters or writings. However, we see something of his affection to his friends in small signs. For example, when he writes a letter to Cesare Sportelli, he signs off as ‘Alfonso’ rather than his common ‘Alfonso de’ Liguori’. When he writes to Francesco di Viva or Guilio Marocco, he expresses the warmth and kindness of a friend as he enquires about their health. Again this affection for his confreres comes through in the posthumous biographies he has written on Vito Curzio and Gennaro Sarnelli.

Although Alphonsus writes extensively about friends and friendship, these are primarily a metaphor for our relationship with God. Nevertheless it does demonstrate the importance of friendship in his experience and thinking. As a wise spiritual director he also cautions against the abuse that can happen with distorted friendships. While healthy friendships enhance community living and ministry, the opposite is true for dependent, immature infatuations that lead to an exclusive fusion of two people at the expense of community living. Often these dependent relationships have an erotic component that can further jeopardise a chaste living of the vows. Alphonsus does not hesitate to point out the destructiveness of such friendships to community life nor their potential for sin.

Healthy friendships are a grace and a most important source of our happiness; they are a channel through which emotional and spiritual blessings flow. They are central to a lived spirituality. Conversely, isolation and loneliness can bring the biggest sufferings we endure in community. Friendships bring meaning to life; they support us, motivate us and challenge us to be our best and to do our best.

Constitution 34 echoes these aspects of healthy friendship as giving ‘life to the apostolic community ... and [friendship] maintains and gives growth to the community life of the members’. The Constitution uses the phrase ‘Gospel friendship’ to characterise the kind of relationships we ought to have in community, but it does not give a definition of what this means. Raponi in his notes on the Constitution claims that number 34 ‘recognises in *friendship* (sic) a fundamental element for the development of the person and of the community. Thus, it revives one spiritual dimension, which in recent centuries had become

clouded over in the practices of the spiritual life, even to the point of being seen as suspect' (Raponi p.263 in English edition).

### Friendship as a Metaphor

Alphonsus uses the metaphor of friendship as his primary framework for our relationship with God. He recognises that God is not only friend, but is also lover. These expressions of human love cannot fully capture the power of divine love but are useful references we have from human experience. In a cross-reference of the works of Alphonsus the words 'friend' and 'friendship' are used almost 600 times, almost always in the context of prayer and our relationship with God. His understanding of friendship comes through with especial clarity in his book, *A Way of Conversing Continually with God as with a Friend*. As he says: 'Divine grace is that treasure by which we, lowly creatures and servants, become the dearest friends of the one who made us' (ibid, par 2).

What do we learn about friendship from Alphonsus? First of all, friendship is based on trust. Trust is central to a relationship of friendship. We need to trust another before we will share our lives, thoughts, feelings and frustrations. We need trust to share our deepest secrets without worrying that these will be used against us. Faithfulness and loyalty are key elements of trust; their absence can quickly destroy a friendship.

Second, Alphonsus sees friendship as a relaxed relationship in which I can talk freely about my hurts, hopes and points of view. 'Ask people who love God with a true love and they will tell you that in the troubles of their lives they have found no greater or more genuine relief than in loving conversation with God' (ibid, par. 6). 'Tell [God] everything that happens to you; tell him about all your concerns just as you would to the dearest friend' (ibid, par. 13).

'Whoever loves a friend rejoices in that person's well being as if it were one's own' (ibid, par. 20). Friends rejoice in our successes and comfort us in our failures. In other words, friends exhibit understanding and empathy. In Alphonsus' mind they also suspend judgment and are willing to forgive our mistakes. In the *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, Alphonsus notes the role of kindness in pointing out faults (chapter 6, paragraph 4). A friend is someone who tells you the truth when you need to hear it. In the same book he speaks of the role of mental prayer in self-knowledge (chap 8, paragraph 18). It seems evident that there can be little self-disclosure or acceptance of correction without time spent in knowing yourself.

In closing, we learn from our Redemptorist tradition and lived experience that friendship is a grace. It is a dynamic mutual relationship built on trust, loy-

alty, love and respect. For most of us in community, these friendships grow out of a common sense of purpose. Friendship comes about through action, a shared sense of caring and concern, a desire to see the other grow, and a hope that each will succeed in giving their best to the mission of Jesus Christ.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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T. Edwards: *Spiritual Friend* Paulist NY 1980

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Our Constitutions and Statutes use the phrase ‘Gospel friendship’; what does this phrase mean for you?
2. From your experience of friendship would you call it a grace of community and a grace for ministry?
3. How has friendship been a channel of grace for your spiritual growth?
4. St Alphonsus uses friendship as a metaphor for our relationship with God; does this metaphor help your life of prayer? If so, how?

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## GOVERNMENT

Government of the apostolic community is the complex of structures and policies that regulate the exercise of authority in an institute of consecrated life in service of its *raison d'être* or mission. The Church teaches that there is a great variety of institutes of consecrated life, each of which possesses different gifts according to the grace given to them. At the same time, the Church acknowledges an autonomy of life for each institute by virtue of which it possesses its own governance and discipline.

When speaking of the government of an institute of consecrated life, it is customary to distinguish its *external* government, which recognises the authority of superiors outside of the institute, such as the pope, the Roman Curia or the local bishop, from its *internal* government, which includes the exercise of authority by the Chapters and superiors of the institute itself. The present article will treat exclusively different aspects of the internal government of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

A fundamental assumption of this article is that the government of the Congregation, like its proper community life and the consecration and formation of its members, is really at the service of the mission that has been entrusted to it (cf. Cc. 54; 77). It is also assumed that a proper understanding of the government of the Congregation demands an appreciation of the vow of obedience, by which a Redemptorist accepts not only the role of legitimate authority in accomplishing the mission of the Congregation but also his own obligation to commit all of his personal gifts to that mission. Finally, it must be remembered that the relationship between authority and obedience is situated in the larger context of the mystery of the Church and constitutes a particular actualisation of the function of the Church as mediator of God's will.

### Origins

Over the course of nearly two millennia, a number of factors have influenced the precise form of government assumed by institutes of consecrated life, such as the existing understanding of authority, contemporary models of organisation in civil society and the self-understanding of the Church during a particular period as well as the charism and purpose of the institute itself. A study of these influences would help to explain why our Congregation assumed a highly centralised structure at its birth in middle of the 18th century and maintained this style of government until the middle of the 20th century, and illustrate why Redemptorists chose to alter radically their government under the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council as well

as developments in the social sciences.

### Description

When introducing the government of the Congregation, in the place of clear norms, the Constitutions present general principles, namely, co-responsibility, flexibility, decentralisation, subsidiarity and solidarity (Cc. 92-96). These principles do not exhaust the list of the elements proposed for continuously revitalising the organisation of the Congregation but do, however, represent the touchstone for such renewal (cf. Const. 91). The normative texts of the Congregation – the five chapters of the Constitutions as well as the Directory of Chapters and the Directory of Superiors – depend on these five principles of government.

Several of the principles are clearly rooted in a notion of radical equality among the members (Const. 35) and the manifestation of the Spirit that has been given to each for the good of all (Const. 92). In virtue of this equality and giftedness, all confreres are called to participate in the government of the Congregation, whether or not they are canonical superiors or elected to Chapters. The Congregation is not made up of governors and the governed.

Instead, the gifts of the Spirit that have been bestowed on each member should contribute to the faithfulness of the other members of the local community, Unit and Congregation. In recognition of these gifts and in the hope of enhancing their active role in the mission of the Congregation, the principles of government promote a continuing search for God's will at the local and provincial levels and empower the authority at each level to take decisions in response to such discernment. Hence, a primary responsibility for government at all levels of the Congregation is the discernment of God's will. When assembled in chapters, the members should question the fidelity of their missionary methods (Const. 17) and give continual attention to the renewal and adaptation of the apostolic life and government of the (Vice-) Province (Cc. 123; 133-134). The General Chapter must submit the whole Congregation to a careful examination in order to determine whether it remains faithful to the vocation it has received (c. 108).

Although all contribute to exercise of authority through shared discernment and the execution of what is decided, the superior retains the authority to make decisions according to the norms of canon law and the particular legislation of the Congregation. The government of the Congregation is not envisioned as rule by committee. What is more, since the opposite of government is not freedom but rather paralysis, the failure of discernment and decision inevitably constrains the vitality of the apostolic life.

### Pastoral Application

Among Redemptorists, authority is essentially pastoral by its nature in that it is entirely in service of the mission and the building of fraternal life in community. While in the apostolic life of the Congregation persons in authority are invested with the pastoral task of leading and deciding, the members of government will be able to do so only if they first undertake to seek the will of God with intensity, persistence and humility, so that their acting conforms as much as possible to that holy will (Const. 72). Chapters as well as superiors at all levels need to be sensitive to God, who speaks through His Word as well as through the charismatic inspiration of the Congregation, the voices of the confreres and, especially, the cry of the abandoned poor.

The proper exercise of government in the Congregation demands skills such as dialogue and a contemplative docility to the Holy Spirit, which allows Redemptorists to see God's plan of salvation in its true light and to 'distinguish between what is real and what is illusory' (Const. 24; cf. also Cc. 23, 25).

### Current Manifestations

The present debate in the Congregation regarding its structures touches directly the question of government. For 40 years Redemptorists have been governed by Constitutions that ascribe a high degree of autonomy to the Province and Vice-Province and pay less attention to the maintenance of a creative tension with the general government or to empowering cooperative action among the Units. The movement towards new structures, begun with a decision of the XXI General Chapter in 1991, has gathered momentum because of a growing conviction that new ways of exercising authority are needed in order to respond to the signs of times and places.

Among the developments that drive this search are the challenges posed by new groups of the most abandoned (such as young people or migrants), improved means of communication and the other consequences of globalisation, the appearance of new political models of international and intercultural cooperation, and a diminishment of personnel that threatens the existence of the Congregation in significant areas of the world. It may also be observed in a number of cases that the autonomy of a Province or Vice-Province has in fact contributed to the stagnation of its apostolic life and a division among its members.

Finally, it must be stated that the processes of government as well as the efforts at restructuring are complicated when the confreres lack a common language, that is, when the Constitutions and Statutes are not points of reference for reflection and without influence in decisions.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. To what degree do contemporary models of government or attitudes towards the political process in institutions beyond the Congregation influence the exercise of authority within this religious family?
2. How do you understand the characteristic of a superior as 'pastor'?
3. How have decentralisation and subsidiarity enhanced the apostolic life of Redemptorists? Has the application of these principles also hindered or harmed the apostolic life?
4. What, if any, provision should the governmental structures of the Congregation offer for participation by laity who are associated with the missionary work of the Congregation?

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## HEALING

Saint Alphonsus was the great promoter of the confessor's role as 'physician of souls'. In his days, when confessors often withheld absolution because of Jansenistic rigorism, he never refused absolution to any penitent. He saw, long before we had a theology of the healing power of the sacraments, that confession was for the healing of the inner distress and pain that people suffer, through the sins of others. This inner turmoil often makes a person feel unloved and forsaken by God. Pope Paul VI called this inner pain 'the wound of sin'. In the introduction to the New Rite of Penance, he said that the sacrament of penance was for the healing of that wound. 'Just as the wounds of sin are varied and multiple in the life of individuals and of the community, so too the healing which penance provides is varied.' For the sin itself we need forgiveness; for the multiple wound inflicted by sin we have a healing.

The wound of sin manifests itself in different ways: *self-rejection, self-hatred, poor self-image, guilt or shame*. These manifestations are the contradiction of the gospel of human dignity, the core beliefs that we hold about ourselves. We believe that we are the *image of God, precious in God's sight, temple of the Holy Spirit, God's work of art, body of Christ*. We are invited to live by these words of God; we are asked to form our self-image through these words of God; through these words we are encouraged to accept ourselves as loveable. These core beliefs constitute what Pope John Paul II called 'the inheritance of the heart which is deeper than the sinfulness inherited'. He goes on to say that Christ's words 'reactivate that deepest inheritance and give it real power in human life'.

Forty years before Pope Paul identified the healing of the wound of sin as a grace of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the great father of modern psychology and psychiatry, Carl Jung, was observing this healing at work in the lives of his patients. He wrote: 'There must be something in the cult, in the actual religious practice, which explains that peculiar fact that there are fewer neurotic complexes, or that these complexes manifest themselves much less in Catholic than in other people. That something, besides confession, is really the cult itself. It is the Mass.'

Pope Benedict XVI (in *Spe Salvi*, No, 4) asks us this question: 'Can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart be for us too not just 'informative' but 'performative' – that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses?' The healing ministry encourages us to answer a big Yes to that question.

We pray for healing in two dimensions: firstly *inner healing*, for the hurts and wounds of sin; secondly *physical healing*, for the sickness that burdens the person.

### Inner Healing

Inner healing is an experience of the healing love of God in which the person realises that the self is loveable (*the healing of the self-image*), that he or she can love and forgive (*the healing of relationships*), or that he or she can gratefully integrate some past event into the present (*the healing of memories*). We find wonderful inner healing prayers in the psalms. Prayers such as ‘I thank you for the wonder of my being’ (Ps 139) begin the healing of the self-image. Prayers such as ‘Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless God’s holy name’ (Ps 103) begin the process of the healing of memories. We are invited to bless God with ‘all that is within us’, with everything that has ever happened to us in our whole life. That grace of gratitude, freeing the person of regret and self pity, brings a wonderful inner peace. As C.S. Lewis said: ‘Praise is inner health made audible.’

### Physical healing

Praying for physical healing is both a sacramental and a non-sacramental ministry. In the Anointing of the Sick we pray: ‘Heal his sickness and forgive his sins; expel all afflictions of mind and body; mercifully restore him to full health, and enable him to resume his former duties.’ In every Mass we pray several times for health of mind and body. In the sacrament of Reconciliation we expect ‘the healing of the wound of sin’. Can we really pray for ‘health in mind and body’ in the Mass if we don’t believe in our heart that God wants to grant us this gift?

How often people ask us for a blessing! A gentle imposition of hands on the person, with a simple, spontaneous prayer like, ‘Lord Jesus, come to your sister now in your healing Spirit and let her experience your saving love in mind and body’, can transform a person. Those prayed with in this kind of way, even over the phone, tell you that there is truly a great difference between knowing that someone is praying for them at a distance, and ‘being prayed with’ in this way. And some will tell you how they were healed from some sickness or delivered from some heavy burden through those simple prayers.

### Plentiful Redemption

Fr Bernard Häring called for ‘a new holistic synthesis of sharing the good news and healing the sick, in faithfulness to the example and mandate of the Lord’.

Redemptorists, in many parts of the world, have been developing this synthesis, especially by conducting Healing Services based on the word of God, that give people an experience of ‘plentiful redemption’ in every area of their lives. Redemptorist preaching is never simply ‘informative’. It always seeks to be ‘performative’ and, indeed, ‘transformative’. To achieve that we have to develop the healing dimension of our preaching.

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### **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION**

The ‘divine principle’ of healing is to ‘live by every word that comes from the mouth of God’. Teaching people how to do that will ensure that our preaching is not only ‘informative’ but also ‘performative’. How do you integrate the ministry of healing in your overall approach to your Redemptorist mission?

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## HOFBAUER (ST CLEMENT)

Clement Maria Hofbauer was born Johannes ‘Hans’ Hofbauer on 26 December 1751 at Tasswitz, in southern Moravia (Tasswitz is now known as Tasovice nad Dyjí in the Czech Republic), to a Bohemian-German family of devout Catholic faith.

The ninth of 12 children, he was not yet seven years old when his father died. He learnt the baker’s trade at Znaim, a small town near Tasswitz. Then he worked in the Premonstratensian monastery at Kloster Brück (now Znojmo), where he could also attend school. For some time, he lived as a hermit near his own town, and then at Quintiliolo, close to Tivoli, near Rome. He attended courses in philosophy and theology at the Vienna University. In 1784, he entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in Rome, taking the religious name Clement. On 19 March 1785, he made his religious profession and he was ordained probably ten days later, on 29 March. He spent some months in Frosinone, where he completed his theological instruction. In autumn 1785 he and his compatriot Thaddeus Hübl were sent north to attempt a new foundation of the Congregation beyond the Alps.

In February 1787, Clement arrived at Warsaw and began his apostolate in a little church dedicated to St Benno, on the banks of the Vistula. He soon transformed the church, which had been almost abandoned, into a lively centre of pastoral activity. He instituted a kind of ‘perpetual mission’ with daily public celebration of the Eucharist (in Polish, German and sometimes French), the celebration of the sacraments and many devotional practices. He promoted an ambience in which to worship solemnly, attaching a great value to liturgical music and singing. In the midst of political upheaval, the church was always well maintained and decorated with flowers, liturgical vestments and furnishings were of good quality, and everything was well prepared. Clement also began a novitiate and an international study house, and proceeded to found the first houses of the Congregation in southern Germany and Switzerland.

Since he himself was orphaned of his father, he was very sensitive to the problems of children and youth. To that end, he opened a school and an orphanage. Moved by a practical sense, he sought the active collaboration of the laity, and so founded the Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer, for the defence of the faith and customs, and in particular for the dissemination of good books. He also established a Congregation of Sisters, at once contemplative and active, entrusting to them the education of the youth, and assistance to the poor and the sick.

After his group of Redemptorists was expelled from Warsaw in 1808, on the

orders of Napoleon, Clement moved to Vienna, where he worked first in the Italian National Church (of the Friar Minors), and then, in 1813, as confessor to the Ursuline Sisters and a preacher in their church. Under his direction, the church of the Ursuline convent became the hub of religious life in Vienna. It became a centre of the reform of sacred preaching in the Austrian capital. Clement frequently repeated the maxim: 'Preach the Gospel anew'. Clement considered helping the dying and the poor to be an important part of the priestly ministry. He also developed an intense personal apostolate, above all to students and professors. He frequented the cultured milieu of the city, in particular the 'Romantic Circle' of Vienna, which included famous writers, politicians, professors, priests, and so on.

The important characteristics of Clement's spirituality were his unshakable faith in God and total trust in Divine Providence, a spirit of prayer and contemplation, deep devotion to Mary, fidelity to the Church and the Pope, and love for the Founder and the Congregation of Redemptorists. Speaking of faith, he would affirm: 'For my part, I do not know how to conceive that it is possible to live without faith: a person without faith resembles a fish which has been taken out of its natural environment'. Another time, he declared: 'Of course, I am a great sinner, a miserable man, yet I possess a treasure that God has given me, the treasure of faith, a faith so strong that I would never exchange it for anything else. I am a Catholic from head to toe.' He often thanked God for the gift of his faith and religious vocation: 'My God, I thank you for my holy baptism, for my vocation to the true Catholic faith, for my vocation and religious state, and I pray that you will permit me to live and die in your grace'.

Clement's love for the Church and the Pope was deeply rooted. When preaching, he often said: 'Whoever does not honour the Holy Father, does not even honour the Holy Church, our Mother. He who does not pray for his parents is a perverse child, and he who does not pray for the Holy Father is a bad Christian.'

Clement died on 15 March 1820 and was buried in the Romantic cemetery in Maria Enzersdorf, close to Vienna. His tombstone simply said: '*Fidelis servus et prudens*' (Faithful and wise servant). In 1862, his mortal remains were transferred to the Redemptorist church at Maria Stiegen in Vienna.

He was canonised by Pius X on 20 May 1909. In 1913, he was proclaimed patron of bakers and in 1914 the secondary patron of Vienna.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Clement was moved by an immense pastoral passion and tried new ways of ministering, but it was all motivated by a genuine love for the neighbour, above all for the poorest and abandoned. What does he teach us by the example of his life and how can his apostolic method help us to promote 'apostolic charity' in our communities and in our Congregation?
2. Clement was very devoted to St Alphonsus and was a tireless propagator of the Congregation, to which he brought a spirit of universality. What does it mean to be a Redemptorist according to the spirit of St Clement?
3. How well do we know the history of the Congregation, and the life of our saints and beati?

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## HOLINESS

The *New Dictionary of Spirituality* defines holiness as ‘the state of being set apart for religious purposes or being consecrated for God’ (479), while the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* calls it ‘the state or character a thing has by being set apart and especially dedicated to God’ (Vol. 7, 51).

The work of Rudolf Otto has made clear that holiness belongs first and by nature to God, the wholly other. Only God is truly holy; holiness is the very personal nature of God. Persons or things, on the other hand, are called holy because they are close to or touched by God. God is holy; whereas persons or things *become* holy. Hence there is both an ‘ontological’ and an ‘ethical’ aspect to holiness. Any holiness in creatures, especially human persons, is a sharing in the divine, which suggests that our holiness is first God’s gift of divine communion. For our part, we can/must open or dispose ourselves to receive this gift. That is what is meant by the traditional expression ‘to attain holiness’.

### Christian Holiness

God, the Holy One, is the ultimate source of all holiness; and God draws people by grace into his own life. To be holy is to be in relationship with God, whose agents are Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Christian teaching presents Jesus as the model of holiness, so Christian holiness is Christ-centred.

Jesus, as God, is ‘other’, apart from the world; but as the incarnate word of God, Jesus is in the world. Christian holiness, then, always holds apparent opposites in tension: in the world – not of the world; flee the world – serve the world; contemplation – action, etc. Synonyms for holiness in Christian and Catholic writing are *sanctity* and *perfection*.

The spiritual writings of Alphonsus Liguori, which shape the Redemptorist attitude and approach to holiness, focus on the more practical or ‘ethical’ aspect of holiness. St Alphonsus does not engage in a lot of theoretical speculation about the meaning of holiness; rather, he is more concerned about people actually becoming holy or growing in perfection in their daily lives.

The Alphonsian approach to holiness is also extremely Christ centered. Even when he begins a paragraph talking about the Father, by the end of the paragraph Alphonsus is often talking about Jesus; and as might be expected in the era in which he lived, Alphonsus seldom refers to the Holy Spirit. References to the Trinity are also rare in the writings of St Alphonsus.

Perhaps the first thing to emphasise regarding St Alphonsus (and Redemp-

torists) when it comes to holiness is the conviction that *all* are called to holiness. Despite the prevailing attitude in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Alphonsus Liguori never considered holiness/perfection to be the preserve of clergy or religious. St Francis de Sales had already taught that holiness can be attained in the secular world; St Alphonsus strengthened that teaching by his insistence that every Christian is called to perfection. Furthermore, Alphonsus was convinced that God provides every person with the necessary means to salvation and perfection.

In the view of Alphonsus, the demands of the Gospel are incumbent upon all Christians, and these demands do not need to be watered down for ordinary people. This was two hundred years before the Second Vatican Council proclaimed: 'It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love' (*Lumen Gentium* 40). Redemptorist tradition holds that holiness is within the grasp of every human being; however, it will have a different flavour or shape depending on one's state in life and the working of God's grace in each person (See *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, ch 8, par 10).

Holiness is the goal of the Christian life, and St Alphonsus writes in *Conformity to the Will of God*: 'Our whole perfection consists in loving God who is so deserving of our love... The perfection of the love of God consists in uniting our will with his most holy will.' Fifteen years later he stated more simply in *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*: 'The sanctity and perfection of a soul consists entirely in loving Jesus Christ, our God, our sovereign good and our Redeemer' (ch 1, par 1; Heinegg translation).

Manders summarises the argumentation of St Alphonsus this way: 'Our perfection consists in union with God; union with God comes about through love; hence perfection is to be found in love. One of the demands of our love for God is submission to the will of God' ('Love in the Spirituality of St Alphonsus', in *Readings in Redemptorist Spirituality*, vol 2, pp 31-32).

Holiness consists in love, and in the view of Alphonsus, the real act of love is the gift of self whereby the lover becomes one with the beloved, merges into the beloved. 'Without the assurance of faith,' asks Alphonsus, 'could anyone ever have believed that an omnipotent God, Lord of all and supremely happy in himself, was capable of loving human beings to the extent of appearing to be out of his mind with love for them?' (*Practice*, ch 1, par 11- McConvery translation). Love is about belonging to the other. For God that means the Incarnation – becoming one of us; for us it means giving ourselves totally to God by the gift of free will. 'In the renunciation of the free use of our will



the total availability of our person for God is already contained' (Manders, 36). For Alphonsus love seems to be mostly about 'being possessed', belonging to the beloved. Hence holiness is about being possessed by God, belonging to God.

Holiness is actually a circle of love whereby God first loves us, gives himself to us; and we respond in kind by loving in return, surrendering ourselves to God. Alphonsus sees God's surrender to us not only in the Incarnation and on the Cross, but primarily in the Eucharist where there is a mutual indwelling of the Christian and the Son of God and where Jesus allows himself to be possessed by us. Alphonsus even speaks of our becoming by grace what Jesus is by nature:

'[Jesus] was not able to satisfy his love by giving himself to the human race through his Incarnation and Passion... He instituted the Sacrament of the Altar in order to be united with us... St John Chrysostom says that it was out of his great love for us that Jesus Christ wished to unite himself to us so much in order that *we might become the same thing as he is*' (Practice, ch 2, par 8).

So one of the primary means by which we become holy (i.e. united with God by love) is the Eucharist. Building on the desire for perfection and the resolution to attain it, other means of attaining holiness are prayer, asceticism, and the imitation of Christ. For Alphonsus 'imitation of Christ' (a term which appears less and less as Alphonsus' spiritual writings progress) means primarily loving Christ in return and giving back what Christ first gave us. 'Thus we do the same as Christ did. We do not do this, however, so as to be like him, but in order to give back to him what he gave to us' (Manders, 47).

Asceticism refers to all those practices that help a person become detached from creatures so that one can surrender completely to God and be in union with God. The word Alphonsus most often used, and that thanks to him became common Italian, is *il distacco*. Detachment is necessary in our growth in holiness because 'as soon as the created gets its foothold in our heart...it demands part of our surrender; whereas perfect love asks for total surrender to the beloved' who is God (Manders, 56).

'In this is love, not that we love God, but that God loved us and sent the Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another' (1 John 4:10-11). Holiness is a matter of returning love for love. The Christian's desire for holiness is awakened when the imagination is fired by the example of Jesus Christ. As St Alphonsus and Redemptorists see it, holiness is mutual love focused on Jesus Christ the Redeemer in whom God has given himself to us. Christian holiness strives for

perfect surrender to God, especially Jesus Christ, in a return of love that results in belonging totally to the beloved. Mutual surrender brings about the union with God which love strives for and which is Christian holiness.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

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DeLiguori, Alphonsus: *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*

Manders, H. C.Ss.R.: 'Love in the Spirituality of Saint Alphonsus' in *Readings in Redemptorist Spirituality*, Vol 2, pp 21-71

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In the spirituality of St Alphonsus, what is the essence of holiness/perfection?
2. What does it mean to say that Alphonsus emphasises the 'ethical' rather than the 'ontological' dimension of holiness?
3. Does the teaching of St Alphonsus on holiness have anything in common with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council?
4. The title of chapter 8 of *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* says: 'The means of perfection are: (1) desire; (2) resolution; (3) mental prayer; (4) holy communion; and (5) prayer of petition.' Comment!
5. How might the approach taken by St Alphonsus to holiness/perfection be incorporated in Redemptorist preaching?

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## HOPE

In his *Words of Spirituality* Enzo Bianchi asks some probing questions of the Church in the context of hope. We could ask the same questions of our Congregation:

Is the *Congregation* able to open up vistas of meaning?

Does the *Congregation* know how to let its hope for the coming of the kingdom be the source of its life?

Does the *Congregation* know to give hope to personal lives, and show that it is worth living and dying for Christ?

Is the *Congregation* able to call people to a life that is filled with beauty, happiness and meaning because it is filled with hope, as was the life of Jesus of Nazareth?

The question of hope is particularly critical in the context of despair. The history of hope shows vividly how hope and despair shadow one another. Movements which gave birth to great hopes are often followed by waves of despair as those hopes are dashed. The Enlightenment raised great hopes of human progress through reason unfettered by religion. Political revolutions were often followed by tyrannies, economic revolutions. Even religious renewals which generated high hopes for radical change and improvement often run into the ground.

Many would describe our time as an age of despair. Political instability and more recently global economic collapse only reinforce the sense of hopelessness against insuperable odds. Something of this despondency can seep into the Church. The shocking child-abuse scandals often weaken our fragile grasp on the world of faith, hope and charity. In the Congregation the advancing years of many confreres coupled with decline in numbers of new members helps to generate, if not despair, at least a discouragement or dejection among many. Hence the pertinence of Bianchi's questions.

In our Judeo-Christian tradition hope has never been just a virtue. Hope is constitutive of our tradition. Everything in our relationship with God is shot through with hope: the Exodus, the Covenant, the Land, and the Promise. The first Testament looks to the future in hope; it prepares for the definitive Testament. The New Covenant in Jesus is both fulfilment and anticipation of the hope of Israel. New Testament hope is both realised and yet still to come. The kingdom is here and the kingdom is coming.

A feature of medieval thinking was the analytical interest in hope. Aquinas' careful investigation into the nature of hope helped to clarify the essential meaning of hope: the orientation to God as future. But while theologians charted the nature, the subject, the object and the goals of hope, popular religion was often more captivated by fear and dread.

Influenced by the individualism that crept into the Church after the Reformation and during the Enlightenment, popular preaching was often more concerned with the graphic details of the minutiae of the Last Things than with the joyful hope in the glory of the Parousia. The beauty of hope faded from Christian awareness just at a time it was most needed. The work of theologians like Moltmann, Metz, Rahner, Segundo and others has helped to retrieve the critical importance of hope.

The Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* tried to hold the balance between hope and anguish and to offer to humanity a vision of a world in the process of being redeemed. In a situation hovering between hope and anxiety other significant heralds of Christian hope were Medellin (1967) and Aparecida (2009).

The recovery of hope has to involve a tough examination of where hope is placed. The psalmist reminds us:

*Do not put your trust in princes,  
In mortals, in whom there is no help...  
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob  
Whose hope is in the Lord their God (Psalm 146:3,5)*

We may have learned not to put our hope in political princes or economic princes; but what about 'princes of the Church'? We may have learned not to put our trust in governments or secular agencies, but what about Church bodies? We may have learned to eschew ideologies and not to put our hope in the latest trend, but what about our own structures? What might be called 'tough hope' is hope which is focussed entirely in God.

For Christians hope has a human face: the face of Jesus. Writing to Timothy, Paul describes himself as an 'apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of our God and saviour, and of *Jesus Christ our hope*' (1 Tim 1:1). Jesus is our hope not only in the sense that we await his return in glory, but that in him is all our future, our glory and our peace. Total reliance on Jesus becomes an everyday attitude (virtue) and the implicit underpinning of all that we are and do.

It is this implicit infrastructure of the Christian life that gave St Alphonsus such confidence and trust in all that he said and did for the sake of the kingdom. In his *Preparation for Death* Alphonsus wrote: ‘Jesus crucified truly is the hope of all Christians for if we did not have Jesus we could not expect salvation.’

Towards the end of his encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI proposes three settings for learning and practicing hope. Perhaps our Congregation, particular Units and indeed individual confreres, could profit from examining our settings for growing in hope.

The first setting in which hope is learned is prayer. In our Constitutions, faith, hope and charity are linked (Const. 20) to a life of persevering prayer. To pray is to hope. If we lose our prayer tradition we can hardly expect to grow in hope. We could adapt the legendary saying of Alphonsus on prayer to read ‘the community that prays will grow in hope, the community that does not pray will lose hope’.

The second setting for growth in hope is ‘action and suffering’. To preach the Gospel, especially to those in greatest need, is surely hope in action. The courage to proclaim the good news, in season and out, welcome or unwelcome, is born of passionate hope and love. Our ministry to the poor and most abandoned gives witness to the hope that is within us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15); we are called (Const. 43) to be ‘a living witness of hope’, like a leaven in the world and a ‘sign of hope’ (Const. 65) to the poor. It is interesting that in his treatise on the monthly virtues Fr Mouton proposes *distacco* as the first condition of a life of hope: if we are to put all our trust in God, then we must have an inner freedom from all other sources of confidence. Sacrifice and suffering are the mark of those whose only hope is the Lord.

Finally Pope Benedict XVI proposes ‘judgment’ as a setting for learning and practising hope. The pope is referring to the mystery of Christ’s coming in glory ‘to judge the living and the dead’. As Redemptorists we have experienced the fading of any sense of the last judgment as issues around the mystery of the Last Times were quietly eased out of our preaching and conscious spirituality. But Benedict boldly proclaims that ‘the judgment of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace’. Our world needs both. We need justice in the face of the evils which so easily prompt us to despair; we need grace to ‘serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days’ (Lk 1:75). A return to the richness and fullness of redemption in preaching the Parousia will strengthen the Congregation in holiness and justice.

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## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. What does it mean to put all one's hope and trust in God?
2. What has happened to the 'Spes' of '*Gaudium et Spes*'?
3. How is restructuring our Congregation an example of hope in action?

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## ICON OF OF PERPETUAL HELP

The icon of the Immaculate Mother of God, ‘Virgin of the Passion’, venerated at present in the church of the Most Holy Redeemer and St Alphonsus in Rome, is of Cretan origin.

It was first exposed for public veneration from 1499 to 1798 in the church of St Matthew Apostle, served by the Augustinian friars. When that church was destroyed in 1798, the icon was transferred to the church of St Eusebius (1798-1819), and from there to the church of Santa Maria in Posterula, also served by the Augustinians. There it was relatively forgotten until 19 January 1866. On that day, by the personal wish of Pope Pius IX, it was handed over to the Redemptorists to be once again venerated in the church on Via Merulana. The icon was installed on 26 April 1866, marking the beginning of a new Marian devotion. As the icon grew in importance for the Redemptorists, it also marked the life of the Congregation in such a way that it would be difficult to write our history from that day on without including ‘our icon’.

The title ‘perpetual help’ arose from the devotion of so many who in the sufferings and difficulties of life sought and found Mary’s maternal and un-failing help in the context of prayer before the icon. The icon seems to draw those who contemplate it into a healing relationship with Mary. This is what is reflected in all the icons in which Mary expresses the love with which God loves us in his Son. For when Jesus, filled with fear, seeks refuge in the arms of his Mother, he discovers also in her a manifestation of the depth of the love the Father had for him. When we pray with our icon, we implore the perpetual help of Jesus and Mary as the supreme manifestation of God’s love.

### A True Icon of the Mother Of God

Since the beginning of the devotion to it in Rome, our icon has been considered a miraculous image – and this aspect has tended to obscure its spiritual riches as an icon. As the value of icons was being re-discovered, so we began to appreciate the treasure we had received.

The original icon, according to tradition and its artistic traits, came from the island of Crete (previously called Candia). Its artistic origin is related to the emigration of iconographers from Constantinople who took refuge in Crete as they fled the Turks and put themselves under the protection of Venice. It was from Crete that this type of post-Byzantine religious image was spread

throughout the Christian world, thus arriving at Venice, Rome, Madrid, Toledo, and so on.

Thus the transfer of the icon to Rome might have had a ‘commercial’ dimension, which would make us read more critically the pious stories about the icon that emerged during the 16th and 17th centuries. But what we should not forget is the icon’s post-Byzantine legacy. The school of Andreas Ritzos de Candía (died 1492), our icon (1499) and the iconography of El Greco (1540-1614), who began painting icons along the lines of this school, could serve as three emerging points for a reflection that would allow us to integrate this humble icon within the history of art. The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help has undoubtedly made an important contribution to iconography, spirituality and religious culture.

### Space For Prayer

The icon became a fundamental element in the Redemptorist vocation, especially through the popular missions. The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help gradually became the centre of extraordinary prayer to Mary during the mission. The Redemptorist Archconfraternity (founded on 31 March 1876) became a Christian association called on to solidify the pastoral results of the Congregation’s mission. This explains the presence of the image, the devotion and the Archconfraternity in many churches and chapels as a ‘remembrance’ of the mission. Wherever we preached, we highlighted the importance of the triduum, novenas and processions to honour Our Lady of Perpetual Help as instruments to periodically renew the fruits of the mission.

This universal diffusion has also created a particular prayer space defined by altars that have been erected in shrines, country chapels, ‘house chapels’, altar niches, and by the many expressions of popular piety (pictures, holy cards, medals, etc.). The appropriate place for the veneration of the ancient icons was on the liturgical iconostasis. The icon of Perpetual Help can be found on altars, processional banners, in chapels and homes, etc.

The personal creativity of artists, without eliminating the basic symbols found in the original icon, have adapted it to the aesthetics of each age, style, school or region, sometimes ignoring the aesthetic language appropriate to icons.

The *missionary icon* has been spread throughout the world both with faithful copies of the original and also with artistic interpretations of the icon in diverse forms and styles. Nevertheless all these reproductions bring us back



to the title and the *original iconographical symbolism* with the special theology and spirituality proper to icons.

### Symbolism And Significance

Our icon belongs to the line of ‘Virgin of the Passion’. The Archangel Gabriel (on the icon’s right) is the angel of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) and the Archangel Michael (on the left) is the protector of Mary and God’s People (Dan 12:1). Both are showing the instruments of the Passion to Christ. But in our icon, there are references to the icons of the Anástasis, or the resurrection, in which Christ descends to the depths to redeem humanity and raise it up with himself in his ascension to the Father.

According to the interpretation of the iconographers, this announcement or foreboding of the Passion also contains the paschal attitude of the archangels. This allows us to see in our icon the ‘Icon of the Angelus’ and the ‘Icon of Laetare’ or of the paschal antiphon ‘*Regina Coeli, laetare, alleluia*’. Mary, the Mother of God (*Meter Theou*), the Amóluntos or Immaculate, holds Christ and looks at whoever contemplates her. On her forehead there are the stars of the Trinity (on the left) and the star of the Nativity (on the right). Jesus Christ (*Iesous Xristos*) looks toward the horizon, contemplating the announcement of his sorrowful passion in the glorious light of the Pasch, his resurrection preceded by the descent to the place of the dead, and frightened, he seeks the maternal help of Mary.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Take a copy of the icon – as faithful a copy of the original possible – and comment in the group on the distinctive elements and what the gestures of Jesus and Mary suggest to you.
2. Comment on the images of Our Lady of Perpetual Help that you have seen in different places. In what are they similar and in what do they differ? How do you believe they strengthen the faith of the persons who venerate them in such distinct contexts?

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## INCARNATION

The word Incarnation as such does not appear in the New Testament, although there are references to its components: *in* and *carne*. With this term we normally refer to the mystery of the Word Made Flesh, and it is to this central element of our faith that we refer in this article. But the word Incarnation can also have a meaning derived from this mystery when we speak of being incarnated in a reality, for example, to live among the poor or to incarnate the Gospel in a culture (inculturation).

### Origin

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the focus in the theology of redemption was placed above all on the passion and death of the Lord. Thus it is interesting that St Alphonsus, besides his books on the Passion, also has a series of writings about the Incarnation, and that he directly connects the meaning of the crib with what is celebrated on Calvary. Moreover, the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection and Eucharist are presented as links of the same chain, or better, as dimensions of the one Christian mystery: the saving nearness of God in his Son, Jesus Christ.

It is helpful to note that in the history of the Congregation, the emphasis given to the mystery of the Incarnation shows up in a dual way: in its devotional practices and in meditations and prayers. The pious practices and devotions were to place a statue of the newborn Jesus as ‘presider’ at table, to celebrate in a special way the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month during the novitiate, and to renew our religious vows on Christmas Eve. Then there were the poems and holy cards that St Alphonsus published, the story of the Child Jesus getting the keys out of the well for St Gerard, and many other edifying stories. The other element of the Incarnation tradition refers to the practice of daily meditation on this mystery during Advent and Christmas, and the importance given to their respective liturgies (note the enthusiasm with which St Clement explained to the people the meaning of the three Christmas Masses).

The Incarnation has always had a basic dimension in the devotional, liturgical and spiritual reflections of the Redemptorists.

### Description

The Incarnation is the intense stage of revelation in which the ‘Word’ becomes ‘flesh’ and ‘yeast for the world’ (St Athanasius). In this way God reveals to us what he is and what he has desired from the cosmos and from human beings, since his Son ‘for us and for our salvation was conceived by the Virgin Mary and

was made man’.

If there is something distinctive about the Redemptorist tradition with regards to the Incarnation, it is the conviction that the Son of God came into the world out of love and to win the love of humankind. This principle, which precedes the idea that the Incarnation reestablished the order broken by sin, is clear in the spirituality of Celeste Crostarosa and of St Alphonsus.

### Pastoral Application

Communicanda I (*Spirituality: Our Greatest Challenge*, 1998) affirms that ‘our spirituality is based on the theology of the Incarnation’ (no. 4). This is why the mystery of the Incarnation and the spirituality that flows from it orients the Redemptorist to live his life and mission from the perspective of a God who loves humankind. The abundant redemption that is announced is not a payment of debt but rather the most sublime expression of God’s self-giving love made a reality in the gift of the Son. This love encompasses all humanity and creation. Due to this reality, the mission of the Redemptorist does not begin with the truths he carries but with the humility with which he approaches others, trying to ‘encounter the Lord where he is already present and acting in a mysterious way’ (Const. 7).

For the Redemptorists who work in difficult missions, in the context of poverty, marginalisation or violence, in different cultures than their own, the Incarnation of Christ is the prototype of life and pastoral work, planned and carried out from the viewpoint of this new context.

Incarnation also requires that the Redemptorist does not separate that which God has joined, that is to say, the human and the divine. His spirituality cannot be ethereal or disincarnate, nor can his pastoral work be without soul and prayer; the option for the poor can not separate him from the option for Christ, and the option for Christ can not happen outside the realities and conflicts of history.

### Radical Option

For those that dedicate themselves with fervour to the study of Moral Theology (as professors or confessors), the Incarnation reminds them that the Christ event is unique and primordial and that the task of the Redemptorist consists in ‘bringing people to a radical option for Christ’ (Const. 11), since ‘only the mystery of the Word Incarnate throws true light on the mystery of humanity and on the full reality of its calling’ (Const. 19; cf. GS 22).

‘In all the attempts to Christianise the world that surrounds us, it is clear that the spirit of charity and the liberty of the children of God should be undividedly

united, and that in a certain way, they are the prolongation in the world of the Incarnation of the Divine Word. In the same way that Christ came to serve, so too, the true sovereignty of the Christian over creation is verified only when the individual is interiorly freed from egoism' (B Häring, *Christian In the Modern World*, Herder, 1964).

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. St Paul says that 'when the fullness of time arrived, God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law... so that we would become sons by adoption' (Gal 4:4). What meaning does the Incarnation have as the fullness of time?
2. God is eternal. How are we to understand, that through the Incarnation, time becomes a dimension of God?
3. The Son of God becomes the son of a woman. In what way does the maternity of Mary guarantee the reality of the Incarnation?
4. How can we explain to the People of God that the Incarnation is our official document of adoption?

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## INCULTURATION

**E**vangelisation and inculturation are related in a natural and very close manner. The Gospel is announced to people in concrete situations and cultures. There is a mutual interaction between the Gospel and the personal and social life of the people. For this reason ‘all evangelisation has to be an inculturation of the Gospel’, says the Document of Santo Domingo (1992, no. 13).

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* says: ‘Evangelisation loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelisation risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it’ (no 63).

### Definition

It is important to distinguish between ‘acculturation’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘inculturation’. ‘*Acculturation*’ describes a process of changes that happen in a person or a group when in contact with a new culture. Those who seek to acculturate themselves make an effort to assimilate the lifestyle, eating habits, language and behaviour of the new culture. This may represent a first step towards inculturation. ‘*Adaptation*’ is similar to ‘acculturation’, but more sketchy and shallow. It expresses some form of adjustment, more or less external, to the new culture on the part of the evangeliser, in such a way that this message will be better understood and accepted by the people. ‘*Inculturation*’ is a more intricate process.

The term ‘inculturation’ comes from cultural anthropology. It was used for the first time in a theological sense in 1959 by Fr Joseph Masson SJ. Later in 1962, he spoke of the need for ‘inculturated Christianity’. After Vatican II, words like ‘adaptation’, ‘accommodation’, ‘incarnation’, ‘contextualisation’ and ‘indigenisation’ were used alongside ‘acculturation’ and ‘inculturation’ to indicate the relationship between evangelisation and cultures. In 1974, for the first time in an official ecclesial meeting, the Asian Bishops used the word ‘inculturation’ during a plenary assembly. Following the Synod of Bishops in 1977, it was more frequently used.

‘Inculturation’ indicates the process of evangelisation by which the message of the Gospel is welcomed by a people and it is understood, assimilated, interiorised, and expressed in forms proper to their culture. It is a dialogue between

the Gospel and a particular culture which happens in a continuous process of interaction, reciprocal assimilation and mutual critique. This process produces a transformation and enriches both the local culture and the faith experience. The Gospel needs to be inculturated in all societies and cultures. Thus the message of the inculturated Gospel becomes a living force which inspires, unifies, renews, and transforms the culture from within.

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) makes a very clear option for inculturation: ‘As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church’s pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent... at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith. Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community’ (52).

Inculturation is a demand and consequence of the mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation of the Word is the theological foundation for Inculturation and is also the model or paradigm for the process of inculturated evangelisation. Jesus Christ enters the historical and socio-cultural conditions of human reality. He lives and expresses himself in a concrete culture. The fullness of redemption begins with the Incarnation. The analogy between the Incarnation and the Christian presence in a particular socio-cultural and historical context inspires and favours the model of inculturation in evangelisation.

### The Redemptorists: ‘Adaptation’ and ‘Acculturation’ in mission

We Redemptorists are missionaries sent to ‘follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor, as he declared of himself: “He sent me to preach the good news to the poor”’. We are sent to accomplish an inculturated evangelisation and to inculturate the ‘Redemptorist *vita apostolica*’ among the different nations and cultures, thus promoting the inculturation of the Gospel and the Christian faith.

This mission embraces many different aspects of the Christian life. It involves not only the missionary, his lifestyle and his witness, but also the language and symbols he uses, liturgy, catechesis, ethical and moral reflection, formation of Christian communities, and structures ecclesial organisation.

In the history of the Congregation, Redemptorists have responded to the pastoral and social needs of people. They did it with a ‘missionary dynamism’ and ‘pastoral charity’. St Clement Hofbauer was a very significant example.

Following the Redemptorist charism, he responded with creative fidelity, adjusting his missionary endeavours and adapting himself to the social reality in cultures new to him. We can say the same about St John Neumann, Bl Francis Seelos, Peter Donders, Gennaro Sarnelli and many others. They did not hesitate to find solutions to new missionary situations, ‘acculturating’ and ‘adapting’ themselves to respond to the new realities.

A principle which oriented the mission of St Alphonsus, was his ‘understanding of the Redeemer as the compassion of God that expresses itself in kenosis’ (Communicanda 2, 2006, n. 14). This principle has guided Redemptorist confreres in every continent. Nonetheless, inculturation of the ‘Redemptorist *vita apostolica*’ remains a challenge.

Our Constitutions and Statutes do not use the word ‘inculturation’. They speak of ‘missionary dynamism’, ‘pastoral charity’, ‘bold initiatives and whole-hearted dedication’ and ‘missionary availability’. They demand fidelity to the charism and they speak specially of ‘adaptation’ (13,17,18,45,90,96, 107) and other concepts such as ‘appreciation’, ‘evolution’, ‘integration’. They foster constant renewal, so that the Congregation ‘develops and adapts the form of its missionary activity’ (Const. 13). Further, ‘the Congregation must adapt its own structure and institutions to its apostolic needs, and adjust them properly to the different character of each particular mission’ (Const. 96). Our norms ‘must of their nature be adaptable to the requirements of the missionary work. They should be capable of being modified, too, according to what the Church, circumstances of time and place, and the particular culture and character of a nation require’ (Const. 45).

General Statute 011c stresses the importance of our missionaries learning the language, culture and religion of those to whom they are sent. We are to give the Congregation a local face.

### Inculturated Evangelisation

Various Congregational documents refer to the need for an ‘inculturated evangelisation’. They affirm the need for ‘solidarity’ and ‘dialogue’ with cultures and with the poor and most abandoned. The Final Document of the XXI General Chapter (1991) treated the theme of ‘inculturated evangelisation’ in a more direct and focused manner (cf. Chapter 4, nn13-21). It says: ‘In order to make our mission present (‘incarnate’) in history, we need to submit it continually to a process of inculturation’ and ‘inculturation has for us a special shade of meaning: we are called to read the Gospel here and now from the perspective of the abandoned, especially the poor’ (n. 13).



The Redemptorist missionary has to undertake a process of *kenosis* in the Pauline sense of being ‘all things to all people’, incarnating himself in his adopted country. This is also true for one’s own country, especially where there is a plurality of cultures (n. 15).

As Redemptorists we are called to a special sensitivity to and support for a culture of life in opposition to the many threats of death, for a culture of freedom in opposition to the abuse of power, for a culture of justice in opposition to the egoism of nations and individuals, and for a culture of solidarity in opposition to the lack of social responsibility (cf. nn. 18-19). In addition, ‘opting for inculturated evangelisation also makes clear the direction for our moral theological reflection, since Christian discernment of culture is in great part the task of such reflection. Moreover, this reflection constitutes part of our Alphonsonian and Redemptorist tradition’ (n.20).

The model of inculturation demands new attitudes and practices. It is an ongoing process because culture is a dynamic reality in constant evolution. Inculturation must be liberating. Christian faith affirms the value of the local culture, but also critiques it. The faith is not imprisoned in any one culture. The Gospel, inculturated in different cultures, produces new expressions of Christianity, fosters an authentic pluralism, strengthens communion and the catholicity of the Church. Inculturation is a responsibility of the local community and the evangelisers. But it cannot be so localised that this expression of faith becomes unrecognised by others within the ecclesial communion. An authentic inculturation is the work of the Holy Spirit.

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Varios. *El Cristianismo y las culturas: ¿un mutuo enriquecimiento?* (Revista Concilium, n. 251, año 1994).

### Church Documents

Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (John Paul II, 1990).

Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (John Paul II, 1979).

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975).

Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium Et Spes* (1965)

In Latin América, the documents of Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) and Aparecida (2007).

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What are the practical consequences of ‘inculturation’ for Redemptorists?
2. What are the conditions that facilitate and favour the process of inculturation?
3. What can be done concretely by a confrere, and a local community to promote inculturation?
4. How can we support inculturation of the Redemptorist *vita apostolica* in different realities and cultures?

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## INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

From ancient times, different peoples of different parts of the world adhered to different religions. Although the Church has always acknowledged the diversity of religions, it was only at the Second Vatican Council that this diversity was recognised as part of reality with which the Church needs to enter into dialogue rather than eradicating that diversity. Thanks to the contemporary phenomena of globalisation and mass migrations, many societies in which we live today are multi-religious, wherein to be religious is to be interreligious. This multi-religious milieu demands a dialogue among religions.

### Origins

Although there had been various efforts to understand optimistically the reality of other religions since the time of early Christian thinkers, such as Sts Paul, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria etc., the predominant general Christian attitude down through the ages towards them was negative and pessimistic. The accepted missionary practice before Vatican II was to look down on other religions as the ‘work of the devil’ which needed to be rooted out, and supplanted by Christianity. It was Vatican II which officially taught for the first time that the ‘seeds of the Word’ (*Ad Gentes* 11,15) lie hidden among some religious traditions and that their adherents could also be saved, ‘in a way known to God’, thanks to the all-pervading salvific paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Ad Gentes* 7, *Nostrae Aetate* 2, *Gaudium et Spes* 22). In fact, the Council encouraged a dialogue with other religions (*Nostrae Aetate* 2, *Ad Gentes* 11), as recommended by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964). The magisterial document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) speaks of interreligious dialogue as ‘an integral element of Church’s evangelising mission’ (38), while the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) says that it ‘is part of the Church’s evangelising mission’ ( 55), thus making a radical paradigm shift in the Church’s missiology. Accordingly, proclamation and interreligious dialogue are two facets of the same mission of the Church.

In the context of our Congregation, confreres who commit themselves to interreligious dialogue ‘put into effect the intention of our holy founder who used earnestly to exhort his sons to “cultivate a genuine concern for peoples not yet Christian”, and wished them to bind themselves by a vow to “undertake missions to non-Christians”’ (S. 011b).

### Description

Pope John Paul II who consistently taught that the Spirit of God is also at work ‘outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body’, says that through interreligious dialogue the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the truth’ (*Redemptoris Missio* 56). Since the Spirit of the Risen Christ (who is the principal agent of any evangelisation) is fully at work in the whole world, it is he who precedes the missionary in his proclamation. Thus, our Constitutions invite us to ‘strive to encounter the Lord where he is already present and at work in his own mysterious way’ (Const. 7).

A Redemptorist missionary’s main role, then, is to uncover and nurture those ‘seeds’ which the Spirit has already sown in other religious/cultural traditions, so that they may bear abundant fruits of redemption, as desired by the same Spirit. Without ‘confidently engage[ing] in a missionary dialogue with the world’ (Const19), Redemptorists cannot be effective signs or dynamic agents of plentiful redemption. Nor can they ‘highly esteem whatever they find to be good and true in the tradition of the people and methodically incorporate it into their life of faith’ (S. 011c). Since a dialogue is not unidirectional, those who engage in interreligious dialogue are expected not only to evangelise the different religious/cultural traditions but also be evangelised by that which is good, holy and true in those traditions. That is, both partners need to bring their riches, their experiences of the Spirit to the other.

### Pastoral Application

Since Redemptorists ‘are ever attentive to the signs of the times’ (Const. 2), they are called to develop and adapt the form of their missionary activity (cf. Const. 13) as they respond to the contemporary multi-religious milieu, which surely is an undeniable sign of our times. Moreover, since all human beings, though they are sinners, are ‘chosen, redeemed and gathered together in Christ’ (Const. 7), and are called to be heirs of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, all religious traditions (to which they belong), too, are called to join in building up the kingdom through history unto its eschatological fulfilment. All this necessarily demands an interreligious dialogue. Besides, Redemptorists who are called to ‘reveal the all-embracing nature of redemption’ (Const19), are by definition, inclusive, and so are challenged to transcend all religious barriers in proclaiming and promoting kingdom values (i.e., uncovering and nurturing ‘seeds of the word’).

Pastorally, no longer can we afford to ask how the religions are linked to the Church; rather, we need to ask now how the kingdom is present in these religions. Interreligious dialogue is an effective means for transformation of the

non-kingdom realities of our contemporary world, such as injustice, violence, hatred, exploitation, discrimination, corruption, etc. into kingdom realities of justice, peace, forgiveness, sharing, participation, respect for and recognition of the dignity of all, etc. On promoting peace, Hans Küng could write: ‘There can be no peace among the nations without peace among religions. There can be no peace among religions without dialogue among religions.’

### Current Manifestations

Interreligious dialogue is manifested in an inter-related four-fold form, namely dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange among specialists and experts, and dialogue of religious experience (*Dialogue and Proclamation* 42). As such, interreligious dialogue needs to be the prism through which all our contemporary apostolates are viewed. An illustration of this would be the 2007 Asia-Oceania Colloquium of Redemptorists in Pattaya, Thailand, which tried to see the Redemptorist mission in Asia through the concept of *the triple-dialogue* with the three main Asian living realities (i.e., religions, cultures and the poor), as advocated by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC). Not only in Asia, Oceania and Africa, but elsewhere today, surely, Redemptorist apostolates (most of which are performed in a multi-religious context) are involved in one or many of the above-mentioned four forms of interreligious dialogue, though those engaged in them may not necessarily be fully conscious of the official Church’s contemporary attitude towards other religions.

In our regular evaluation of apostolates (Const. 17), we need to ask how much the radical paradigm shift made by the official Church in her missiology has affected our own Redemptorist means/ways of evangelising. Of course, the XXII General Chapter of 1997 officially recognised interreligious dialogue as a ‘source for our Spirituality’ when it recommended ‘that, recognising the value of the great religious traditions of the world, we encourage the confreres to engage in interreligious dialogue, searching for the truth with our brothers and sisters of different religious traditions’ (*Orientations on the Subject of Spirituality*, General Chapter, 1997, No:9.6). However, it seems that the Congregation as a whole is yet to give serious consideration to interreligious dialogue.

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Kendall, Danie & O'Collins, Gerald (eds.): *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, New York: Orbis Books, 2003.

Küng, Hans: *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London: SCM Press, 1991.

Phan, Peter C.: *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Can the Redemptorists pit their Proclamation against IRD, as if they are mutually exclusive realities? Why? Does IRD re-place Christ's command to proclaim the gospel?
2. Has the radical paradigm shift made by the official Church in her missiology since Vatican-II affected the Redemptorist proclamation, in your unit? If so, how?
3. Taking the Vatican-II and post-Vatican-II magisterial teachings seriously, should we follow a kingdom-centred missiology or an Church-centred missiology in our Proclamation of the good news?
4. Are we not specially called to concentrate in our Redemptorist ministry on people at margins of society? Is not IRD a bridge to reach out to such people?

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## JUSTICE

Justice is a human experience that takes place in any relationship where power is involved. There are many sides to it, among which the most important side is the ethical meaning of giving all what is their due (*jus*, right). But the basis of justice is in the criteria that we use to establish those rights or dues. In different periods of history and cultures, humanity has seen that usually the strongest – individuals, groups or nations – easily impose their criteria of ‘justice’ on the others. Many religious systems create divine justifications which tend to validate certain privileges when they refer to rights and dues. In modern times, there are different values, and among them the fundamental equality of all rational beings becomes the basis of justice. However, the practice in the world shows the fragility with which this criteria is accepted.

### Christian Parameters of Justice

The Judeo-Christian tradition of justice is also involved in this reflective process. The Bible shows how a God who is presented as all powerful slowly reveals himself as the one who communicates life to all, without discrimination and privilege. This all-powerful God is not arrogant, but compassionate. This attitude regarding power is also proposed to human beings. Thus, prophetic literature is direct in denouncing violence, all forms of domination and exploitation. It rejects the lack of commitment and indifference in the face of the needs of people. The biblical proposal of justice can be summarised in this statement: God, who is all-powerful is also the Father of all, and we are all brothers and sisters.

In practice, the basis of biblical justice is the recognition of the *other*, who is embraced as brother/sister. In this sense, this biblical concept surpasses the simple idea of a contract, and it goes beyond customs, traditions and social systems. Justice then becomes a question of being existentially faithful to the needs of the *other*. The ‘Justice of the kingdom of God’ defends those who are weak and needy. It is also hope for those who are threatened and abused. It is merciful justice and not punitive, as can be seen in the familiar prophetic utterance: ‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?’ (Ez 18:23; 33:11). Anyone who walks away from the justice of God will find death, which is not willed by God.

Justice then becomes a paradigm of life which should be sought with ‘hunger and thirst’ (Mt 5:6), and is to be pursued in the pathways of life (Mt 6:33). This basis becomes the fundamental criterion for judging and revealing who are the *just* in history. The decisive steps to fulfil the justice of the kingdom of God in the dif-

ferent situations of life are: listen to the reasons of the suffering and allow the pain to speak for itself; recognise what is a threat to those who are in need, listen to their story, and take care of their future. Christian justice includes gratuitous love. Christian love is expressed in justice (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

### Justice as Virtue

Justice has been consistently understood by various philosophical and theological traditions as a cardinal virtue, although that aspect is not emphasised in the Bible. In fact, the practice of justice is a consequence of internalised values and cultivated attitudes which express themselves as a commitment to *others and their circumstances*, and not domination. It is possible to understand the teaching of Jesus on the 'Justice of the kingdom' as a call to be engaged in an on-going process of learning in the journey of life, an attitude which helps us overcome the temptation to see power as domination (cf. Mk 10:35-45, Mt 20:20-28). Mercy becomes a parameter in making judgements in our relationships (cf. Mk 4:24 and parallels).

### Discernment and Practices

In everyday life, the practice of justice often requires a complex process of discernment as to how to promote the well-being of people and the situation in which they live. The practice of *justice* is not necessarily equal for everyone because of the differences in human situations. In these differences, justice in favour of the weakest corrects any distortions in the use of power. There are situations that constantly challenge the type of discernment required for the practice of justice, such as the distribution of resources and the guarantee of rights, the procedures on trade and contracts, social systems expressed in customs and laws, the need to deal with people who cause damage or threaten the well-being of others. These and similar situations require discernment.

The discernment regarding the expressions of justice is also complex because the interests of the powerful easily create artificial forms for justifying customs and standards of living based on domination. The provisions of legal justice do not always guarantee full justice. The rules and disciplines can become oppressive even within religious systems. Faced with the religious requirements of his time, Jesus warned his disciples: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 5:20).

### Witness and Prophecy

In a pluralist society there are different criteria and practices of justice. Many of these are marked with signs of solidarity, but there are also enormous inequalities



and deprivations which are a source of huge injustices. In such a context, a Christian vision of justice needs to give witness in concrete practices. This witness must express, with self-criticism, the coherence between Christian faith and its criteria of justice. It also requires a concerted effort between individuals and groups who promote justice in different ways. Influenced by this witness, they also commit themselves to prophetic denunciation of injustices, through appropriate discourse. Often the promotion of justice suffers violence and opposition. Jesus comforts his disciples with this recommendation: ‘But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’ (Mt 6:33).

### Spirituality

The primary foundation of a Christian spirituality of justice is faith in God who reveals himself as the Father and calls everyone to become brothers and sisters. In Jesus, God reveals power as communication (cf. Phil 2:5-11) and through the Holy Spirit, teaches the attitudes and practices of sharing in all kinds of relationships. The process of learning the spirituality of justice begins with the commitment to others and their circumstances, done with a constructive and merciful attitude. This is fully expressed by means of a dialogue, spiritual and scientific, which opens the way to discernment and the practice of justice.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Pope Benedict XVI: *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009.

Crosby, M.: ‘Justice’ in *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Liturgical Press, Minnesota 1993.

Häring, B.: ‘Free and Faithful’, in *Love and Justice Vol.2*. St Paul Publications Slough 1979.

Rakoczy, Susan IHM: *Great Mystics and Social Justice*. Paulist Press 2006.

Synod of Bishops 1972: ‘Justice In The World’.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Have justice issues receded from the public consciousness of the Congregation and if so, why?
2. Can there be a Redemptorist spirituality without a passion for justice?
3. How do we learn to walk on ‘the two feet of love’, spirituality and justice?

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## LAY PARTNERSHIP

Father Juan Lasso de la Vega in his 4<sup>th</sup> Communicanda to the Congregation began his reflections with these words: ‘Our Congregation from the beginning has always been close to the people, particularly the poor and abandoned, and has always sought collaboration with the laity in its apostolic work’ (4, par 3).

It is true that the Congregation from its beginnings was characterised by its closeness to the people. This closeness would enhance a future when lay persons would seek to share more deeply the Redemptorist charism. From the start of Alphonsus’ ministry in Naples he trained catechists to assist in the Evening Chapels.

‘The [Evening Chapels] were so numerous that it was impossible to provide chaplains for all of them. Alphonsus and his companions, in addition to directing meetings themselves, trained leaders to preside and instruct in prayer and catechism’ (Samuel J. Boland: *Some Thoughts on Redemptorists and the Laity*).

However, it is more accurate to say that Alphonsus’ focus was the spiritual care of these people rather than having them involved in the Redemptorist mission as is understood today. It was St Clement who, shortly after his arrival in Warsaw in 1787, gathered groups of men and women ‘whom he formed to a more fervent life and activity in the cause of religion’ (Boland, *ibid*). This association became the roots of the ‘Oblates’ of the Congregation. In 1804 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda approved the association of Oblates with their statutes and rite of admission. The purpose of the Oblates was to:

‘sanctify themselves and promote the glory of God and the good of the Church, to resist the harmful influences of the times, particularly the spread of bad reading. They were required to practice mental prayer and devout reading and they pledged themselves to promote good Christian living with emphasis on good reading and the practice of retreats’ (Boland, *ibid*).

The association of St Clement disappeared and the practice of giving the title of Oblate became a reward to friends and benefactors of the Congrega-

tion without any consideration for their collaboration in our ministry. Although Oblates as collaborators in our mission disappeared, the concept of lay persons sharing in our mission did not. Michael Kratz (*La Mission des Rédemptoristes Belges au Bas-Congo*, 1970) speaks about the key role catechists played as genuine collaborators in our foreign missions in Congo and in Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, it took the Second Vatican Council to open the door for a new depth of understanding of the role of lay persons in the Church and with the Redemptorists.

With the publication of the Vatican II document *On the Apostolate of the Laity*, a new era began with the role of lay persons in the life of the Church and its mission. As a result, increasing numbers of lay people responded to the call to ministry flowing from a new sense of their baptism and their baptismal call to mission. Concurrently many religious communities made deliberate and planned efforts to share their spirituality, charism and mission with lay people. The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer was also a part of this movement. Like other institutes, the Redemptorists, in their desire to share their charism and mission, experienced some confusion in terminology and understanding of what it means to invite lay people to share their spirituality and to collaborate in carrying out the Redemptorist mission.

It would seem that the more developed forms of association of lay people with the Congregation occur in three categories: a) Sharing of Redemptorist spirituality; b) Association for apostolic work; c) Sharing in Redemptorist community life as lay persons.

In each of these categories we find varying degrees of ‘intensity’ – from loose connection, such as praying for the Congregation and its mission, to building Christian communities; from working side by side with Redemptorists to living in community or making a commitment as Lay Missionaries of the Most Holy Redeemer. Appropriate formation also varies, depending on both the category of association and the degree of intensity. There are some elements common to each category of association:

- Desire and motivation to be associated,
- A selection process by the Redemptorists,
- A desire to share the Redemptorist charism of concern for the most abandoned, especially the poor – and outreach to them,
- A spirituality that motivates and informs the association,
- Some form of community with Redemptorists,
- Sharing in the Redemptorist mission,
- Formation.

The formation depends on the kind of participation in the Redemptorist life and mission, the culture of the individuals, their gifts and education, and their understanding of the Catholic faith. Formation for association with Redemptorists is an interdisciplinary task that touches on various aspects of Redemptorist life. Formation must be:

**Flexible:** geared to the needs of the participants,

**Holistic:** formation for the whole person,

**Alphonsian and Redemptoristic:** based on the spiritual heritage of St Alphonsus and the history/tradition of the Congregation,

**Mutual** – involving commitment from both Redemptorists and lay people,

**Co-responsible** – both Redemptorists and those associated taking initiative and responsibility appropriate to the level of association.

There are many who believe that the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be called the ‘Church of the Laity’. Perhaps we, as Redemptorists, could say that together with lay persons sharing our charism, the Congregation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be reborn with a new face. This is an exciting period of history as Redemptorists in so many parts of the world open their doors to include lay persons in their life and work. In varied ways the Congregation is living out the recommendations of the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter when it recommended:

‘that all Units value the presence of lay people as an element which enriches and gives new dimensions to our task of proclaiming plentiful redemption to the most abandoned. We see this presence as a sign of our times that opens us up more and more to experience the Church as People of God and a mystery of communion. It is from this positive perspective that the Chapter asks that steps continue to be taken in the formation and cooperation with lay people until we reach true co-responsibility in the proclamation of plentiful redemption’ (Orientations 7.4).

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Kratz, M.: *La Mission des Rédemptoristes belges au Bas-Congo. La période des semailles*. Bruxelles, 1970.

**www.c.ss.r.pim.com** for examples of formation for lay people in various parts of the Congregation.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In your opinion, to what extent can lay persons share in the Redemptorist Mission?
2. What are the implications and responsibilities for Redemptorists and for Lay persons?
3. How can lay persons remain faithful to their vocation yet be part of the Redemptorist charism?
4. Can a lay person truly ‘give his/her life for plentiful redemption’?
5. Is this truly an ‘exciting period of history’ for lay persons and Redemptorists?

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## LITURGY OF THE HOURS

The Liturgy of the Hours really complements the Constitutions and General Statutes of the Congregation when these outline the Redemptorist ideal of missionary life and activity.

The Redemptorists exist in the Church to continue the presence and mission of the Redeemer (Const. 23) in preaching the word of God to the poor (Const1). They realise this task by striving for an ever greater personal conformity to God (Const. 25). They beseech God ‘with that same mind and heart which was in our Redeemer’ (*General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* [GILH], 19). In this identification with the Holy One, the psalms are a big help to us: ‘From the beginning they have had the power to raise men’s minds to God’ (GILH, 100).

The more we identify with Jesus, the more perfect we become as Redemptorists. Directed to God, prayer is necessarily tied to Christ, the Lord of all and only Mediator (1Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Only in him do we have access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12). He unites humanity to himself in such a way that there is an intimate bond between the prayer of Christ and the prayer of the whole human race.

In his *Discourse on Psalm 85* St Augustine writes: ‘When we speak to God in prayer we do not separate the Son from God, and when the body of the Son prays it does not separate its head from itself, but it is the one Saviour of his body, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who himself prays for us, and prays in us, and is the object of our prayer. He prays for us as our priest, he prays in us as our head, he is the object of our prayer as our God. Let us then hear our voices in his voice, and his voice in ours’.

Christ came to communicate to us the life of God and he introduced into the world of our exile that hymn of praise which is sung in the heavenly places throughout all ages (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC], 83). From that point on, the eternal praise of the Son reverberates with a human echo in the heart of Christ. He prays to the Father, as Head of the human race and Mediator between the Father and us. The dignity of Christian prayer is in its sharing ‘in the filial relationship of the only-begotten Son to the Father’ which is at once a sharing in the prayer of Jesus which still continues unceasingly in the name of the whole human race and for its salvation, throughout the universal Church and in all its members’ (cf. GILH 7).

The voice of the Church is not just its own; it is also the voice of Christ since its prayers are offered ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’, and so the Church continues to offer the prayer and petition which Christ poured out in the days of his

earthly life (cf. Heb 5:7) and which have therefore a unique effectiveness.

Prayer molds the Redemptorist missionary. By praying, he is already evangelising! In the Liturgy of the Hours our sanctification is accomplished (cf. SC 10) and worship offered to God. The Liturgy of the Hours nourishes the faith, and, without a doubt, all may draw from its holiness of the richest kind through the life-giving word of God, to which it gives such great importance (cf. SC 24; 33).

The Liturgy itself is apostolic. Those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours bring growth to God's people in a hidden but fruitful apostolate (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis* 7). The ordained ministers and religious, guardians of the Liturgy of the Hours, continue the ministry of the good Shepherd who prays for his sheep, that they may have life and so be brought to perfect unity (cf. John 10:11; 17:20-23). In this Liturgy of the Hours they not only find a source of devotion and a strengthening of personal prayer (cf. SC 90), but they also nourish and foster missionary action by abundant contemplation, and so bring joy to the whole Church of God (cf. LG 41). The Office of Readings, for example, 'opens to them the incalculable spiritual riches which constitute the noble heritage of the Church...gives foundation to the spiritual life and abundant nourishment to devotion. Thus preachers of the word of God have daily set before them excellent examples of sacred preaching' (GILH 165).

An excellent Redemptorist way to continue the presence of Christ and his mission is the 'constant meditation on the word of God, especially the Gospels' (S 056). And such mental prayer should draw unlimited nourishment from the readings, psalms and the other parts of the Liturgy of the Hours. Just as the Liturgy of the Hours complements the Eucharist, so it also permeates all the hours of our lives. It seeks to consecrate to God the whole cycle of day and night and to sanctify the whole range of human activity (cf. GILH 10,11).

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Guiver, G.: *Company of Voices: Daily Prayer and the People of God*. Canterbury Press 2001

Taft, R.F.: *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*. Collegville Liturgical Press 1993

General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH)

Paul VI: Apostolic Constitution promulgating the Divine Office as Revised in accordance with the Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. Rome 1970

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Is the Divine Office a joy or a burden for me? Is it integrated into my spiritual life?
2. Do I prefer to 'say' the Office privately or with the community?
3. Do I appreciate that the celebration of the Divine Office is Liturgy? How is that manifested?

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## LOVE

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul affirms that there are three things that last – faith, hope, and love – and that the greatest of these is love (13:13). Love, or ‘charity’, has its origins in the divine and is closely associated, if not entirely identified, with God himself (1 Jn 4:8).

According to Catholic doctrine, God is a Trinitarian community of love, consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is typically represented as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. This Trinitarian community of love is the source of humanity’s creation, redemption, and sanctification. It is also the origin and end of all authentic human love.

### Description

In his book, *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis maintains that the Greeks distinguished four kinds of loves: affection (*storge*), especially the kind parents have for their children; romantic love (*eros*); friendship (*philia*); and selfless love (*agape*). Through the kenotic self-emptying manifested in his incarnation and paschal mystery, Christ breathed new life into the meaning of *agape* and set the standard against which all manifestations of Christian love would to be measured. Some authors (e.g. Søren Kierkegaard, Anders Nygren) have set Christian *agape* in opposition to the other forms of love. Others (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas) see Christian *agape* as having a unifying and transformative role with regard to the other loves. Aquinas even speaks of love as ‘the friendship of man for God’ (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1, resp.).

As human beings, we are *capax Dei*, that is, we have the capacity of entering into relationship with God, experiencing his love for us, and sharing it with others. We can do so, however, not through our efforts alone, but with the help of divine grace. Love is a total gift from God made possible through the grace available to us through Christ’s paschal mystery and the sending of his Spirit at Pentecost. It manifests itself in our lives through love of God and neighbour. It is an infused virtue that comes to us at baptism and is closely associated with the Holy Spirit’s gift of wisdom.

St Paul’s hymn in 1 Cor 13 offers one of the one most eloquent descriptions of Christian love ever written. Both Augustine and Aquinas present charity as the mother and queen of all the virtues. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines it as ‘the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbours as ourselves for the love of God’ (no. 1822). As a theological virtue, it is infused, meaning that it is a gift that comes entirely from God.

### Pastoral Applications

St Alphonsus' *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* is a commentary on the Apostle Paul's great hymn of love (1 Cor 13). In it, he examines the many allied virtues of Christian charity and provides a wonderful synthesis of his moral and spiritual teaching. The book also offers a great deal of practical advice on how believers should conduct themselves in their journey through life. Along with the Gospels, Redemptorists use both Paul's and Alphonsus' insights as a point of departure in their proclamation of the Gospel. They understand Christian love as a union of a person's will with God's that brings about a certain kind of friendship with God, one that enables a person to act as Jesus would act in a given situation. For them, the virtue of Christian charity manifests itself in acts that can be ordered toward every dimension of human existence: the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, institutional, social, and environmental. Redemptorists are 'neighbours to everybody' and manifest their love 'in prayer, in genuine service to others, and in a witness of life whatever form it may take' (Const. 9).

### Current Manifestations

Redemptorists proclaim a Gospel of plentiful redemption which is rooted in God's love for humanity and which affects the entire person (Const. 1). Burning with charity and apostolic zeal (Const. 20), they manifest God's love for the poor and abandoned in any number of ways. Today, they manifest God's love to the people they serve especially through their extraordinary mission preaching and retreat work, their foreign missions and efforts to alleviate the material, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the poor, their sacramental ministry, their apostolate of the pen, their ordinary pastoral ministry, and their efforts to bring about social justice.

Redemptorists fulfil their mission by following Christ in the exercise of pastoral charity (Const. 48). The particular form that their pastoral charity takes in a particular region depends very much on the material and spiritual needs of the people they serve. Whatever they do, they always seek to foster in others a deep sense of God's abiding love and friendship.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is unique about the virtue of Christian charity? Is it opposed to the other forms of human love (affection, romantic love, friendship) or is it something that transforms them?
2. How does such love manifest itself in your life?
3. Do you agree that charity can best be expressed in terms of friendship with God?
4. In what ways do you need to grow in your love for God and neighbour?
5. How does Christian love manifest itself in your local community? What forms does it take? What specific needs does it meet? Is there anything lacking in it?

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## MAJELLA, ST GERARD

Gerard Majella was born in Muro Lucano (near Potenza, Italy) on 6 April 1726 to Domenico and Benedetta Majella (née Galella). In 1749, he entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer as a lay Brother. He exercised his apostolate primarily between the towns of Deliceto and Materdomini (near Avellino, Italy). He died on 16 October 1755 and was canonised 149 years later, on 11 December 1904.

To appreciate Gerard's spirituality, we must begin by understanding his familial relationship with God whom he addressed as 'most holy dear God'. This intimate and profound relationship with God allowed Gerard to see in people the face of the Father. He sought to alleviate the sufferings, physical or spiritual, of those whom he met in the journey of life. The expression 'Dear God' recurred frequently in Gerard's writings. At least 15 times we come across 'my dear God', and many more times 'our dear God'. We also find titles such as 'our dear Redeemer', 'our dear loving Jesus', 'my divine Redeemer', and 'my heavenly Redeemer'. The adjective 'dear' indicates, therefore, a God near to us, loved with all our strength, experienced like a precious treasure, a friend whom we can count on. Gerard's relationship with his 'dear God' was passionate and spontaneous, but emotion never took precedence over faith or his trust which led him to accept, without hesitation, the plan that God has for each one of us.

Gerard, therefore, found comfort and security in his relationship with God, and this bond was a true 'joyful intimacy' for our saint. We can say that his love for God was total and based on a complete gift of himself, following the example of Christ Crucified.

His love for the Crucified sought, above all, to follow the Master. As his Master gave his life for all, so Gerard desired, in total conformity with God, to give his own life to the least. But above all, Gerard lived his 'special' relationship with Jesus through the Eucharist. He was crazy about the Eucharistic Jesus, and this 'madness' is a synonym for an extraordinary relationship that cannot easily be understood.

In the light of this, one can grasp the immense suffering Gerard endured when, on account of a calumny, he was prohibited from approaching the sacrament of the Eucharist. Moreover, it was around the Eucharist that Gerard also developed a fraternal solidarity with others, and this communion reached beyond the grave. The Eucharistic Jesus becomes the ultimate expression of *copiosa redemptio*, specific to Redemptorist spirituality.

Another element, through which Gerard expresses himself as a Redemptorist, is in his love for Mary, the Mother of God. His love for Mary was sincere and very similar to the gestures and language of the Marian devotion of his day. He entrusted himself completely into the hands of Mary, and he chose her, together with the Holy Spirit, as his protector and consoler. The notes for the process of his canonisation record that he reiterated confidence in Mary's protection against evil. His continuous reference to Mary, however, did not assume merely the value of a defence, but was a guarantee that love and communion with others was to be understood in the light of the Gospel. Besides, Gerard considered Mary as one capable of evoking trust. Gerard was firmly convinced that Our Lady could read the hearts of people, and was capable of understanding their needs and difficulties in a light of mercy.

To make room for another in one's life, to accept and to create profound communion with others, are traits of Gerardine spirituality. This emerges forcefully in his letters. Sadly, in the past these traits were not always adequately valued. But in our own time, they are seen as particularly stimulating.

Thus, the life of Gerard is a clear example of evangelical poverty. The boundless love for the poor manifested itself totally during the famine which struck Caposele (Avellino) in the winter of 1755. He went to the poor with magnanimity and courage, with full faith.

Gerard knew that the will of God manifests itself through his superiors, and therefore he did not oppose their decisions. The ultimate expression of his obedience was revealed when, in the face of calumny, he did not justify himself but bowed his head to the divine will. The obedience of Gerard was free and joyful, capable of overcoming any human logic.

His prompt and faithful *Yes* to the will of God, to the point of uniformity with it (i.e. to become one with it), was characteristic of Gerard all his life. In the summer of 1753 he forcefully reminded the superior of the Ripacandida monastery, Sr Mary Michael, about the will of God. She wanted him to accept, for some other use, money collected as the dowry for a girl desiring to dedicate herself to God. Gerard's response was clear: 'That, neither I nor anyone else can do, because it would be the same as destroying our Congregation. I have encouraged candidates on the condition that they become religious and not marry. And if she does not become a religious, the said money must be returned to those to whom it belongs.'

In the *Rule of Life* we can therefore summarise, in an almost definitive manner, the role that he attributes to the uniformity with the will of God: it is his vocation. 'Some make a commitment to this or that. My only commitment is

to do the will of God.’ For Gerard, it was necessary that the *Yes* to the will of God be constant and proclaimed with trust, even in difficult moments. We see this spiritual conviction clearly in his *Rule of Life*: ‘My dear and my only love, and true God, now and forever, I resign myself to your divine will; and I will say this in the face of all temptations and tribulations of this world: *Your will be done*. And I embrace all in the depths of my heart, lifting my eyes to heaven, to adore your divine hands, which showers on me precious gems of your divine will.’

The greatness of the teaching that Gerard passed on to us is also verified in the virtue of prudence and humility, as can be seen in his life. Though he was not a priest, many turned to Gerard for help in discerning their own spiritual journey. The letters witness to his wisdom, respect and sincere sharing, which inspired Gerard and enabled him to support and assure those who turned to him.

Humility, like the other virtues, assumed in Gerard a tone of smiling joviality, even humour. This gave him a special charm. We can see this in the pages of the *Rule of Life*. At the same time, when outlining the key commitments of his spiritual journey, Gerard did not forget his weaknesses and limitations: he acknowledges them explicitly, but makes light of them, learning to trust in God. Thus the ‘warmest feelings of his heart’ are governed by this reasoning: ‘Only once have I the good opportunity of becoming a saint, and if I lose it, I lose it forever. And if once I have the blessing to become a saint... then, what is lacking in me to become holy? I have all the favourable opportunities to become a saint. Forward then, I want to become a saint! How important it is that I become a saint! Lord, how crazy am I! Am I supposed to become a saint at the expense of others, and then complain? Brother Gerard, resolve it by giving yourself totally to God... Oh, God, what a strange wonder this would be that I deceive the world? Strange wonder it would be, if I deceived God!’

In consideration of all that has been said, an essential question emerges: Is the spirituality of Gerard still relevant? We believe it to be so, citing also the words of John Paul II, on the occasion of the Year of St Gerard celebrated in 2004: ‘The Year of St Gerard constitutes for the entire Redemptorist family a propitious occasion to renew your personal and communitarian commitment to respond to the present challenges of evangelisation with the same readiness and creativity of St Gerard and the Founder, St Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, did in their time [...] St Gerard is a dazzling example of such a spiritual attitude through his love for the Crucified and the Eucharist and for his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I urge you to follow his same spiritual journey and, like

him, to remain faithful to your own charism without fearing the inevitable difficulties that accompany every true renewal.’ (Excerpt from the letter of Pope John Paul II to Fr Joseph Tobin C.Ss.R., Superior General of the Redemptorists concerning the year of St Gerard 2004, dated 6 August 2004.)

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you account for the miraculous elements in Gerard’s life?
2. Is St Gerard presented as patron of Expectant Mothers in your area?
3. Do you think of St Gerard as ‘a saint for the Brothers’ or an inspiration for all Redemptorists?

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## MARTYRS

When we think of the Christian martyrs, our minds turn to the first centuries of Christianity, when many followers of Jesus underwent excruciating tortures and death, because they believed in Jesus Christ. However, in the 20th century, the Church was again graced with many martyrs, including five Redemptorists, who were beatified in 2001.

St Alphonsus, in his later years at age of 81, wrote a book called *The Victory of the Martyrs*. He offers the example of the martyrs to the confreres, so that they may have courage in the face of adversity, that they may have a constant dedication to the Christian Redemptorist life, through a life of perseverance. Martyrs hold a special place in the Christian spirituality, because they join Jesus Christ in his paschal mystery very concretely and directly, by laying down their lives (to the point of death) for the kingdom of God.

Alphonsus describes five virtues of martyrs. The martyrs had great faith. They trusted that God would not abandon them. They were filled with courage in the face of persecution, continuing to witness to the Gospel even if it meant to be killed for it. They were filled with joy as they embraced the cross which Christ laid before them. They were thankful that God was allowing them to imitate Christ even unto the point of death. And finally they burned with a great love for their Divine Master. The martyrs also speak to us about being detached from the world and being focused only on the kingdom of God. They also are powerful intercessors. During their life, they had immediate recourse to God in all their circumstances.

The Redemptorist martyrs lived out the theme, 'to give our lives for plentiful redemption'. Four Redemptorists of the Lviv Province in Ukraine and one from the Michalovce Vice-Province in Slovakia were beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2001, namely: Blesseds Mykolay Charnetsky, Vasyl Velychkovsky, Ivan Ziatyk, Zenon Kovalyk and Metodo Trčhka. Each one witnessed to the strength of their faith, love and dedication to the Lord and the Gospel. They all suffered and died because of the atheistic Soviet regime that was present in their countries in the latter half of the 20th century.

Bl **Mykolay Charnetsky**, already a holy bishop distinguished by his apostolic zeal, his ecumenical work, his prayerful demeanor and his compassion for the poor and abandoned, was arrested on 11 April 1945 by the Soviets. He was charged falsely of having anti-Soviet literature and sentenced to 10 years in Soviet prison camps. He underwent over 600 hours of interrogations, during which he was tortured both physically and psychologically. He was transferred, usually in cattle cars, thirty times from prison to prison. In the prison camps, he was known



to mingle among his fellow prisoners, ministering to them, comforting them, bearing their pain. The prisoners took great solace in his presence. For them he emanated the presence of the merciful God in the midst of their horrendous sufferings. With his death immanent, Bishop Mykolay was released in 1956. He spent his time in prayer and intercession and died a holy death on 2 April 1959, his health ruined by his imprisonment.

Bl **Vasyl Velychkovsky**, a great preacher and missionary, was arrested as a priest on 26 July 1945. Accused of anti-Soviet propaganda, he was sentenced to die by firing squad. While on death row, he evangelised his fellow prisoners, preaching to them and administering the sacraments. After his sentence was changed, he spent years in the coal mines of Vorkuta, north of the Arctic Circle. He was known for his great courage and steadfastness of faith. He ministered to the prisoners, often confessing and celebrating the Divine Liturgy clandestinely in the mine shafts. Upon release in 1955, he organised an underground Ukrainian Catholic Church. The Church had been declared illegal by the Soviets in 1946. His courage and fearless leadership, in the face of constant persecution, interrogations, and threats, gave others also courage to stand up for the faith. The persecuted Church grew in strength. Secretly ordained a bishop in a Moscow hotel in 1963, he led the Church, catechised, conducted seminaries, ordained clandestine priests and bishops, organised 'secret' monasteries, and encouraged religious vocations. In 1969 he was arrested for a book he wrote on our Mother of Perpetual Help. For three years he suffered through electrical, chemical, and psychological tortures. When he was exiled from Ukraine in 1972, his health was completely ruined. He died in Canada a year later as a result of slow working chemicals received during his imprisonment.

Bl **Zenon Kovalyk**, a joyful, ardent, and powerful preacher, was warned by confreres not to preach so openly against the atheistic Communist regime. He replied that he would rather die than betray his conscience. On 20 December 1940, after preaching on the Immaculate Conception, he was arrested by the Soviets. Sharing a small cell with 32 other prisoners, he preached to them, shared with them humorous religious stories, and prayed with them. He endured many interrogations with physical beatings. At the end of June 1941, at the age of 37, his body was found crucified to the prison wall.

Bl **Ivan Ziatyk**, a pious, prayerful, holy and good confessor, became the vicar-general of the illegal Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1948. On 5 January 1950 he was arrested simply because he was a Redemptorist and preached that the Gospel was for all people. He was brutally treated in prison, totally disfigured by the beatings he received, but he remained faithful. On Good Friday 1952, he again was beaten severely and died soon after in a Siberian prison hospital.

Bl **Metodo Trčhka**, the founder of the Michalovce Vice-Province, was arrested on 13 April 1950, interrogated and tortured. Accused of high treason because of his reports to his superiors and to Rome, he was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment. In early 1959, he was caught singing Christmas carols. For this he was thrown into solitary confinement where he soon contracted pneumonia and died a martyr's death on 23 March 1959.

Our Redemptorist martyrs witnessed to the ultimate giving of one's life for the Gospel, for the sake of plentiful redemption.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Two of our martyrs died in their beds. What does this tell us about the meaning of martyrdom?
2. 'A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident.' (T.S.Eliot in 'Murder in the Cathedral'). Do we think of our martyrs as saints first?
3. Are we allowing our witness to become invisible?

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## MARY

With St Alphonsus, Redemptorists have always fostered a deep devotion to Mary and have interpreted that devotion according to the cultures of their time. How might that devotion be expressed today? Pope Paul VI wrote: ‘When the liturgy turns its gaze either to the primitive Church or to the Church of our own days, it always finds Mary. In the primitive Church she is seen praying with the apostles; in our own day she is actively present, and the Church desires to live the mystery of Christ with her: “Grant that your Church which with Mary shared Christ’s passion may be worthy to share also in his resurrection.” She is also seen represented as a voice of praise in unison with which the Church wishes to give glory to God: “...with her [Mary] may we always praise you”’ (*Marialis Cultus*, 1974, #11).

The Gospels are written in the light of the resurrection and we may interpret the Marian narratives in the same way. They show how she received the Spirit, finally revealed as the Spirit of the risen Jesus. The Immaculate Conception means that Mary is perfectly receptive of that Spirit. In Acts 1:14 we read that, after the resurrection of Jesus, the Eleven remained in the upper room, ‘devoting themselves with one accord to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and together with his brothers’. The Apostles received the gift of the Spirit of the risen Jesus in prayer, and so with them, did Mary his mother. Mary’s reception of this Spirit is fulfilled in her Assumption into heaven. Since Mary shares in the resurrection, she is empowered to support those who are still being drawn by the power of the resurrection towards its completion. But the way to resurrection is through the Cross as it was for Mary (Lk 2:35). Thus, believers, seeking compassion in suffering, pray to her as the ‘Mother of Sorrows’.

The way to Mary is through prayer, sharing in her prayer, which is the expression of her being transformed by the Spirit of the risen Jesus. From the beginning, the prayer of Mary was with the new community of the Church, thus the prayer of the Church now is prayer with Mary, primarily in the liturgy and also in many para-liturgical devotions. Believers can pray with her: ‘My soul magnifies the Lord... for the Mighty one has done great things for me’ (Lk 1:46, 49). Mary glorifies the Lord for his gifts and it was to bring Christians to share in her gratitude that St Alphonsus Liguori wrote the Redemptorist classic *The Glories of Mary*.

While our relationship with Mary begins in prayer, it has been interpreted in many ways. For example, she has been prayed to as a spiritual mother, as mother of the Church, as ‘type’ of the Church, as ‘first disciple’. The image of Mary as mother has very strong roots in the traditional piety of many believers; Mary loves us as a mother and cares for us. This image of Mary is manifested in many Marian devotions, notably in the novenas to Mary, such as that to Our

Mother of Perpetual Help. Mary's protective role has been extended beyond individual and family needs to include social justice in the form of the liberation from exploitation, the domination of women and the suppression of the poor. Mary, as 'Our Lady of Guadalupe', has long been prayed to as the protector of the marginalised.

The Mary with whom and to whom we pray is a personal agent, not merely a symbol; it is as a healing person that she is experienced at Lourdes and Fatima.

There is a notion, favoured by some, that Mary is the 'Mediatrice' of all graces; others object to this, as it seems to make Mary equal to Jesus. However, if we recall that what Mary gives is the Spirit whom she receives from the Risen Jesus, then, having received the Spirit, she participates in the giving of the Spirit to all. The body that Jesus gave up for us, he first received from Mary. Jesus' earthly body, his risen body and his Eucharistic body are the same body; once he gave within the limits of time and space, now in his risen body, Jesus gives universally without the limits of time and space. But that body, while transformed, is identical with the body that he received from Mary. Mary herself gives in a real and personal way, but she can give only because she receives the capacity to do so from Spirit of the Risen Jesus.

The details of her reception of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus are described in the New Testament. She is present at the Cross when the Spirit is given (Jn 19:25). She is given to the beloved disciple, who is given to her as her son (Jn 19:26). Thus emerges a new family that takes the place of the first family that began with her first receiving the Spirit and giving life to Jesus at the Annunciation. There is no record of an appearance of the Risen Jesus to his mother. Piety has, of course, filled this in; how could a loving son not pay a visit to his mother? But this can be a distraction; Mary may be shown as the first of those who, without seeing, believed (Jn 20:29). Mary is not like the unbelieving disciples who needed dramatic appearances to bring them to belief, but her way to faith is not without some misunderstanding (Mk:3:31-35; Lk 2:21-40). She is a model and support for those who struggle to faith.

The most popular prayer in which believers join with Mary is the Rosary. The rosary provides a memory of the gift-giving actions of God to us, with a response of thanksgiving, petition, meditation and moments of contemplation. (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 2002).

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you connect your theological understanding of Mary with your personal devotion to her?
2. In what ways does Mary still serve the mystery of redemption (C.32)?
3. Do you have a daily devotion to Mary? If so, why, and if not, why not?

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## MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

There are many mediation groups where people seek a deeper spirituality in the chaos of modern life. It is not unusual to meet Catholics who have become members of such groups, seeking something they have not found in the Church and which they believe they can find in 'Eastern' forms of meditation. Catholics are often unaware that there is an ancient tradition of meditation in their own Church.

Fortunately, there are flourishing movements that are seeking to revive and develop that tradition, for example 'Christian Meditation' and 'Centering Prayer'. The Redemptorist tradition has always considered meditation an integral element of its practice of prayer. How is the Alphonsian practice of meditation related to the ancient tradition and how might it contribute to these contemporary movements?

There are historical reasons for the decline of mediation in the Catholic tradition. According to Thomas Keating, in the early monastic period, that is the 5<sup>th</sup> to 12th century, meditation was closely linked with contemplation, in a unified movement of prayer. The first step was *lectio*, which meant a reading aloud and memorising of Scripture, following the Jewish practice. Then followed *meditatio*. This entailed thoughtfulness and imagination, beyond which came a personal taking hold of the text as one's own. Contemplation, which followed this, was envisioned as a non-conceptual, thought-free state of being in God. These were not considered as steps in a programme; all three could happen in one period of prayer.

Especially after the 14th century there was a pronounced effort to facilitate meditation and organise it, by the introduction of schemata and plans, which reflected a typically Western intellectual fascination with intellectual systematisation. The new idea of 'mental prayer' emerged, which lost much of the spontaneity of the original practice. Methods of mental prayer began to emerge. During the 16th century, mental prayer came to be divided into discursive meditation (where thoughts predominated), and affective prayer (where the emphasis was on acts of the will), and contemplation (where graces infused by God were the characteristic). Further, the organisation of prayer into 'stages', led to the idea that contemplation was reserved for a spiritual elite, while for the ordinary Christian, simple, organised mental prayer, or some form of 'devotion' had to be sufficient.

Contemporary meditation movements no longer make a sharp distinction between meditation and contemplation, and do not consider that a complex method

is necessary. Most importantly, they believe that contemplation is available to all and is not the privilege of the elite. The practice of contemplation in this mode opens the way for many to an experience of the presence of God that responds to their deepest longings. While contemplation so conceived does not entail a complicated technique, it does require a firm discipline of thought, imagination and physical posture; it is not relaxed day-dreaming.

Contemplation provides an awareness beyond words, since no words can contain God. This raises questions for some, who fear that this leads to a vague 'Oriental' mysticism, divorced from the truths of the Gospel and from Church teaching. It is important to recognise that the awareness beyond words in the Catholic tradition emerges within the practice of prayer in the community, where believers experience the transformation worked by grace, hear the word of God, respond to that word, give thanks to the Lord in the Eucharist, communicate the word, and commit themselves to the community of the Church, with its authority. A believer can transcend the words only if she or he first hears the words and returns to the words. Given that commitment to the word of God, Christians have found some of the techniques of 'Eastern' mediation very helpful. Christian meditators are not engaged in 'syncretism', nor are they drifting into an amorphous 'new age' spirituality.

St Alphonsus wrote of meditation and contemplation, accepting the distinction between them that was current at his time. He distinguishes between the two in terms of the source of activity: 'In meditation we employ acts of our own faculties, in contemplation it is God who is active and we are the recipients of graces which he puts into souls without effort on our part.' He insists that one should not relinquish reflection on the 'truths' of the faith prematurely. His caution on this point may have been influenced by the condemnation of 'Quietism' by Innocent XII in 1687. However, he clearly recognised that contemplation leads us beyond knowledge through concepts, to a kind of awareness of God that is 'immediately' given.

St Alphonsus was convinced that prayer was not something only for the elite, but for everyone. But the kind of prayer which he strongly believed was available to everyone was that in which the person is engaged in *active recollection*. He seems to have shared the view of his time that contemplation – that is, the purely passive kind – was a miraculous, supernatural gift, reserved for a limited elite, and granted usually after a lengthy process of purification. He also stressed the need for acts of the will, but he was not proposing that 'will power' could bring one to contemplation. He urged that there is to be no doing violence to ourselves: 'First, it as a matter of stirring the will, but gently and not with violence in pro-

ducing “affections” towards Jesus and Mary.’ The last phrase is significant: what is ultimately important is not the nature of our knowledge of God, but love for God and, in particular, for the persons of Jesus and Mary.

In his book on prayer, St Alphonsus suggests that we reflect on truths, but only so long as is necessary to stir the affections. It is the ‘practice of the love of God’ rather than theoretical distinctions and methods, which is the key to understanding St Alphonsus’ view of meditation-contemplation. This personal quality could be the special contribution of Alphonsian spirituality to contemporary practice.

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. We have the right and duty to devote at least one hour every day to prayer (Const. 30). What does this mean in your life?
2. Do you allow enough time for silence within your meditation?
3. How do you feed your spirit in preparation for contemplation?

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## MORAL THEOLOGY

It is useful to notice at the outset that the term ‘moral theology’ is made up of a noun and an adjective, indicating that we are dealing here with a certain *type* of theology. Such a literal understanding of the term does not, however, correspond to the way in which it is generally used: when people talk about moral theology, they often understand a discipline that is primarily about moral problems. To understand why this is so and appreciate the difficulties it entails, we must turn in the first instance to history.

### Origins

It is an accepted historical fact that ‘moral theology’ emerged as a distinct theological discipline after the Council of Trent. This does not, of course, mean that theologians did not think about morality before Trent, but rather that they did so within disciplines such as canon law, theology and various forms of what we today would call ‘spirituality’, all of these being closely tied to Sacred Scripture. In particular, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), while he did not think of moral theology as a distinct discipline, did dedicate a whole part of his colossal *Summa Theologiae* explicitly to moral questions of all kinds. All of this has one very important consequence: when we do moral theology today we must take into account both the period since the birth of the new discipline and the much longer period of Christian history before this birth.

All of this said, the emergence of moral theology after the Council of Trent is a significant event – an event which helps to understand the historical and ecclesiastical context in which St Alphonsus emerged as a moral theologian. The new discipline had a very specific task: to train seminarians for the practice of the sacraments, especially that of penance, as prescribed by Trent. The didactical method most suited to this end (casuistry) was that of the study of specific, illustrative examples of sin and moral dilemma. This approach, which had certainly some pragmatic, didactical value, was greatly exposed to the risk of reducing morality to a question of law, commandment and sin at the expense of a whole range of other considerations (creation, redemption, grace, prayer, virtue, etc.) which had been present in theology and spirituality before the emergence of the new discipline.

Having been introduced into a rigid form of moral theology dominated by casuistry, which at first sight suited his training as a lawyer, one of the great achievements of St Alphonsus is to have set moral questions in a broader theological context shaped by the doctrine of the redemption. Without attempting to

recount here the complex and controversial history of the relationship between St Alphonsus and moral theology, we may attempt to capture some key features of the influence of Alphonsus on this discipline as it is practiced today.

### Description

It is vital to remember that St Alphonsus wrote his *Theologia Moralis* in the first place for students and priests of the Redemptorist Congregation. We must always think of Alphonsus the founder, the confessor, the preacher and the bishop as one and the same person as Alphonsus the moral theologian. This is the best way to appreciate the way in which his theology is ‘earthed’ in pastoral realities and is intended to promote good pastoral practice. It is generally accepted that in terms of explicit, theoretical explication and speculation, Alphonsus in a very obvious way follows the master of his day: Hermann Busenbaum SJ (1600-68). His contribution to moral theology is therefore not to be sought in terms of theoretical innovation, but rather in the way he conceived of moral theology in the service of compassionate pastoral practice. At the core of this ministry is the proclamation of the good news of plentiful redemption, which is of course the very purpose of the Redemptorist Congregation.

### Pastoral Application

To be faithful to the inspiration of our founder, then, we must certainly be fully committed to the proclamation of the Gospel to the poor. We must accompany this, however, with something of the same passion and dedication which Alphonsus had for moral theology. Normally this will not take the form of a full-time academic commitment, but should involve a serious effort to follow the way in which key moral themes such as justice, sexuality and marriage, bioethics etc. are treated in moral theology today. The moral theology learned in initial and ongoing formation is aimed at enhancing the work of the Redemptorist as he pursues his particular pastoral mission. Any effort to dismiss moral theology as outdated constitutes a lack of fidelity to our founder. In this sense moral theology is a constitutive part of the mission of the Congregation.

### Current Manifestations

In the centuries since St Alphonsus and in the Redemptorist world today, there has been in general a reasonable degree of fidelity to this tradition. In Redemptorist seminaries and libraries a certain accent has often been laid on moral theology. A milestone in this history occurred in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when the then Fr General, Buijs, decided to found the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. Among

many illustrious figures associated with the Academy, the best known is certainly Fr Bernhard Häring, who incarnated the best of the Alphonsian spirit: a profound conviction concerning the redemptive presence of Christ; a genuine openness to contemporary culture and other disciplines; prudent and compassionate pastoral practice and, last but not least, an amazing dedication to writing moral theology.

Häring died in 1998. His spirit, and with it the spirit of St Alphonsus, lives on in all those confreres who dedicate themselves to the pastoral care of the poor and abandoned. It takes a particular form in those who dedicate their lives as Redemptorists to teaching and writing moral theology. Given the complexities of the globalised world and the rapidly changing configuration of Redemptorist presence, it would seem to be a vitally important time for a transmission of this tradition to younger generations and to broader cultural contexts.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Have I got three good moral theology books in my room (which I have read or am reading)?
2. How has my understanding of moral theology changed since my time as a student?
3. Have I an author whom I consider a particular authority in this field?
4. When I am faced with a moral problem in my own life or that of someone else how seriously do I take prayer as a key part of the solution?

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## NEUMANN, ST JOHN

**M**onday, 29 May 1836: John Neumann stood at the rails of the SS *Europa* in New York Harbor. He could not have known that he stood on the verge of what had been and what awaited him. His first 25 years were in every way European; the next quarter-century would be the life of an immigrant to North America.

### European Years: 28 March 1811 to 11 April 1836

John Nepomucene Neumann was born on 28 March 1811 in Prachatice in Bohemia (then part of the Austrian empire, now Czech Republic), the third of six children of the Bavarian Philip Neumann and Agnes Lebis, a Czech. As a child, John was known as the family's bookworm, and his love of learning never left him. Educated at the gymnasium in neighbouring Budweis, John excelled in the sciences and considered the medical profession, but instead applied for the local seminary. To his surprise, he was accepted.

Neumann was happy among the 140 seminarians at the seminary of Budweis, and academically successful. During these years, inspired by the records of St Paul's missionary journeys in the Scriptures and by the *Leopoldinen Berichte* accounts from America, Neumann decided to prepare for missionary life.

He successfully applied to the archiepiscopal seminary in Prague, but his request to study English along with his seminary curriculum was denied. John described himself as a solid mountain boy, and life in the big city did not suit him. He missed life in the smaller seminary of Budweis. His *Spiritual Journal* reveals a man tortured by self-doubt and alienation. John had a sensitive conscience and worried about his personal failings. At one point, he feared he might do himself harm if his inner turmoil remained unresolved. Although he completed his seminary studies, his bishop declined to ordain him, because the diocese of Budweis had enough priests. After six months of waiting, Neumann decided he could no longer defer his missionary dream and took leave of Europe. He would return only once, for the solemn declaration of the Immaculate Conception in 1854.

### The American years: 4 June 1836 to 5 January 1860

Neumann sailed for America from Le Havre in France on the *Europa*, leaving on 20 April 1836. Neumann experienced the trans-Atlantic voyage as akin to that of Jesus in the desert – 40 days at sea in preparation for a ministry he could not predict, with neither a specific destination in mind nor an acquaintance to greet him. When he did finally meet the bishop of New York, he learned that a letter

of acceptance for his ordination had already been sent. Neumann was ordained two weeks later. His first assignment as a priest of the diocese of New York was to the western frontier, north of Buffalo. There he served the parishes of North Bush, Williamsville and Lancaster, along with a number of out-missions. Neumann served his people tirelessly and came near to a breakdown. The words of Joseph Prost C.Ss.R., '*Vae Soli*', often echoed in Neumann's head, and he confided his intense longing for the company of fellow priests. In 1840, four years after his ordination, Neumann requested entrance into the religious life as a Redemptorist, and received a positive response. He left for Pittsburg in early October of that year.

As a Redemptorist, John Neumann maintained an intense pastoral schedule. He showed deep concern for the immigrants to the new land who, in his view, were too easily led into heretical directions. Likewise, he held himself to a rigid daily routine of prayer, both in common acts and private devotions. He was the confrere who would rise early every morning to start the fire in the furnace, so the house would warm up by the time the community gathered for prayer and breakfast. The confreres recognised John's goodness and ability. He was appointed pastor just two years after profession and became the superior of the entire American mission three years later.

Neumann's leadership style, both in the local community and as vicegerent/vice-provincial, were marked by diligence, patience and at least a bit of self-deprecation. He insisted that the Rule and community exercises be strictly observed, but did not seek the honours and privilege often associated with the positions of authority he occupied.

Archbishop Kenrick chose Neumann as his confessor in Baltimore and in 1852 picked him as his successor in Philadelphia, where Kenrick had been bishop before his promotion to the primal sea of Baltimore. Neumann begged to be excused from the task, but reluctantly acceded to the wishes of those in greater authority. The 'little bishop' felt the complaints of the people of his diocese keenly. He had neither the bearing nor the correct accent which the high society of the Fair City associated with a bishop ordained to serve such a prestigious city and all the territories surrounding it. The bishop was intelligent, but not known for his scholarship; he organised complex institutions, but was not known as a great administrator; he oversaw to completion the construction of the cathedral, but was not known as a builder.

He was, however, known for his love and concern for his flock, especially for the immigrants who poured into the area every day. He spoke their languages and saw to their needs with institutions of charity. He started parochial schools

and developed the first Catholic school system in the United States; he started the 40 hours devotion and other pieties needed for the faith life of the people; he spent at least half of his time on the road visiting the priests and people in all areas of his diocese; he saw to the development of the local seminaries for the future clergy of the diocese.

Neumann died on 5 January 1860; he was 49 years old. He passed into eternity in his normal quiet and unpretentious manner: of a stroke on the doorstep of an unknown neighbour while on a simple errand of charity. Earlier that day, he had chatted with a confrere and mentioned that one must always be ready because death comes when and where God wills it. It was reported that the city of Philadelphia had never seen such a funeral. In life Neumann avoided crowds, in death he had to submit to great demonstrations of love. Benedict XV summed up the manner of this saint's life: 'He did the ordinary extraordinarily well.' He was canonised by Pope Paul VI on 19 June 1977.

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. How could St John Neumann be promoted as patron of migrants?
2. How did John Neumann develop from a tortuous introspective young man to a self-possessed bishop?
3. Is John Neumann a model for Redemptorist superiors?

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## NOVENAS

For the last 50 years, every Tuesday, thousands of people gather in Teresina, Brazil. Each Wednesday, some 100,000 people gather in Manila in the Philippines. Every Saturday, thousands gather in Singapore. For nine days in June, thousands of people gather in Limerick, Galway and Belfast in Ireland. In Poland, people flock to Redemptorist shrines in Tuchow, Torun and Krakow. What brings all these diverse tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations together? The answer is an extraordinary Redemptorist phenomenon known as the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

### Evolution of a Devotion

The notion of the Novena (from the Latin *novem*, meaning nine) is nothing new in the Catholic tradition. It is soundly based in Scripture, on the account of the nine days of continuous prayer of the early Christians, accompanied by Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

In the Naples of St Alphonsus, novenas were very popular, and in *The Glories of Mary*, Alphonsus specifically recommends them as ways of honouring Our Lady. Traditionally, novenas also formed part of the devotional life of a Redemptorist community, particularly in anticipation of major Marian feasts. Redemptorists are indebted to the Servites for the concept of the Perpetual (or weekly) Novena. In 1937, Fr James Keane broke free from the nine-day model and, at a packed session at the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Chicago, inaugurated the Perpetual Novena in Honour of Our Lady of Sorrows. This notion was adopted by Redemptorists in the Baltimore Province, and eventually spread worldwide.

After the Second World War, in January 1949, the Redemptorist Community in Singapore established Our Lady's Perpetual Novena. Thousands continue to celebrate the Novena there every Saturday (including many non-Catholics and people of other religious traditions); the whole area is called Novena and it even has a dedicated subway stop!

In 1931, Mrs Ynchausti, a lay woman, made a gift of an icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help to the people of the Philippines. During the war, the icon was temporarily lost, but was restored in time for the establishment of the Perpetual Novena in 1948. Fr Lewis O' Leary, builder of the new Baclaran Church, presented the Novena as a 'perpetual mission'.

The story of the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in Ireland is in-

teresting. In October 1943, two American Redemptorist chaplains to the US forces based in the north of Ireland, Frs Keenan and Meighan, called to the Redemptorist Community at Clonard. Fr Meighan told the Rector, Fr Regan, about the Novena back home in honour of Our Lady. Fr Regan passed the word on to Fr Kerr, the Provincial who agreed to begin the Perpetual (weekly) Novena in Clonard, Dundalk and Limerick. This weekly event would be accompanied by a Solemn (yearly) event of nine consecutive days.

Bolstered by events such as the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950, and the Marian year of 1954, the Perpetual Novena proved immensely successful. In the early 1970s, Fr Vincent Kavanagh focussed his energies on the Solemn (yearly) event of nine consecutive days. Under Fr Kavanagh's leadership, attendance at the Solemn Novena in Limerick rose from 4,000 per day in two sessions in June 1971, to 23,000 per day in nine sessions in June 1976. In 1981, Fr Kavanagh obtained a recorded video greeting from Pope John Paul II to Irish Novena-goers! By then, the addition of a tent in the monastery garden and the extension of the Novena to surrounding parish churches caused an attendance of 50,000 per day in 24 sessions. In Fr Kavanagh's own words, the Novena was a 'new form of Redemptorist mission', aimed more at urban centres.

### The Format

Worldwide, the Novena format is basically the same, whether or not it's accompanied by a Eucharist. There's hymn-singing, praying of the Novena prayers, reading of people's petitions and thanksgivings, and a sermon. Special features of the Novena sometimes include communal celebrations of Penance, Anointing of the Sick, and special sessions for children and young people.

### Some Theological Reflections

1. The Novena is based on *human experience*, on 'the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time' that Vatican II speaks of, and which is shared by the Church. At the Novena, the people hear their joys and griefs being read out in petition and thanksgiving, often being made the subject of the homilies.

2. The Novena is *incarnational*. 'Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction' (Pope Benedict XVI). Redemptorists try to facilitate this encounter, conscious that for many people, the Novena is their only contact with organised religion.

3. The Novena is *catechetical*. As Pope John Paul II put it very directly, catechesis refers to the Church's efforts 'to make disciples, to help people believe



that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they may have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and so build up the Body of Christ'. The Novena is not just about healing and comfort; it's also about being sent out on mission. The catechetical dimension to the Novena is about education in faith, but it is also to equip people to assume their baptismal mandate to go on mission for the healing of the world.

4. The Novena is about *conversion*. The Novena speaks to the human dream of betterment and change that lies behind every petition. Conversion is a process. The nine days of waiting is a time of change. Some people say that they finish the Novena with a petition very different to the one with which they started, or they find the freedom to leave the petition open ended, to let God answer it however God wills.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Has the custom of Redemptorist Novenas disappeared from community life? If so, do I miss them?
2. How do the Novena Devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help connect with my Mariology?

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## NOVITIATE

Someone who is not a religious would wonder exactly what a ‘Novitiate’ is. Individual Redemptorists would have a notion of Novitiate stemming from their own experience of that institution. Our purpose here is to show what the Redemptorist novitiate is like today.

### Origins

Religious life began unpretentiously with people such as St Anthony going off into the desert to spend their days alone in prayer and penance with God. As religious life expanded into monastic life and religious orders, the notion of a period of induction became codified. Novitiate (from the Latin *Novus*, ‘new’) became standard practice.

The first volume of *The History of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* gives a fascinating account of the origin and growth of the Redemptorist novitiate. From the beginnings (1732-64) we see the early confreres struggling to give a peculiarly Redemptorist flavour to this first stage of formation: it was always first and foremost a school of virtue, of discernment and of love for the Congregation and its vocation. It is remarkable that from the time that definitive legislation was agreed (1764) the novitiate throughout the Congregation remained more or less unchanged until the General chapter of 1967-69.

Eight structural elements of the traditional Redemptorist novitiate are noted: 1) radical conversion; 2) clarification and quiet of conscience; 3) self-knowledge and good intention; 4) self-control of mind, will, emotion, passion, and natural impulse; 5) total break from worldly standards and social pressure; 6) practical exercise of the ‘holy virtues’ as a concrete form of the imitation of Christ; 7) gradualness, gentleness, energy, and prudence; 8) an austere life proper to the Congregation.

### In the Post-conciliar Church

After *Perfectae Caritatis* of the Second Vatican Council called for the renewal of the religious life in 1965, a follow-up *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, issued by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 1990, insisted: ‘Not all the novices enter the novitiate at the same level of human and Christian culture. It will therefore be necessary to pay very close attention to each individual so that each advances at his or her own pace, and so that the content of formation and the way it is communicated, are suitable to the one receiving it.’

## Redemptorist Novitiates Today

The Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes, first drafted in 1969 and then given final approval in 1982, describe how the novitiate is to help the novice in attaining psychological maturity, in spiritual formation, formation in community life and in Pastoral Formation.

The publication Redemptorist Formation Plan, *Ratio Formationis C.Ss.R.*, in 2003 presented formation under five interconnected dimensions: The Human Dimension; the Spiritual Dimension; the Community Dimension; the Academic/Professional-Training Dimension; and the Pastoral Dimension.

The role of the novitiate in terms of the human dimension of formation is to help the novice grow in his knowledge and acceptance of himself (his abilities and traumas), his family and his culture.

For the spiritual dimension the novice master accompanies each novice in his process of discernment and the organising of his own spiritual journey. He also helps him to integrate both the personal and the communal dimension of his new life as a Redemptorist. The community dimension is concerned with formation to live and work in community – the Redemptorist community and the various ecclesial communities in which we find ourselves.

While the novitiate is not a time for formal academic study, there should be adequate intellectual formation about the charism of the Congregation, and the meaning of the vowed life. Again pastoral outreach is not part of the novitiate, but adequate formation should always encourage sensitivity to the pastoral concerns of the Congregation and begin to develop ways of reflecting on apostolic experience so that it can be integrated into the spiritual life.

## Current Examples

For some Units, the number of candidates still makes possible a free-standing novitiate entirely staffed and administered for members of the Unit. In other places, the smaller number of men requesting to join Redemptorist life requires collaboration between Units. Some collaborative novitiates are ‘interprovincial novitiates’, governed by by-laws drawn up by a board consisting of the major superiors of the various Units. Others are novitiates that are hosted by one (Vice) Province and in which other Units are invited to participate with limited say as to how the novitiate is to be conducted.

The number of men entering the novitiate also affects to a certain extent the quality of training the men receive. On one hand, if there are too few novices, the lack of a peer group can be detrimental to the novice. For this reason, novitiate policy often demands a minimum number of novices. On the other hand,

too many novices reduces the quality of formation that can be given each novice since today there is a great emphasis on character formation as well as the development of a reflective style of living.

The insights from psychological testing are taken seriously, personal and family history are explored, and the novice is helped to ‘grow in his awareness of his sexuality and affectivity’ in preparation for a life of chaste celibate love. The novice and the novice master meet weekly to assess the novice’s personal issues – human, spiritual and with regard to community life.

The style of formation today is more one of partnership between the master (as a coach) and the novice (as a willing participant in his own formation). In the end, the novice master has the obligation of assuring that the admittance of a candidate to vows is to the good of the Congregation, but the hope is that it can be done in such a way that novice and the master agree that the decision best serves the individual, the Congregation and the Church.

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*Manuale Formatorum Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris*. Rome 2009

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What we expect of a Novice (*Ratio Formationis* 2003) would be a challenge to any of us: In the Human dimension, am I growing in knowledge and acceptance of myself, my family and culture?
2. In the Spiritual dimension, do I have a habit of personal and communal prayer?
3. In the Community dimension, do I experience community life as a place of faith, service and acceptance of others in fraternity?

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## ORIENTAL REDEMPTORISTS

Many people, including Catholics, think of the Catholic Church only in terms of the Roman or Latin Church. The reality is that the Catholic Church is a communion of Churches. This notion of a ‘communion of Churches’ is very suitable for expressing the core of the mystery of the Church, and the word ‘communion’ (*koinonia*) is a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology. Each Church in the Catholic communion is called a Church *sui iuris*, though sometimes they are wrongly referred to as ‘rite’. It is helpful to unpack these terms.

### Rites and Churches *Sui Iuris*

A ‘rite’ is defined by the Church as ‘a heritage made up of liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline, a heritage that is differentiated by the culture and the circumstances of the history of peoples and which is expressed by each Church *sui iuris* in its own manner of living the faith’ (Corpus Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, or CCEO, can. 28 para 1). Generally the Church documents speak of six ritual traditions in the Church: the Roman, the Alexandrian, the Antiochian, the Armenian, the Byzantine (Constantinopolitan) and the Chaldean.

The phrase ‘*sui iuris*’ (‘of one’s own law’) is a legal phrase referring to the capacity to manage one’s own affairs. A Church *sui iuris*, therefore, is ‘a community of the Christian faithful, which is joined together by a hierarchy according to the norm of law and which is expressly or tacitly recognised as *sui iuris* by the supreme authority of the Church (CCEO can. 27). Therefore, there can be different Churches *sui iuris* belonging to the same ritual tradition (for example 14 Churches *sui iuris* have the Byzantine rite as their original liturgical tradition). This is due to the adaptation of the same rite to different cultures, places, time and people. Today in the Catholic Church, there are 23 Churches *sui iuris*, including the Latin Church belonging to the six different ritual families.

The man who pioneered the foundation of a Redemptorist apostolate in another Church *sui iuris* was Fr Achille Delaere, a Belgian missionary. Fr Achille was sent to Canada in 1899 to work especially among migrants of the Ukrainian rite. In 1904, he established St Gerard’s monastery in Yorkton to care for the large Galician (Polish and Ukrainian) population in Saskatchewan’s and Manitoba’s prairie parkland. In 1906, convinced that Greek Catholics, Ruthenians and, later, Ukrainian Catholics required services in their own language and rite, he persuaded his superiors to allow him to adopt the Byzantine rite, to preach in Ukrainian, and to use Old Church Slavonic instead of Latin as the liturgical language.

The efforts of Delaere and his companions bore fruit. In 1921 two Vice-Provinces, Yorkton in Canada and Lviv in Ukraine, were established. Eventually with the erection of the Yorkton Province in 1961, it became the first Eastern-rite

Redemptorist Province. While the number of Ukrainian Redemptorists in the Province of Yorkton is small today, their influence on the Congregation, on the Church and the world is profound. The first foundation in Yorkton is significant for the Congregation because it showed a way forward for the Church in an era when uniformity was being emphasised to the detriment of diversity. The Congregation itself eventually incorporated the rich diversity of the Church in its Constitutions: ‘The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, founded by Saint Alphonsus [...] and having members belonging to various rites’ (Const. 1).

Today Redemptorists have four Provinces/Vice-Provinces and two missions in different Oriental Churches, as well as a number of confreres belonging to the Oriental Churches in various Units of the Congregation such as Bangalore, Mumbai, Baltimore and Edmonton-Toronto.

Lviv had its first Redemptorist foundation in 1913 and it was erected to a Vice-Province in 1921. It really flourished in the years after it was erected into a Vice-Province until it faced persecution in the hands of the communist regime in the 1940s. In 1946, the Russian government altogether prohibited the activities of the Ukrainian Catholic Church which made the Redemptorists, along with many other religious, priests and other devout Christians, go underground, to suffer persecution and even martyrdom. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, the Redemptorists reorganised themselves and the Province of Lviv was established in 1991.

The third Redemptorist province in the Oriental Church is the Liguori Province in India, in the Syro-Malabar Church belonging to the Chaldean liturgical family. The first foundation in the Syro-Malabar Church was in Chowara in the archdiocese of Ernakulam in 1981. In 1992, the Syro-Malabar Region was established, which was eventually erected into a Province on 27 June 2008.

Another Redemptorist Unit in the Oriental Church is the Vice-Province of Michalovce in Slovakia. The first house was erected in 1921, becoming a Vice-Province in 1945. Like the Province of Lviv, Michalove also suffered persecution under the communist rule. However, since the fall of communism in the former Czechoslovakia, the Vice-Province has reorganised itself, and is once again attracting young men to its ranks.

Thanks to the missionary zeal of the Belgian Redemptorists, the Congregation also has missions in Lebanon and Iraq. The first Redemptorists reached Lebanon in 1952 and Iraq in 1958. Due to the fluid and tense political and social situations and wars, like the rest of the Christian faithful, our confreres live in a situation of constant uncertainty in these two missions, both of which belong to the Chaldean liturgical family.

Though at present Redemptorist foundations in the Oriental Churches are confined to these different Units mentioned above, we do have members from the other Churches *sui iuris* such as from the Maronite Church and Syro-Malankara

Church. However, the significance of having Units in different Churches *sui iuris* is not in terms of the number of Units or members from these Churches, but in the witness value to the whole Church and to those Institutes of Consecrated Life that still tend to undermine the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II by their insistence on the uniformity of the whole membership to one liturgical tradition and ascription to one Church *sui iuris*.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it inaccurate to identify the Roman Catholic Church with the universal Church?
2. Why does the Decree on the Eastern Churches insist that that the Catholic Eastern Churches cannot be a model for greater unity among Christians?
3. 'Each local Church is wholly Church but not the whole Church.' Is this a good expression of the *communio* concept of Church?

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## PARISH MISSIONS

Parish Missions, also known as ‘Popular Missions’, are the missionary activity carried out by Redemptorists among the lay faithful, especially the poor, in their respective parishes and local communities. In missiology this is referred to as *missio ad intra*, in contradistinction to *missio ad gentes* (missionary activity among non-Christian peoples and cultures). Aimed at revitalising the faith of the people in parishes and local communities, Parish Missions are a distinct contribution of the Redemptorists in the Church.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many of the religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Augustinians and Dominicans, were engaged in *missio ad gentes* in the Americas, Asia and Africa. St Alphonsus wanted to be part of the great missionary expansion, especially in China. However, after encountering the poor in mountains and villages of Scala and other parts of Italy, he became aware of the need to carry out missionary activity among them. Thus, Alphonsus founded the Redemptorist Congregation to preach the good news especially to the poor, most of whom were already Christians. They had already been baptised but not evangelised. Popular Missions became the primary means in carrying this out.

Throughout the centuries, Redemptorists have been conducting Parish Missions. As they spread out all over the world, this form of mission was considered as their distinct contribution. There were times when the social conditions made it difficult, if not impossible, to conduct such missions. Consequently Redemptorists like St Clement had to adapt. They transformed their churches into centres of devotion and a kind of ‘permanent mission’ which attracted many people. Others had to accept the care of parishes. However, whenever circumstances permit, Redemptorists would revert to traditional itinerant missions.

A traditional Redemptorist mission is conducted in parish churches and village chapels, and often last for a week or more. The emphasis is on explicit proclamation of the Gospel aimed at a renewal of life or conversion. This is symbolised by the pulpit and the confessional. Going to confession is seen as the response of the people to the preaching of the word by the Redemptorist missionaries.

Most of the preaching is done in the evening for five to seven days. The choice of topics would depend on the missionaries and would vary according to the situation of the people. Prominent among the topics are: God’s love, Jesus Christ the Redeemer, personal conversion and renewal, discipleship, Christian community/the Church, Christian family, prayer and the sacraments, service and care for the poor, Marian devotion, and so on.



The emphasis on explicit proclamation leading to conversion is enshrined in the Redemptorist Constitutions:

‘.....Redemptorists have as their special mission in the Church the explicit proclamation of the word of God to bring about fundamental conversion...’ (10)

‘Blessed by God with the ministry of reconciliation, the members announce the good news of salvation and the “favourable time”, so that people be converted, believe in the Gospel, really live their baptism and put on the new self.

Redemptorists are thus “apostles of conversion”, in so far as the chief object of their preaching is to lead people to a radical choice regarding their life – a decision for Christ – and draw them firmly and gently to a continuing and total conversion’ (Const. 11).

During the mission proper, the missionaries would visit the homes of the people and invite them to attend the mission activities. The mission is also accompanied by popular religious/devotional practices such as processions, Stations of the Cross, Holy Hour, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, etc. This form of Parish mission continues to be conducted by many Redemptorists all over the world, especially in North America and Europe.

Another form of popular mission that has emerged in Latin America and Philippines since Vatican II emphasises the building up of the local Christian communities, known as Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). Redemptorists and lay missionaries spend longer period of time in parishes and villages evangelising these communities and organising them. While making use of the activities of the traditional form of Popular Missions, they conduct evangelisation seminars for the whole community and for various sectors (youth, children, men). They also train lay leaders, introduce sustainable community activities, structures and ministries. When necessary, they help develop the capability of the communities to address the problems that they face, such as poverty, injustice, violence, environmental destruction, corruption. This type of mission can go on a year or more in a parish.

The emphasis on formation of Christian communities as part of the missionary activity is in line with the Constitution: ‘...the object of their whole missionary activity is to raise up and develop communities that will walk worthily in the vocation to which they are called, and exercise the priestly, prophetic and royal offices with which God has endowed them’ (12).

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Is there still a need to conduct popular missions in your area or country?
2. What form of popular mission is suited in your own context? Is it enough to proclaim the word of God? Is there a need to form Small Christian Communities/ Basic Ecclesial Communities?
3. To be able to explicitly proclaim the word of God and bring about fundamental conversion there is a need to be nourished and touched by the word of God and experience ongoing conversion. Have you experienced this in your life?
4. How can your experience of community life contribute to the formation of the Christian community among the lay faithful to whom you are sent?

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## PARISHES

A parish (from the Greek *paroikos*, ‘to live nearby’, ‘around the house’) is ‘the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful. In a certain sense, it is the *Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters*’ (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 26). Canon Law describes the parish as ‘a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop’ (515.1). ‘It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of liturgical life: it gathers them together in celebration; it teaches Christ’s saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2179).

### Constitutions and Statutes

In Chapter 1 article 2 ‘Certain Forms of Missionary Work’, our General Statutes deal with ‘The Parochial Ministry’: ‘Members assigned to this ministry should perform their parochial duties with wholehearted dedication. They should bear well in mind that the more they are activated by the missionary spirit, the more they are, as it were, engaged in a continual mission’ (018). To carry out this continual mission they should remember the criteria set out in the corresponding Constitutions, that is, to act with ‘bold initiative and wholehearted dedication’ (Const. 13). If we are to act with missionary dynamism and with bold initiatives then we cannot ‘settle down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary’ (Const. 15). The parochial ministry of the Redemptorists should be recognised as an incessant source of new forms of evangelisation among those most pastorally and socially abandoned ‘raising up and forming communities that are signs of the presence of God in the world’ (Const. 12).

Our Redemptorist vision of ‘missionary parishes’ is echoed in the Aparecida Document (Brazil 2008). As ‘schools of communion’ parishes are called to a renewal which involves ‘the reformulation of their structures’ so that they become a ‘network of communities and groups’ where all are ‘disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ’ (172).

In *The Parish in the Redemptorist Apostolate* (Communicanda 82, 1984) Fr Joseph Pfab C.Ss.R., Superior-General of the Congregation, drew attention to

some characteristic attitudes which influence the way we minister in parishes.

An intense *missionary spirit* (cf. Const. 1-20) should always be a characteristic of the parochial ministry as exercised in a Redemptorist parish.

The *community life* of the confreres should occupy the centre of their parochial apostolate. In this context community life acquires a great apostolic relevance. It is the testimony of what we preach to others.

Confreres working in parishes are called to *integrate* their ministry with that of the diocese in which they live and that of the Unit to which they belong. The confreres dedicated to parish work should always be receptive to an *evaluation of their ministry* by the diocese and by the unit. In order to facilitate this evaluation, all the Redemptorists in parishes are encouraged to elaborate a *pastoral plan*.

### Pastoral Priorities in a Redemptorist Parish

Pastoral priorities will vary with the circumstances of each parish but one would expect certain matters to receive particular attention in Redemptorist parishes:

**Preaching:** given our call to proclaim the mystery of Christ ‘in Gospel simplicity of life and language’ (Const 20).

**Liturgical life:** given the tradition of making our churches centres of liturgical and devotion life.

**The Laity:** given the call towards partnership in mission.

**The Poor:** given our focus on the most abandoned, especially the poor.

**Youth:** given the significance of young people in the Church and in the Congregation.

**Priests:** given the pressures local priests are under and their spiritual needs (S. 015).

**Outreach:** as a Christian community a Redemptorist parish is open to all and reaches out to all, avoiding exclusivity.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In the tension between community life and parish apostolate, have we found a good balance?
2. Are we able to recognise and promote the charisms of parishioners?
3. Do we offer and encourage spiritual direction for those who come to our parishes?
4. Is there any outreach in our parishes to those who no longer participate in the life of the parish?

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## PASSION OF CHRIST

The love of Christ Crucified and Christ in the Eucharist were central to St Alphonsus' own spiritual life and in his writings. Alphonsus made the Passion the leitmotif of his spirituality. He was consumed to the depth of his being with the love of God revealed in the Passion of Jesus. Even as a young layman, inspired by his own inner experience, he painted the image of Christ on the Cross. The Passion became a central theme of his preaching and, in his direction of souls in the confessional, he taught people to meditate on the Passion.

Alphonsus nurtured his own love of Christ crucified by meditating on the Gospels, reading books about the Passion and daily making the Stations of the Cross. In a letter, referring to his *Considerations on the Passion of Jesus Christ (1761)*, he writes: 'I use it myself every day. I recommend to you never to allow any day to pass without recalling to your mind at least something of the Passion by the aid of this book or of another. The Passion has been the continual subject of meditation for the saints.' Alphonsus could say with St Paul: 'With Christ I am nailed to the Cross; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:19-20). This gave an irresistible power to his words on the love of God manifested in the Passion.

Alphonsus' dedication to the Passion left its imprint on the Congregation and its mission. He called Redemptorists to follow in the footsteps of Christ the Redeemer by preaching the good news of God's kingdom to the poor and most abandoned. He gave the Congregation its coat of arms with the cross, the lance and the sponge, and the motto: *Copiosa apud Eum Redemptio*. Each room was to have an image of Christ crucified and a large wooden crucifix was to be in the entry of our houses.

The love of God for us shown in the Passion is a strong focus of his mission preaching. In a letter on the way to preach he writes: 'I beg you speak often of the love which Jesus Christ has borne for us in his Passion and in the institution of the Eucharist; and of the love which we should have for this most beloved Redeemer, often calling to mind these two great mysteries of love... In our missions, and specially in the last three days, we should speak only of the Passion of the Redeemer, in order to leave souls bound to Jesus Christ.' The erection of the Cross at the end of the mission was to be an ongoing reminder to the people of the Passion, maintaining them consciously in the way of conversion.

Alphonsus composed hymns on the Passion which were sung on the missions, as well as an extended musical composition, *Duetto between the Soul and Jesus in his Passion (1760)*. He speaks of the Passion in all of his books

and composed a number of works explicitly dedicated to it. Among his principal writings on the Passion are: *The Love of Souls* (1751); *Meditations on the Passion of Jesus Christ for Every Day of the Week* (1754); *Considerations and Affections on the Passion of Jesus Christ, Explained Simply as the Gospels Describe It* (1761); *The Way of the Cross* (1761); *Fifteen Meditations on the Passion of Jesus Christ* (1766); and *Reflections on the Passion of Jesus Christ* (1773).

Though Alphonsus works with the classical concept of Christ's Passion satisfying for sin, it is the Passion, as the revelation of God's saving love, which is Alphonsus' overarching theme. 'Jesus on the Cross! Here is the proof of the love of a God. This is the last appearance of the incarnate Word on earth. The first was in a stable; the last is on a Cross. Both manifest his infinite love and charity towards human beings.' The Cross reveals a gracious God 'with whom there is plentiful redemption'. Basing himself on such texts as John 3:16 and 13:1; Romans 8:32; Galatians 2:19-20; Philippians 2:8; Ephesians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 5:14, Alphonsus argues for an intensely passionate God, a God of burning desires: 'The cross cries out, and every wound cries out that Jesus loves us with an infinite love.' The power of the Cross to save is vividly portrayed in the frontispiece of his *Reflections on the Passion of Jesus Christ* (1773) where arrows of love issue from the five wounds of Christ on the Cross. At the top of the page are the words from Ephesians 5:2: 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.' And across the bottom is a saying from St Bonaventure: 'The wounds of Jesus are arrows which pierce the hardest of hearts and inflame the coldest souls.'

The Passion, Alphonsus wrote, is particularly apt to evoke the dialogical structure of love and response which is so characteristic of him – the return of love for love. If the Passion of Jesus *first* reveals the love of God for us, it *then* demands in return the human response of love. The crucified is the principal book to be read by the Christian. 'The science of the saints is not learned in the study of books but in prayer. The crucified is both the master who teaches and the book read [...] The one who tastes God through love is the one who sees him and knows the greatness of his goodness.' Always the pastor of souls, Alphonsus constantly calls us to respond in mind, heart and will to Christ crucified, in order that the Passion have its transforming effect on us. The redemption, accomplished once and for all, needs to be accepted and appropriated by each of us personally.

In *The Love of Souls* Alphonsus writes: 'Jesus crucified then is the book all of us must constantly read. If we do so it will teach us to have a lively fear

of sin. At the same time it will inflame us with love for a God so full of love for us.' He draws the conclusion: 'It is impossible for a soul, which believes and thinks on the Passion of the Lord, to offend him and not to love him, rather not to go mad with love, seeing a God, out of his mind, as it were, for our love.'

Noel Londoño points out that it is Alphonsus' conviction about the love of God, so manifest in the crucified, that made him oppose both the rigorists and laxists, whom he saw as mutilating the Gospel and robbing salvation in the Cross of Jesus Christ of its efficacy and meaning. The pastoral benignity of Alphonsus in his moral theology and in his ministry to the most abandoned is a consequence of his theological vision. Out of that vision he did all in his power to defend his moral stance because it was the victory obtained by Christ on the Cross. The moral theology of Alphonsus is born of the 'scandal of the Cross' and leads to union with Christ in the Eucharist.

In Alphonsus' theology there is an inseparable interconnection between the theology of the Cross and the Eucharist. Londoño writes: 'The Passion and Eucharist mutually imply each other. The Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion; from this it derives its entire efficacy, and is, in the life of the Christian, the most concrete way to unite oneself to the crucified Lord. The Passion is the most visual and unrepeatable self-giving of Jesus Christ; the Eucharist is the continuing sacramental reality of his self-giving. The Passion shows forth the universality of salvation; the Eucharist expresses its personal realisation.'

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Am I drawn to meditate on the Passion and death of Jesus or is this a topic reserved for Lent or for occasional sermons?
2. Has the Cross revealed its secret to me over the years?
3. Do I reserve the Stations of the Cross for Lent only or is it a feature of my ordinary spiritual life?

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## PERSEVERANCE

The virtue of perseverance consists in being able to carry through on an action in order to bring it to a successful conclusion. It implies overcoming difficulties which are associated with prolonged effort. It is a quality that affects our follow-through on the promises and commitments we make. It thus has special application to making vows ‘*for life,*’ *perpetual profession*, and for us as Redemptorists involve ‘*the vow and oath of perseverance*’.

### The Vow and Oath of Perseverance

Redemptorists were not alone, as an active Congregation in modern Church history, to adopt the vow and oath of perseverance. It took time for the jurisprudence of the Church to give full recognition to Congregations of *simple vows* as religious institutes alongside the older religious orders with *solemn vows*. As active Congregations with simple vows came into being, the vow (and/or oath) of perseverance came to serve as a stabilising feature of some of these institutes.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the act of simple profession was recognised in law and came to fulfil the purpose previously fulfilled by the vow of perseverance.

From 1732-40, the members of the Congregation were missionaries living in common without vows. The departure of two members occasioned the taking of the vow of perseverance on 24 July 1740. This vow, reserving dispensation to the Rector Major and the Pope, bound the members to the Institute, giving it some of the internal stability it needed. Then in 1743, with Bishop Falcoia’s death, the members took simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, along with the vow of perseverance. In the General Congregation of 1747, an oath of perseverance was substituted for the vow, apparently to remove apprehension on the part of the regalist government of Naples concerning the founding of a religious order. In the Rule approved by Benedict XIV in 1749, both the vow and oath of perseverance are included. The General Chapter of 1764 formulated specific Constitutions on the vow and oath of perseverance.

Finally, in the General Chapter of 1979, a resolution to drop the vow and oath of perseverance, because its substance is already contained in the profession of perpetual vows, did not receive the required majority. Perhaps this is providential, given our world of short-term encounters and doubt about the possibility of life-long commitment.

## Vows for Life

Religious profession is rooted in our baptismal consecration (Const. 47). This puts the focus on *the primacy of God's action and his gift* in the call to religious life as a special charism in the Church. Our vowed life is a profession of faith in a faithful God, who makes promises and keeps his word. He covenants with us: 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Jer 31: 31-33; Ez 37:27; Rev 21:3). We see the fullness of who God is in Jesus, in whom all the promises are fulfilled. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14). He is the source and inspiration for our faith response of fidelity.

So our profession of vows is our response to this ever faithful God and to his gift. Our model and inspiration is Jesus who gave his life for our redemption. He is the faithful one who sustains us in making our pledge. His kingdom is something worth living and dying for. Timothy Radcliffe OP speaks of vowing as being ultimately 'about confidence in the God who is faithful to us, who has promised that just world which is the kingdom, and who will be faithful to his promise'.

Gabriel Marcel aptly distinguishes between '*constancy*' and '*fidelity*'. *Constancy* is simply the keeping of a promise (in this case) for a lifetime. It is an observable fact which does not address the inner motivations. One can keep a promise, without having one's heart in it. *Fidelity*, on the other hand, means that what is promised will always be accompanied by the internal dispositions and attitudes which led to the commitment in the first place.

The commitment of the Redemptorist in perpetual vows and by the vow and oath of perseverance involves a *constancy* animated by the internal dispositions designated by *fidelity*. It is fidelity which continues to nurture the *love and communion* at the heart of the original commitment. It is that which is life-giving both for ourselves and for others. Our vowing *first of all* commits us to be faithful followers of Christ (Const. 47), reflecting his own self-giving for the salvation of the world (Cc. 48, 56). It means a constant attention to nurturing the love relationship with God and one's own apostolic zeal, through a sustained life of personal and communal prayer (Cc. 23-33). It entails ongoing conversion (Cc. 41, 54), affecting dedication to the missionary work of 'preaching the word of God to the poor' (Const. 1). Finally, it involves an ongoing effort to live and work together in apostolic community 'in a spirit of genuine brotherly union' (Cc 21-22).

Perseverance has within it a certain resiliency in the face of life's twists and turns. 'Let us...lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with *perseverance* the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus

the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross [...] Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may *not grow weary or lose heart* [...] Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed' (Heb 12:1-3.12-13).

In our Redemptorist tradition, we make the vow and oath of perseverance, while at the same time praying each day for the grace of final perseverance. St Alphonsus quotes Bishop Palafox in emphasising this importance of prayer for perseverance in virtue: 'Virtues which are not supported by prayer will fail [...] How long can charity remain in us if God does not give us the grace of perseverance? And how will God give us this grace if we neglect to ask him for it? And how can we ask him for it if we do not pray? How can this miracle take place (namely to obtain perseverance) if we remove the aqueduct which brings all the heavenly graces into our souls, in a word, prayer? If we cease to pray we cease to be in communication with God to secure our perseverance in virtue.' Alphonsus also often invoked Mary as 'Mother of Perseverance' in his preaching and in his prayers. He left us the tradition of praying the *Salve Regina* for the grace of final perseverance.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Is the distinction between 'constancy' and 'fidelity' helpful? Is it akin to the distinction between 'survival' and 'steadfastness'?
2. Has your Unit studied the lack of perseverance among young confreres?
3. How can we integrate perseverance into our Redemptorist spirituality?

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## POOR

**O**n Sunday, 13 May 2007, in the basilica of Aparecida in São Paulo, Brazil, Pope Benedict XVI made an important and weighty pronouncement. He was inaugurating the Fifth General Episcopal Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean when he affirmed with clarity: the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith that God became poor for us in order to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). With this he settled a theological and ecclesial dispute which lasted for almost 40 years.

### The Evangelising Potentiality of the Poor

For us, the preference for the poor has no social motivation but it is part of the essential core of our faith. This is what Alphonsus understood when he founded the Redemptorists – moved by compassion for the poor, in order to evangelise them. In this, he follows the example of Christ who proclaims the Gospel to the poor, with whom he wished to be identified. For this reason, the Constitutions insist that Redemptorist spirituality requires solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, promoting their rights of justice (Const 5).

In this journey, a step forward was *Communicanda* 4 of the General Government in 1986: ‘To evangelise the poor and to be evangelised by the poor’. This same title includes a new factor in our spirituality: to allow ourselves to be evangelised by the poor. This already implies that the poor also evangelise. Their very existence is a call to evangelical conversion, to fidelity to our Constitutions and to our Redemptorist spirituality. Such a bold and clear formulation raised a debate among the conferes, but it picked up what was said already in the Puebla Document in 1979, when reference was made to the ‘evangelising potentiality of the poor’ (n. 1147).

### Our attitude towards the poor and poverty

Faced with the poor, as faced with Jesus, one must decide: ‘Are we with them or against them?’ Although their presence annoys us at times, we cannot live as though the poor do not exist. The poor exist, they are here. The very fact of their existence is a cry, at times weak and forgotten, and at other times threatening and impetuous. But the basic attitude when faced with the poor has different personal expressions: escaping from them; seeing them naively as any other common citizens; mystifying them by seeing in them only the good, or discarding them, emphasising only the bad.

However, our spirituality demands above all an authentic conversion to the

world of the poor. The poor are loved not because they are good or pious. They are loved because of God and in the way God loves them. This already represents a profound spiritual experience: through the disfigured face of the poor, Christ appears to us here and now (Mt 25:31-46).

We are committed to the cause of the poor not because of the analysis of the economic, political, social, historical or cultural reasons as to why the poor exist. On the contrary: it is only when we allow ourselves to be motivated by the dynamism of love that we can begin to understand the complexity of this situation and the urgent challenges presented to us by the existence of so many poor in the world.

### How the poor evangelise

1. In the first place, they reveal *human misery*: poverty is an inhuman situation, scandalous and anti-Christian. That is the reason why God specially loves the poor.
2. They help us discover *our own selves*: the existence of the poor challenges and calls us to conversion and the renewal of our own life.
3. They evangelise us because they teach us about the *love of God*: his beloved are the outcasts and the marginalised of this world. If he has promised his kingdom to the poor, we cannot ignore them.
4. The poor reveal to us the *suffering faces of Christ*, the Lord. One cannot follow or serve Christ except where he wishes to be served and followed. For this reason, St John Chrysostom spoke of the 'divine agape' which demands that we unite indissolubly the 'altar of the Eucharist' and the 'altar of the poor', since in them it is Christ himself who is being sacrificed.
5. The poor help us to rediscover *the vocation of the Church*. Throughout the centuries, the periods of greatest vitality, holiness, and renewal coincide with the periods when there is primacy of Christian commitment to the poor. We see this in the history of the Church Fathers, the Mendicant Orders, the Religious Congregations of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Vatican II and Medellin.
6. The option for the poor is a sign which verifies the *fidelity to the Redeemptorist religious vocation* (Const. 5). This option is the *raison d'être* of the Congregation in the Church. It demands a new way of living so that the poor may feel at home in our communities. Thus they will experience the Gospel as good news for them because it makes them live the Easter joy of Christ.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Why does the Church insist that the preferential option for the poor is a constitutive element of Christian life and spirituality?
2. What concrete demands do the Redemptorist and Alphonsian spirituality raise before us in our relations with the world of the poor?
3. Do I allow myself to be evangelised by the poor?
4. In what aspects have they evangelised me?

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## PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

When many of us hear the term ‘practical theology,’ we immediately think of the pastoral skills necessary for ministry. However, this would be to persist with the division of theology into specialist fields of endeavour. Contrary to this increasing specialisation, ‘practical theology is an attempt to heal this fragmentation of theology, such that it resists being slotted into yet another theological specialty’ (Veling 2005, p. 3).

### Origins

The term ‘practical theology’ has its origin with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who in *A Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (1811) divided the theological disciplines into ‘philosophical theology’, ‘historical theology’ and ‘practical theology’. However, all three were seen as connected through their service to the Church. In more recent times (1980s onwards), there has been a robust debate about the nature of ‘practical theology’ viewing it not merely as the application of principles drawn from other disciplines, but as a real effort to connect theology with life and, as such, having significant import for the education and life of all who are called to ministry.

### Description

Catholics have tended to use the more familiar term ‘pastoral theology’, but today it is often interchangeable with ‘practical theology’. Strong interest in the subject was generated in the late 1960s by the publication of the five-volume *Handbook of Pastoral Theology* by F. X. Arnold, Karl Rahner and others. In *Method in Theology* (1972), Bernard Lonergan describes it as the eighth functional specialisation which he called ‘communications’. What unifies the approach of ‘practical theology’ is the ongoing attempt to bring about dialogue between what is happening on the ground and the sources of the Tradition. It is in the sphere of making the connections and interpreting present realities through the various processes of theological reflection that practical theology has its most characteristic methodology. Of course, there are those who see it as just one more disciplinary specialisation, but this is to delimit the potentiality of a way of doing theology That seeks intentionally to bring to continuing dialogue the riches of Scripture, Tradition and experience.

### Pastoral Application

Our very first Constitution reminds us of the missionary nature of the Church and the way that the Congregation incarnates this mandate: ‘It does so by responding with missionary thrust to the pressing pastoral needs of the most abandoned, especially the poor, and by devoting itself entirely to evangelisa-

tion.’ We have all heard this numerous times, but it is a salient reminder that our lives are praxis oriented and that engagement in pastoral mission is fruitless if it does not foment dialogue with the sources of our faith and draw on those same resources within the communities among whom we minister. This is not the past meeting the present, but the dynamism of the Spirit bringing us into ever new encounters that enrich, enliven and empower. This is truly the realm of practical theology which is not simple pragmatism, but a genuine endeavour to ‘honour the appeal to human experience, drawing our attention to questions of history, culture, and society, urging us to respond to the real needs of our world...’

### Current Manifestations

Where are the needs? How can we respond from our charism? To answer this question I would like to provide two illustrations: one from Australia and one from the Philippines. The first is a response to the Church’s ministerial poverty in the rural dioceses of Australia. Two confreres have, in recent years, conducted diocesan-wide missions which are a combination of traditional mission, adult education, sacramental ministry and just being with people. Through the encounter with the diocese and with local people, often in very small rural communities, they assess and respond to their pastoral needs.

The second instance is educational where our confreres in the Vice-Province of Manila are engaged in deeply contextual formation of our candidates. This means time in the field, in the rural barrios, in fishing and agricultural communities, and then back to the classroom struggling to bring the sources of the Tradition to bear on experience and experience to bear on the Tradition. It is a field of struggle and of dialogue. Like all dialogue it gives rise to further questions and this is the basic hermeneutic of practical theology which is the desire for understanding of self, context and Tradition in the service of the Gospel.

### A Reflection

Martin Buber, the great proponent of dialogue, tells of an experience of conversion after which he ceased to separate the ‘religious’ and the ‘temporal’. After a morning of ‘religious’ enthusiasm, an unknown young man came to him, and although Buber was attentive he says he was not with the young man ‘in spirit’. He later learned that the young man had taken his life. The experience was traumatic, and Buber relates how he came to realise that we possess ‘nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken’ (Buber 1963, 31-32). He goes on to emphasise that when we pray we don’t remove ourselves from the events of our lives, but rather that we bring our lives and experiences to prayer. This engagement is truly ‘practical theology’.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What does it mean to read the 'sign of the times' with reference to our Redeemerist charism and ministry?
2. How do we bring the riches of Tradition to bear on our ministerial praxis, and bring our ministerial experience into dialogue with the sources of our faith?
3. Do you understand contemporary 'practical theology' to be more than pastoral application of the predominant theological disciplines?
4. How does the encounter of praxis and spirituality take place and engage you?

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## PRACTICE/PRAxis

Saint Alphonsus used the word *pratica* as a trademark. It features conspicuously in the title of many of his important works, especially the *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo* that expounds his approach to spirituality. His small treatise on the ministry of a bishop, *La pratica del ben governor*, elaborates the basics of the Catholic tradition in practical theology by describing the Church's basic pastoral structures. In moral theology he joined theory and practice dialectically, as is evident in the *Istruzione e pratica per i confessori (pratica grande)* which popularised and made his great *Theologia Moralis* accessible to priests involved in parishes

The *Pratica del confessore* is precisely what its name says; a manual of the practices a priest had to master to hear confessions, everything from instructing the *rozzi (the uncouth)* to helping souls to the heights of contemplation. It was incorporated as an integral part of the *Theologia Moralis* to ensure that his moral science would be put into practice. The fact that St Alphonsus' used the word *pratica* across the whole gambit of his literary production shows the essential bent of his mind.

*Pratica* has its own logic. In spirituality it usually describes virtues and how they are to be exercised. For instance, a meditation should issue in a resolution that changes one's way of acting. In his rhetoric for mission sermons in the *Selva* he insists that preachers instill *cose di pratica (practical matters)* in their hearers. He is utterly realistic about the necessity of repeating this message forcefully so as to impress new *pratiche (practices)* in uneducated people's behaviour. Such is the logic typical of rhetoric and communication. Moral theology involves the application of principles to cases. Here we encounter the logic of *prudentia* that guides moral action. St Alphonsus is therefore adamant that moral theology is always *ad praxim dirigenda (Theologia Moralis, Lib. V, Praeambulus)*.

An example might help. Spirituality might be compared to a car driver's how-to manual. If the vehicle breaks down, there is a problem to be resolved and repairs to be made before putting it into motion again. And so spirituality and casuistry help each other mutually. St Alphonsus distinguishes a *pratica* from *le pratiche* in terms of virtue and the practice of the virtues that compose it.

This has to be understood against the background of his times and culture. After the Council of Trent both theology and spirituality took a practical turn largely in reaction to the dry impersonal presentation that had failed to resolve

pressing problems, particularly regarding grace. The Jesuits were leaders in this new movement that emphasised the word *praxis*, *pratica*, or the English *practice* because of its importance for the Spiritual Exercises. This idea entered the culture of early modernity from secular sources as well.

St Alphonsus was educated in the *scuola pratica* of Neapolitan jurisprudence. Sarnelli, Alphonsus and Giambattista Vico all defined the concrete singular reality of a completed human action as *pratica*. By being shared by the members of a community it was able to build up a way of life and a tradition to support it. Vico employed *pratica* to visualise human activity at the dawn of civilisation as well as in the contemporary world. The term sums up all that goes into the successful exercise of human agency. *Pratica* is therefore defined morally through the intention of the person acting, the object willed and the circumstances that determine its concrete activation. St Alphonsus belongs to the classic tradition that thinks in terms of the virtue of *phronesis* (*insight/wisdom*) which is only fully actualised when it reaches *praxis*.

The revival of the term presently under way in spirituality depends on its retrieval in philosophy and the social sciences. Many have reacted strongly against the old idea of spiritual exercises and practices as merely routine repetitive actions lacking deeper motivation or meaning. This has yielded to the realisation that action as *praxis* forms a way of life, a community with common goals and its own spiritual tradition. MacIntyre has analysed these realities in terms of virtue. *Pratica* therefore belongs to the modern history of *praxis*. It should neither be simply identified with the Marxist *praxis* nor should it be considered as totally foreign to projects to transform a society's practices.

Alphonsus put his mark or signature on the idea of *pratica*. To explain the title of his main spiritual work, the *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo* (Chapter IV, no. 12), he argues that the Christian life can all be summed up in the practice of charity as *vero amore verso Gesù Cristo*, or 'charity as the true love for Jesus Christ' (idem, No 11). He holds that the practice of this virtue has already been revealed in Sacred Scripture. We may therefore speak of charity as a revealed practice.

St Paul teaches us that there is nothing greater or more necessary than it in the following of Christ. St Alphonsus further reasons that St Paul's hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 does nothing other than spell out the list of the *pratiche* that put the virtues essential to Christian life into effect. In fact, he personified charity as a mother who generates the *pratiche* of all the other Christian virtues as her daughters. All his efforts in spirituality, writing, preaching, moral theology and all branches of the apostolate were focused on Christ and love for him.

Here we may perceive the unity and originality of his Christocentric conception of *pratica*.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What efforts are made in your community to keep up to date with pastoral practice?
2. How do you integrate study and practice in your personal life?
3. Have you had occasion to change your pastoral practice in the light of experience?

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## PRAYER OF PETITION

Saint Alphonsus lived and ministered in a time deeply affected by the crisis of Jansenism and Predestinationism, as well as the controversy over Quietism. Theologians, preachers and ‘masters of the spiritual life’ were asking: What is the point of prayer of petition? Either one is saved or not. Jansenists, Predestinarians, and Quietists all rejected the prayer of petition. This was part and parcel of their negative vision of human nature.

Alphonsus responded to this thinking by affirming that petitionary prayer is not only efficacious but *essential* for salvation. ‘Whoever prays is certainly saved. Whoever does not pray is certainly damned.’ For Alphonsus, to pray in petition is to begin to live the redeemed life.

### Universal Salvific Will of God

In the face of those who preached a ‘limited’ salvation for the ‘elect’, Alphonsus powerfully affirmed the universal salvific will of God. No one is predestined for damnation. For Alphonsus, petitionary prayer is always directed towards this salvific will and the salvation of all. He takes a position against predestination in favour of universal salvation. He notes that revelation connects God’s salvific and redemptive will with the Christian’s prayer of petition: ‘My advice is that, first of all, there should be prayers offered for everyone – petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving ... this is right and will please God our Saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and to reach full knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Against Jansenism and Predestination, Alphonsus argues that it is precisely because God will never subvert human freedom that the prayer of petition is so important.

God gives everyone the grace to pray because God wants all to be saved. It is *God’s initiative* (protecting the sovereignty of the Divinity), but God chooses to act in a respectful and gracious manner towards all people without distinction, and most especially towards the poor. God invites them into partnership, mutuality and dialogue through their natural inclination to pray in petition.

### Creaturehood and Need for Redemption

The prayer of petition is a reminder that we are creatures, and that God is the Creator. It is natural for the one who realises that she or he is poor and dependent. As creatures, born needy, we must ask for sustenance, for help, for assistance. Fr Paul Hitz reminds us that the prayer of petition expresses our need for redemption, for a Redeemer, knowing that redemption can only be given to those who

desire it. For St Alphonsus, inspired by the writings of St Teresa of Avila, God can and will fill us only to the limit of our desire. One of his favourite texts was that of Isaiah 64:1 which resounds during Advent: ‘O that you would rend the heavens and come down!’

### Prayer Taught by Jesus

Alphonsus recognises that this is the way of praying taught by Jesus. Jesus teaches his disciples to persevere in asking: ‘Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened’ (Lk 11:9). Frequently he tells them to ask their Heavenly Father who knows all their needs and they will be heard. He reminds them that wherever two or three of them agree to ask anything in his name, it will be granted (cf. Mt 18:19). The ‘Our Father’, the model of Christian prayer which describes the relationship of the community with God in familial terms, is a series of petitions. The priestly prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John is a petitionary prayer (Jn 17). So is the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane – the prayer of suffering and abandonment.

This pattern continues and is reflected in the prayers of Paul, and then in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Eucharist. Alphonsus observes this solid tradition and realises that the experience of generations of Christians and of the community teaches that the prayer of petition has pride of place in Christian prayer.

### Pray and be Saved

Alphonsus champions the prayer of petition for a number of reasons. First of all he understood *the prayer of petition as God’s work in us* and that our very petitions are responses to grace. The initiative, even for petitionary prayer, *is God’s, not ours*. It is God who gives the grace to pray and stirs up within us the desire for prayer. It is God who plants within our consciousness the very petitions for which we must pray. St Paul says: ‘The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words’ (Rom 8:26).

*Petition is the prayer of the poor*, who are faced each day with their needs and who cry out in their poverty. Jesus identified with the poor, and so does Alphonsus. The poor taught him a radical dependence, and that God reached down to them in their need. Petition is the prayer of a child, of a sufferer, of one who recognises one’s essential poverty. It is a deeply human, incarnate prayer.

The ultimate goal of all prayer, and especially of the prayer of petition, is *to be one with God’s will* and to continue the presence and mission of Jesus to redeem the world. We are to pray for *conformity to God’s will*, to do what God



wills, to accept what God wills. This is what we might call ‘resignation’. This discipline and grace draws us beyond conformity with God’s will to *uniformity with God’s will* – that is, to ‘surrender’, that we might will only what God wills, truly desire what God desires, see as God sees and love as God loves! Again, God’s will is the salvation of all, as described by Paul in 1 Tim 2: 1-8. The prayer of petition thus *opens us up to partnership with God in the work of redemption*.

We do *not* pray to inform God of our needs, or the needs of others, but that we ourselves might become more consciously aware of these needs. This conscious awareness must move us to action on behalf of others. The prayer of petition allows God to cause compassion to grow in us, so that we come to ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5:6). Alphonsus resolved the faith/works controversy by appealing to the prayer of petition.

Alphonsus writes that we do not pray to change God, but *that God might change the one who prays and the community which prays*. When we open ourselves to God’s grace and action in this way, we will be changed and become instruments of God’s redeeming love.

*Petitionary prayer deepens the bonds of communion* in the Christian community and in the human family – because God wills that all be saved. It opens up a communion of love with those for whom we pray, and challenges us to respond to them in love as God has responded to us. It leads to our participation in God’s saving work. This is perhaps the deepest meaning and purpose of petitionary prayer.

The prayer of petition also leads to *a life of thanksgiving and praise of God*. God’s response to Mary’s desire for the salvation of Israel led first to partnership, and then to praise in the Magnificat. Gratitude becomes a spirit and way of life for those who live in love.

Alphonsus believes that all petitionary prayer is directed to two great petitions – perseverance and love. These are the graces above all others which we must request day after day after day.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Do I consider petitionary prayer as the poor relation in comparison to contemplative prayer or centering prayer? Does a certain snobbery creep into my understanding or practice of prayer?
2. Do I ask others to pray for me and if so do I find support in this practice?
3. Do I have a prayer list of urgent intentions and petitions and if so does this help me in praying for others?

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## PREACHING

The mission of preaching the Gospel was assigned by the risen Christ to his disciples (cf. Matt 28:19-20). It is also recognised as the purpose of the Redemptorist Congregation: to ‘follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor, as he declared of himself: “He sent me to preach the good news to the poor”’ (Const. 1).

There is no better portrait of the preacher St Alphonsus wanted than the one he presents in seven verbal brush strokes in *The Dignity and Duties of the Priest* or *Selva*:

To preach well, learning and study are necessary.

An exemplary life is necessary.

One must speak from the heart.

The preacher must have a liking for mental prayer.

The preacher must preach with a good intention: the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The preacher should speak in a manner accommodated to the capacity of the hearers.

The preacher should employ a simple, popular, familiar style.

### Alphonsus, Preaching and Eros

Alphonsus’ approach to preaching is more than a list that can be checked off as one prepares to preach. These ‘brush strokes’ must be heard against the backdrop of Alphonsus’ recognition of a God as ‘crazy in love’ (*‘Dio pazzo d’amor’*) with us, a jealous God who woos the world by first sending his own Son, and now invites preachers to win the hearts of men and women and draw them into the flames of God’s passionate, consuming love. For Alphonsus this love was revealed most fully in Christ through the images of Crib, Cross, and Sacrament.

Alphonsus’ guidelines can be said to be rooted in the power and experience of *eros*, that archetypal presence and drive towards relationality, to connectedness, to passionate desire and love that carries souls into communion with another. *Eros* carries the preacher more deeply into relationship both with God, revealed in the Word made flesh, and with the people to whom the preacher is sent. Through the preaching, with the help of the Holy Spirit, people are helped to move into the loving embrace of God.

Alphonsian preaching must engage the heart, heart speaking to heart, demanding a total commitment of the preacher. This commitment is embodied by his being a person of learning and study, an exemplar of what it means to live in

and for Christ, one dedicated to mental prayer, and, above all, one whose preaching is wholeheartedly focused on giving glory to God and bringing salvation to others.

Alphonsus often turns to the imagery of fire, a symbol closely associated with Eros, calling the preacher to have an ‘ardent [i.e. fiery] love for Jesus Christ’, and saying that one ‘who is not on fire does not inflame’. Alphonsus concludes that ‘the divine love must first burn in the preacher that he may afterwards kindle it in others’. This presence of divine love will occur if the preacher has ‘an affection for mental prayer, in which he may excite the sentiments that he will afterwards communicate to others. Mental prayer is the blessed furnace in which sacred orators are inflamed with divine love’.

Complementing the preacher’s passionate love for Jesus Christ is his love for those listening. This love manifests itself in his speaking in a way that all can understand, especially the less educated, embodied in a style that is simple, popular, and familiar. Like Jesus, who came to cast fire on the earth, the fire both of judgment and of the love of the Holy Spirit, preachers are to bring the light and warmth of God’s passionate word to the darkest recesses and the coldest corners of the human heart. Fire without the brimstone!

### Living by Alphonsus’ Vision

Alphonsus’ portrait of the preacher calls preachers to identify with the urgency of St Paul’s words: ‘I am ruined if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Cor 9:16). He was aware that ‘whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’ (Phil 3:7).

Passionate preaching can go off track. Paul Hitz’s corrective words to Redemptorist mission preachers over a half century ago noted that too much emphasis was being given to our duties and responsibilities, and not enough to what God has done for us in Christ. Hitz called for a greater focus on the resurrection in preaching and for a greater attention on making the mission Christocentric. The preacher’s goal is to turn the eyes of the people to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In Marilynne Robinson’s novel *Gilead*, 76-year-old preacher John Ames, the son and grandson of preachers, says: ‘A good sermon is one side of a passionate conversation. It has to be heard in that way. There are three parties to it, of course, but so are there even to the most private thought – the self that yields the thought, the self that acknowledges and in some way responds to the thought, and the Lord. That is a remarkable thing to consider.’ Alphonsus would have approved:

preaching as a *passionate* conversation among a trinity of participants – preacher, listeners, and the triune God, fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

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### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do I preach? Am I preaching the crucified and risen Christ?
2. How do I preach? With fire?
3. Does my preaching speak to all, especially the least, the alienated, the poor?
4. Why do I preach? Does my preaching lead to (ongoing) conversion?

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## RECOLLECTION

**R**ecollection (to recollect, unite together) is an attitude of concentration of the mind and spirit, in which the interior faculties are directed towards an object and remain fixed on it for a period of time. In a purely natural context, recollection means concentration and application. However, the term refers above all to a person who meditates or prays. Recollection is part of the effort of focussing the activity of the spiritual faculties (intellect, will and memory) away from external things and of reflecting on self. It is an attempt to focus the attention, in a peaceful and quiet way, on the object under consideration. In the supernatural field, recollection represents a key element of the interior life, which is essential to prepare the believer to listen to God.

### Origin

Classical Spirituality, since the times of the Desert Fathers, understood recollection as the ability to enter within oneself, to find an interior solitude in which the person is alone with God, freed from any external influences. Recollection reorders the work of the spiritual faculties; it assesses impulses and emotions, the play of memories and fantasy, with the goal of entering into an intimate and personal communion with God and in God, to rediscover our lost unity. Spiritual authors (e.g. Francesco di Osuna) delineate various effects of recollection among which are: the integrity of the person; harmony of the senses; physical and spiritual equilibrium; progress in the acquisition of virtue; and the concentration of the interior faculties on conscience in which the image of God is impressed. Recollection is a communication of God which leads to communion with him. A distinction is made between *active* recollection, based on the efforts of the will (ascetical exercises), and passive recollection in which the free initiative of God predominates.

St Teresa of Avila explains: ‘It is called recollection because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God. Its Divine Master comes more speedily to teach it, and to grant it the Prayer of Quiet, than in any other way’ (*The Way of Perfection* 28:4). St Alphonsus, as a contemplative, captures the thoughts of his spiritual teacher, but as a missionary and spiritual author, he addresses a wide readership. He does not highlight the mystical aspect of recollection. He emphasises rather its importance for the ordinary spiritual life, based on God’s free love and developed through *the practice of uniformity with the will of God*.

### Description

Alphonsus left to his followers this practice, so that they could bring to recollection their interior faculties, seeking to conform their own will to the will of God. On the one hand, this involves a ‘*distacco*/detachment from all things’ and on the other, a ‘close interiority with the Lord’. *Distacco*, then, is not due to a contempt for things, but it is the choice of a greater good: to conform oneself to the will of God. This means to live in loving personal closeness with Christ, present in us: ‘Love is the bond of perfection’ (*Col 3:14*). Alphonsus writes: ‘If we really want to please the heart of God, then we must be sure to conform to his will, and not only conform but we should actually make ourselves one with whatever he ordains. Conformity means joining our will to the will of God but uniformity means making the will of God and our will into one single will, as it were, so that we do not want anything but what he wills and so his will becomes ours [...] this should be the goal of all our actions, desires, meditations and prayers. (*Uniformità alla volontà divina*, in *Opere ascetiche*, vol. I, 286). (*Conformity to the Will of God*, translated by Martin McKeever C.Ss.R., p 72)

### Practical application

Recollection is not aimed at oneself but at rediscovering the presence of God in the ‘depth’ of the soul, to listen to him and therefore bring this experience of salvation to others. Consequently, Redemptorists are to be men who pray incessantly, ‘wherever they find themselves’, distinguishing themselves by leading ‘a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity’ (*1 Tim 2:8, 2*), so that through their life and action they can contribute to the redemption of all. They are conscious that the more their lives and actions arise from prayer and the transforming union with the Lord, the more useful and precious are they for the redemption of the world. One who lives the Alphonsian charism, therefore, must discover the presence of the Redeemer in the depth of one’s heart and commit both desires and will to the deepening of this vital relationship. However, this is impossible without the personal effort at being recollected, in the depth of one’s own spiritual faculties.

### Present Manifestations

The followers of St Alphonsus try to focus their interior life, their motivations, desires, thoughts, will, every ability, on an intimate relationship with the Redeemer. Through ‘*daily meditation*’, they strive to give a proper direction to all the activities and actions of the day and so live them in relationship of love with the Lord. Through personal and communitarian prayer, through an examination of conscience, the Liturgy of the Hours, the recitation of the rosary, reading of Sacred

Scripture and other spiritual texts, Redemptorists several times during the day try to organise their daily walk in faith. They try to recollect their thoughts and interior powers in order to discern and follow the will of the Lord. In this context the daily celebration of the Eucharist and the silent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament have a privileged place.

For those who live the Alphonsian charism, silence is not a time of emptiness, but it brings about an intimacy with Christ, which step after step leads to a maturity in faith. A special importance is given to fidelity to the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation. These indicate the manner of living the charism of the Congregation for example in developing a particular sensitivity to the needs of the poor and spiritually marginalised, in taking courageous initiatives, and in making a serious commitment to spread the Gospel of hope. For a more intense interior recollection, a few times during the year they gather in a tranquil place to follow communitarian retreats, guided by a preacher, or a spiritual retreat in silence – a time dedicated to reflection, spiritual reading and personal prayer.

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Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*, The Crossroad Publishing Company  
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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What do you do to find and maintain an interior silence?
2. Is it possible to experience silence as an intimate contact with the Lord?
3. What are the difficulties in building a personal relationship with Christ within yourself?
4. How would you discern the will of God in daily life?

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## RECONCILIATION

The idea of reconciliation does not appear in the Congregation's foundational documents when they formulate its purpose and mission. Redemptorists are accustomed to perceive reconciliation in terms of hearing confessions, historically their primary missionary activity. In fact, the two terms have usually been treated as synonymous. This facilitated the reception by Redemptorists of the 1973 renewed *Rite of Penance* especially when it spoke of the sacrament as reconciliation. In the present Constitutions the purpose of the Congregation is formulated in terms of reconciliation: 'Blessed by God with the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor 5:18) the members announce the good news of salvation' (Const. 11, and cf. 12, 41, 42).

Another aspect to the Congregation's origins and its early missionary experience emerges not so much at the level of ideas as of *praxis*. All missionaries were to consider themselves as ambassadors of Christ by following his way of life and the virtues he practiced. All were called 'ambassadors of peace', but the superior was to choose one in particular who would be named the 'peacemaker', or *Prefetto della pace*. Without doubt, 2 Cor 5: 20 resonates through these titles. The task of the peacemaker was to keep informed on family feuds, or what we would today call clan wars, in the district where the mission was being preached. He was to 'do his best to bring about their settlement and forgiveness'.

This mandate was to be given to a missionary who was 'rather serious, but solid, capable and filled with God's spirit,' according to the 1764 Constitutions. After gathering information on the cause dividing the families he was to seek for the best way of resolving the matter, e.g. through an intermediary or negotiator. Disputes over land, inheritance, promises of marriage, and wills were notorious causes of misunderstanding. Missionaries would, when necessary, even assume the role of applying the civil law in order to put an end to litigation. The large quantity of legal texts in the Congregation's early libraries reflects this fact, demonstrating the sources they drew on for their casuistry.

In cases dealing with 'insult (honour) or spilled blood,' the peacemaker would seek to have the offended party forgive the perpetrator before a formal public *funzione della riconciliazione* (ceremony of reconciliation) was contemplated. 'If he does not see the person sincerely disposed, he should not hazard a reconciliation, considering the deadly consequences which would result.'

It must be appreciated that by reconciling families in this way, the missionaries were touching the deep structures of a rural society. In that type of culture,

healing families from within meant bringing peace to an entire community. Here we find a social apostolate and spirituality in the strongest sense. They were integrated as integral and necessary parts of an overall project of conversion. Unfortunately their significance for Redemptorist self-understanding has not been studied as thoroughly as it deserves. What needs researching is the history of Redemptorist preaching on the issues of life and justice. The instructions on the fifth ('thou shalt not kill') and seventh ('thou shalt not steal') commandments are crucial in the process of community reconciliation.

In St Alphonsus' time the official Church was often at odds with the piety of the country people. He translated the psalms so that such people could sing them in church with the melodies they loved. Here is reconciliation which enriches the Church with the gifts of the poorest and simplest folk. Endless examples of Redemptorists' behaving in similar ways could be cited.

Part of their missionary initiative is to invent new models of reconciliation suited to different countries and cultures. Sometimes this means living in danger of death, as when there are churches in war zones or guerrilla areas. Confreres are called to serve both sides of the conflict while often being threatened by both. Some are blessed with the charism of working with liberation or even terrorist organisations so that these might find their just place in a nation's political processes and development. To bring justice to a society may require coping with violence and criminality without compromising religious identity or dedication. Reconciliation projects require organisation, official approbation and support to function well. This will obviously involve discernment, discretion and discrimination. For this reason the Church has established Justice and Peace Commissions at parish, diocesan, national and international levels. We are familiar with such structures even at the level of the General Curia.

At present dialogue is a necessary means in work for justice, peace and reconciliation. This opens up the possibility of apostolates in ecumenism, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, ecology and so on. Remarkable contributions made by Redemptorists include how they accompany migrants moving into a new culture, or the simple fact that confreres from the Eastern and Latin Rites join together in living out the Congregation's vocation in the Church with passion and zeal. This is a sign that the Gospel is universal, that it can successfully overcome the deepest human differences and divisions, and that it can bring groups hostile to each other to discover their fullness, harmony and peace in Christ.

In 2 Cor 5:18-20 St Paul identifies the ministry of the new covenant as a ministry of reconciliation. The recognition that everything begins in and comes

from God gives this ministry a special spiritual quality. God has the absolute initiative. We see this first because God ‘through Christ, reconciled us to himself’ by forgiving us, and second because ‘he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us’. That is how missionaries become ‘ambassadors for Christ’.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What can we learn about the ministry of reconciliation from the early Redemptorist practice of appointing a ‘Prefect of Peace’ on the Missions?
2. What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
3. How do you experience reconciliation as a gift and as a task?

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## REDEEMER JESUS CHRIST

The life and work of Jesus Christ can be summarised in the word redemption, but understood in an inclusive manner, i.e. covering the entire history of salvation accomplished in Christ Jesus, who is ‘the cornerstone of the Christian mystery and the key that explains it all’ (cf. F-X. Durrwell, *Christ our Passover*). Speaking of the Redeemer Jesus Christ uniquely in terms of ‘the price he paid with his blood’ to save us (passion and death) is to summarise the plan of God and plentiful redemption: ‘it proclaims the love of God the Father “who first loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10) and through the Holy Spirit gives life to all who believe in him’ (Const. 6).

It should be noted that the origin of the word redemption is the experience of slavery and the need to pay a price for the ransom; moreover, the New Testament prefers to describe God the Father as Redeemer and Christ as Redemption.

### Origins

The name of the Institute founded at Scala in 1732 was of the Most Holy Saviour. When they sought papal approval 16 years later, and knew that they had to change the name to the Most Holy Redeemer, there was no difficulty; it was even in line with what had appeared on the coat of arms/emblem: ‘*Copiosa Apud Eum Redemptio*’ [sic]. St Alphonsus comments on this phrase taken from Psalm 129 emphasising the work of Jesus Christ, who is the ‘basis of all our hope’, in the plan of God: ‘who can redeem us with abundant means from all our evils because his mercy is infinite’ (Translation of the Psalms). Since 1749, we have been known in the Church as the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

Until a few decades ago, Redemptorist spirituality referring to the Redeemer was marked by a ‘devotion to the Passion of the Lord’ and was expressed in the three hours of silence at midday, in the meditation on the Passion every night, in the Way of the Cross, and in penitential mentality (in the style of St Gerard).

### Description

The present Constitutions place Jesus Christ at the heart of our pastoral work and our lives: ‘Since the members are called to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of redemption in the world, they choose the person of Christ as the centre of their life, and strive day by day to enter ever more intimately into personal union with him. Thus, at the heart of the community, to form it and sustain it, is the Redeemer himself and his Spirit of love’ (Const. 23). Thus the person of

the Redeemer Christ is our life option, the *raison d'être* for our apostolate, the heart of the community, and is (especially in the liturgy) the source of our spiritual life (cf. Const. 29).

### Pastoral Application

‘Redemptorists have an instinctive and pastoral way of understanding and announcing redemption, despite the theological and cultural differences among us. This understanding comes to us from St Alphonsus and can be traced within our spiritual and pastoral tradition. We spare no effort in order to help people understand that redemption is always the initiative of God, who loves us in ways the human imagination can scarcely conceive and desires our love in return. In our ministry, redemption is proclaimed both as deliverance from sin and as God’s call to live in a relationship of love with him. Generally, we are known for being close to the people, particularly the most abandoned poor. Generous mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation are characteristic notes of our ministry. Just as Jesus invited people to change their minds and hearts, our preaching traditionally includes an insistent call to conversion. The apostolate of the confessional is appreciated by us because the celebration of this sacrament offers people a tangible experience of redemption. Most Redemptorists make an elemental connection between redemption and the demands for social justice, the respect of human rights and an appreciation for the integrity of creation.’ (Communicanda 2, on Redemption, no. 10, 2006)

### Present Manifestations

As Redemptorists, we are increasingly aware that through baptism, we are consecrated to God in Christ and through our religious profession we confirm and express this radical choice (cf. Const. 47, 78). This is present today in a growing awareness of the increasing centrality of the person of Christ in our spiritual practice, especially in connection with the particular emphasis of the liturgical year, and in our missionary work in its different forms.

This does not shield us from our own personal and community difficulties and discouragement proper to our age, especially when it appears that we are not progressing in our spiritual journey and that proclaiming Jesus Christ as Redeemer seems fruitless since so few are willing to hear it as good news. ‘This enormous disproportion, tragic and humanly baffling, between desires and achievements... cannot be explained nor endured, except for faith in the mystery of the apostolate... faith in Christ the Redeemer’ (P. Hitz, *Missionary Proclamation of the Gospel*).

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(also: any of the classical Christologies of Schillebeeckx, Gonzales Faus, Kaspar or Sobrino)

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In the old Constitutions (of 1764, no.3) and in the present (Const. 2), the Redemptorists are defined as ‘helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption’. How do we understand this ‘help’ and ‘service’? Isn’t the work of redemption wrought by Jesus Christ already complete?

2. Const. 6 says: ‘All Redemptorists... must be humble and courageous servants among people of the Gospel of Christ, the Redeemer and Lord.’ What nuance does this add to the above?

3. If our pastoral task is ‘to lead people to a radical choice regarding their life – a decision for Christ’ (Const. 11), to what extent is our personal option for Christ also radical and meaningful?

4. Many candidates of the Institute justify their vocational decision saying that they hope to achieve their personal fulfilment or because of the option for the poor. What danger can it be to our Redemptorist vocation if it is not above all an option for Jesus Christ the Redeemer?

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## REDEMPTION

The Theology of redemption has been historically marked by the work of St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). In his tract *Why God became man*, Anselm expounds a theory that became an explanation, *par excellence*, of redemption in the Western Church.

According to this theory, the first man, Adam, committed a serious sin by disobeying God. The gravity of this sin is infinite, because the magnitude of sin is measured by the honour of the offended one, in this case God. According to Anselm, God cannot forgive freely, because forgiveness without punishment introduces disorder in the perfect system of justice established by God. As the magnitude of the sin is infinite, only God can give this satisfaction, 'but only a man ought to make it, for in any other case it would not be man who makes it... therefore, it is necessary that a God-man make it'.

Anselm's ideas concerning redemption were imposed and began to be considered as the only explanation as to why God became man to save humanity. Many Protestant reformers, as also post-Tridentine Catholic theologians, took even further the ideas of Anselm: Christ has freed us from the anger of God attracting divine punishment upon himself.

St Alphonsus lived at a time when there was no alternative to this doctrine. He accepted the tenets of Anselm's theory, but managed to avoid the rigid rationalism of this vision and the dark image of God. According to Alphonsus, to redeem humanity, it would have been sufficient if Christ shed just one drop of his blood, since any sacrifice of the Son has an infinite value. Jesus accepted death on the Cross not by necessity, but for abundant love. A 'crazy' (*pazzo*) love that is beyond all rationality is behind the Passover of Christ and our redemption. Alphonsus insists that we must respond to this love with our total surrender to Christ.

In the mid-20th century, both Protestant and Catholic theologians began to indicate the insufficiency of Anselm's model and to discover in the Bible and Patristic Tradition a very different understanding of redemption. Among these pioneers was the Redemptorist François-Xavier Durrwell. After Vatican II, biblical and patristic renewal has completely transformed the landscape of Catholic theology on this issue. Presently, there is a consensus that the vision of a God who demands the blood of the Son to redeem humanity is over. Joseph Ratzinger has written:

'For many Christians, above all for those who know the faith from a distance, the cross is a part of the mechanics of a violated right that has to be re-established. It is the way to re-establish, with an

eternal Atonement, the justice of God, infinitely offended. [...] This concept is very wide-spread, but it is also very wrong. The Bible does not present us with the Cross as a part of the mechanics of a right that has been violated' (J. Ratzinger, English translation: *to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004).

The New Testament expresses the Mystery of Salvation through numerous symbols and concepts: Salvation, Liberation, Justification, Sacrifice, Offering, Expiation, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Vivification, Adoptive Sonship, Deification, etc. Redemption is one of these. The word 'redemption' firstly means 'liberation of a slave'. Taken in its symbolic value, this human experience becomes an indicator that points to a transcendental meaning: freedom from all bondage and limitation that prevents human beings having access to the fullness in God. Human struggles for emancipation are discovered as places of revelation of the God who saves.

Redemption is at the core of the most basic experience of the Old Testament, the Exodus. Through Moses, God redeemed Israel: He made a group of enslaved men and women, a free people. The identity of God reveals itself through this historical redemption: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Deut 5:6). Jesus told us that the power of God is not like the power of this world, which subjugates people. God in Christ is revealed as a non-violent power which is put at the service of human beings, especially the poor (cf. Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:1-17). His life was delivered on the Cross to redeem humanity from the powers that oppress. The boundless love of God expressed in the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, puts into motion a freedom which makes a new creation.

The early Christians understood themselves as redeemed persons. Christ had freed them from 'slavery to the elements of the world' (Gal 4:3), that is to say, from the desperate submission to dominating powers in the different spheres of life (economic, political and family). He even gave them freedom regarding religious law (Rom 3:21-24). Communities where 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female' (Gal 3:28) became signs of concrete redemption which attracted new converts.

Full salvation cannot be less than total communion with God, for the ultimate destiny of a person is the encounter with one's Creator, face to face. However, in the historical experiences of liberation, we can sense the presence of God. To accompany those struggling for freedom in concrete situations of oppression puts us in that privileged place where God is revealed. A contemplative spirit enables us to discern God at work in situations where men and women fight so as not to resign themselves to desperation.



Redemptorists are helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption (Const. 2). By their profession, they consecrate themselves to the mystery of Christ the Redeemer who submitted to the will of the Father, for the work of redemption (Const. 48, 52, 71). The contemplation of the mysteries of redemption (Const. 31) makes them vigilant to discover how the Redeemer acts in History. They consider the Virgin Mary as their model and helper, as she cooperated in the mystery of redemption. (Const. 32)

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What situations, that you are aware of, need redemption?
2. Do you have any contact with persons or groups who seek healing, justice or liberation?
3. How can we discover in the poor, those signs of God 'who hears the cry of the poor'?
4. Read some of these biblical passages and reflect on the experience of redemption which they indicate: Exodus 3:1-12; Isaiah 43:1-7; Job 19:25-27; Mark 10:32-45; Romans 3:21-24; Galatians 4:1-7. What nuances of redemption are presented in these passages? What image of God do they reveal? What do they say to you at this point in your life? How do they challenge your community?

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## REDEMPTORIST FAMILY

Besides the enclosed and contemplative Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptoristines), since the 19th century a number of apostolically active Congregations have shared the Redemptorist charism. They are linked to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in various ways, and together with this Congregation and the Redemptoristines, form the Redemptorist Family (*Perfectae Caritatis* 22). Many lay associations are also linked to this family.

### History and Development

The first beginnings were made by St Clement Mary Hofbauer, who founded an Oblate institute for which he obtained papal approval in 1804. At the Generalate in Rome, he familiarised himself with the rule of the Redemptoristines and wished to found an institute of women for the education of girls in Warsaw. The document known as the ‘Warsaw Rule’ included an appendix dealing with the ‘Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer’ who were to undertake, in a special way, the care of poor and abandoned girls. However, this institute was never founded because St Benno’s closed.

Still Clement realised that the multiple demands arising from the difficulties of the time could be met only by working together. Some 20 years after his death, the first foundation of an apostolically active community of women was made, an event attributed to the influence of the sermons of the Redemptorists. It is noteworthy that this foundation was made in Vienna, the city in which Hofbauer had worked in his last days and where he died. Since then 36 communities of women, with a membership today of 11,000, and five communities of men with about 300 members have come into being (2003 report). Geographically, these communities are located in North and South America as well as in Europe, which are the places where most of these communities were founded. They are present in some countries in Asia and Africa. All told, they are represented in some 60 countries worldwide. One Congregation has a branch within the Eastern rite. Some communities are blooming; for others the future is questionable. The number of members ranges from four to 2,000. The most recent foundation was made in 1997 (Report 2003). Besides religious institutes there are also secular institutes and associations with episcopal approval.

### Relationship to the Redemptorists

Their relationships to the Redemptorists are of various kinds: some are affiliated with the Redemptorists, some owe their origin to them, and in some cases there is a closeness of spirituality or general agreement on outlook. Many communities were founded by Redemptorists or received spiritual guidance from

them, at least in their early years. The Rule of some of these communities conforms closely to the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes. They seek to cooperate in the work of Redemptorists and share with them certain fundamental spiritual convictions, for example the centrality of the mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion/Resurrection and Eucharist. There are formal agreements between the Redemptorist Congregation and some communities; others maintain looser contacts. Not a few have St Alphonsus Liguori as their patron, others invoke Bl Gennaro Sarnelli or St Gerard as patron. Others feel themselves bound together by devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

The stimulus for a foundation was often a concrete problem to which people wished to find a solution based on faith in the redemption. Often women asked directly to share in the Redemptorist charism and mission, or Redemptorists saw the necessity to recruit women for the apostolate. Former candidates for the Redemptorists felt the call to found their own communities. The field for apostolic work is wide: for example care for women, children, orphans; education (especially of women); work with and for migrants; evangelisation, popular missions and catechesis, media ministry, and the option for local marginalised groups. In the choice of such work, the motive of engagement for the abandoned is almost always central.

### Significance for the Present

The great variety of these institutes demonstrates the fruitfulness of the charism of St Alphonsus, who again and again attracts and inspires new followers to creative expressions of that charism. Just as in the days of St Clement, so too today can the challenges of the time be met only by working together. The cooperation of women and men in pastoral ministry is not only a matter of a practical division of labour, but a sign of a crucial commitment of the whole Church. The many gifts of women for the preaching of the ‘superabundant redemption’ are thus made fruitful. Besides this, the mutual engagement of communities dedicated to spiritual and charitable works shows clearly that redemption includes humankind in all its dimensions, bodily, spiritual and religious. The different ways of living the Redemptorist charism can enrich and expand particular perspectives. In this way the Redemptorist family can respond to the call of the Church to religious Orders and Congregations to live a spirituality of communion (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 52: Starting Afresh From Christ, 29).

To promote this, however, there is need for a growing consciousness of the mutual bonds that provide the motive for concrete working together and for spiritual exchange. There is a great variety of contacts with the Congregation of the Redemptorists. But what is lacking is exchange between the various institutes so that they can present themselves as a family of Congregations and understand themselves as such.

### Present Manifestations

Good examples of this are the meetings of various communities of women concerned with Redemptorist spirituality in the area of South America, as well as community study days for the formators of Redemptorists and Redemptoristines and an apostolically active community on a regional basis. In each sexennium a member of the wider Redemptorist family works with the Secretariat for Spirituality.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Which communities of the Redemptorist Family are known to me? With whom can I, can we, make contact?
2. Where do I hear a cry for redemption that can be answered only through the collaboration of various vocations in the working together of women and men, lay and religious?
3. What does it mean for our understanding of redemption that the communities of the Redemptorist Family adopt different emphases?
4. Which mission is entrusted to us as a Redemptorist Family in the Church?

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## REDEMPTORISTINES

The spirituality of the Order, as expressed in its Constitutions and Statutes (Rome 1985) corresponds to the original inspiration of the Venerable Maria Celeste Crostarosa. ‘The Father calls us today to be a living Memorial – a *Viva Memoria* (or a constant reminder) – of all that the Son accomplished for our salvation during his life on earth’ (Const. 5). The central figure is the Incarnate Word who, in becoming man for us, has shown the Father’s love. Thus, ‘it was the will of the Father that the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer should have a specific role in his Church: to be a clear and radiant witness of the love he has for us in Christ’ (Const. 5).

Starting with the ‘*intent*’ of the Father, who out of love desires to communicate his Spirit through his Son made Man, Sr Maria Celeste assigns to the Redemptoristine community the task of being a witness to this love. A fundamental characteristic of the community is to be one heart and one soul, united to Christ its head. This union is the fruit of the Eucharist in which the nuns are united to Christ and participate in the divine life of the Trinity. In order to carry out their vocation, the nuns, in their imitation of Christ, should be ‘living copies on earth’ of the Son. To be a ‘living memorial’ is to allow oneself to be transformed by the Spirit so as to be a living image of Christ as he is the image of the Father. Community life, united in love, makes visible the presence of Christ because Christ continues today doing the works of love that he did during his earthly life when he was a ‘Wayfarer’ in this world.

By their vocation, the Redemptoristines dedicate themselves in a particular way to prayer, as the Constitutions express: ‘Our vocation of prayer in the Church is to live out the unceasing prayer of Christ and according to the particular characteristic of our contemplative life, to make our own this essential element of his redemptive mission’ (Const. 41). With personal, community and liturgical prayer, with prayers of praise and intercession in the name of all, the Redemptoristines know that they are fulfilling a mission that has not much exterior glamour, but is very fruitful in its service to the Church and the world (cf. Const. 39). But besides this hidden apostolate, the Redemptoristine monasteries are schools of prayer for the local Churches, in which spaces of silence and receptivity are open to all for an encounter with the Lord. In all the monasteries groups of laity may, in different ways, participate in the spirituality of the Order.

### Foundation and Expansion

The Order recognises as their foundress Maria Celeste Crostarosa, who on 25

April 1725 had a revelation of a new Institute whose foundational Rule would be the life of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the Gospels. In September 1730, St Alphonsus encouraged the community to accept the new Rule. Under the direction of Mgr Tomaso Falcoia, bishop of Castellamare, the Institute of the Most Holy Saviour began on 13 May 1731, the solemnity of Pentecost. On 6 August of the same year, the religious were invested with the habit of the new Order. The Institute, with the name of the Most Holy Redeemer, was approved by Pope Benedict XIV on 8 June 1750.

Sr Maria Celeste, obliged to abandon Scala, founded the monastery of the Most Holy Saviour in Foggia in 1738. In 1766, St Alphonsus invited the nuns of Scala to found a new monastery in his diocese of Sant' Agata dei Goti. The first foundation outside of Italy was in Vienna (1831), thanks to the insistence of Fr Joseph Passerat, vicar-general of the Transalpine Redemptorists. It was from this monastery that the Order spread throughout Europe: Belgium (1841), Holland (1848), Ireland (1859), France (1875) and England (1879). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Order spread throughout the world: Spain (1904), Canada (1905), Brazil (1921), Germany (1934), Argentina (1949), Japan (1949), United States (1957), Burkina Faso (1960), Australia (1965), Venezuela, Peru and Haiti (1976), the Philippines (1980), Colombia (1988), Poland (1989), South Africa (1991) and Mexico (1993). And in this new century, the Order has founded one monastery in Kazakhstan (2001) and two in Slovakia (2002), one of Latin Rite and one of Greek Rite.

At present the Order has 43 communities with 460 religious. The current vocational crisis is mainly felt in the European monasteries.

### Relation with the Congregation

Since their foundations, the Order and the Congregation have maintained a close relationship based on their common origins. Both were born in Scala, with the title of the Most Holy Saviour, with the intervention of St Alphonsus and Maria Celeste Crostarosa and under the guidance of Mgr Tomaso Falcoia. The Order and the Congregation, considered as two branches of the same Institute, were approved by Pope Benedict XIV with the same title of the Most Holy Redeemer.

This special relationship is recognised in the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation, inviting the confreres to 'value highly the contemplative apostolate of the nuns of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer. They have a common origin and are dedicated to the same purpose and participate in the ministry of the Congregation' (S. 08). As a matter of fact, the expansion of the

Order has happened with the material and spiritual help of the Congregation, nurtured by the same Alphonsian spirituality.

The monasteries of the Order do not have any juridical dependence on the Congregation. According to the Constitutions of the Order, the Father General of the Congregation convokes the General Assembly of the Order and should be consulted about the founding or suppression of a monastery. The statutory General Secretariat for the Redemptoristines makes a report of its work to each General Chapter of the Congregation.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What appreciation is there in your community or Unit of the cloistered life?
2. If there is a Redemptoristine community in your unit, how do you support it?
3. What resources are available in your Unit concerning the writings of Maria Celeste?
4. Do you have any sense of the mystical insights of Maria Celeste and their relevance to the Congregation?

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## RESTRUCTURING

‘**S**ince they are always obliged to seek new apostolic initiatives under the guidance of legitimate authority, they cannot allow themselves to settle down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary. On the contrary, they will diligently pioneer new ways of preaching the Gospel to every creature [Mk 16:15]’ (Const. 15).

It seemed as if all was ended on that darkest Friday in history – ‘we had hoped...’, the disciples on the road to Emmaus would say (Lk 24:13-32). But then they learned to recognise him because new life was born within the empty tomb. It is within the context of this process of death and resurrection to new life that we situate the topic of restructuring.

### Origins

The Second Vatican Council exhorted religious institutes to search out more authentic means of becoming more present and effective in today’s continuously changing world (*Perfectae Caritatis* No 2). An effective renewal and adaptation can be achieved only with the collaboration of all the members of the Congregation. This entails adapting the way in which we live, pray and minister. Hence, we need to adapt our life according to the demands of the apostolate and in the light of the social and economic situation.

We cannot say that nothing has changed since the founding of our Congregation. We are certainly not beginning from point zero with regard to restructuring. Throughout our history efforts have been made at different levels in terms of pastoral efficiency. These efforts bear witness to the dynamism of the Congregation and its attentiveness to the signs of the times. Perhaps the new element that characterises our efforts at restructuring at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the desire of the entire Congregation to undertake the process, and to do so as a single Congregation.

St Alphonsus did not found the Congregation to continue to do what already existed. Rather he generated a new force, a new wind of the Spirit that overtook the Church and the world. Fidelity to our vocation can mean a new Exodus, a new crossing of the Red Sea of fear and indecision. We need to allow ourselves to be roused by the power of our charism. To generate a new strength, an energy of the Spirit – it is this that today’s world situation asks of us as a Congregation.

Restructuring is always more than an organisational or managerial issue. For us it is an imperative of Mission, and in the end it is a re-working of religious



life. It requires us to learn to think, not just in terms of individual Units, but *as a Congregation*.

### Factors

**The world as the context for fulfilling our mission.** In the light of the rapidly changing world in which we live many of us have asked ourselves if our mission still has meaning and if the Congregation still has a future. Perhaps we have asked ourselves if the spiritual and missionary institution of St Alphonsus, with all the traditions that proceed from it, still has a place in this world. In the light of the secularisation and globalisation we can no longer further our mission without frequently questioning ourselves about its validity and efficacy.

**Statistics** have demonstrated how the Congregation is experiencing both loss and gain. There are countries – indeed continents – in which the Congregation is undergoing a severe, widespread process of diminishment, whether in terms of the aging of confreres or in terms of new members, especially in the earlier areas of development (Europe and North America). At the same time, there are areas where the Congregation is growing (Latin America, Asia, and Africa), though some would contend that this growth is stunted because even here vocations are beginning to peak or else confreres find themselves in financial difficulties which become an obstacle to the recruitment of plentiful candidates.

**Interculturation.** The Congregation has taken root in so many different cultures that it should be easy for Redemptorists to move between cultures, to be at ease with the cosmopolitan mentality which is part of today's world while remaining rooted in their Redemptorist culture. Issues of culture and culture clashes need our on-going attention.

**The Migration of peoples.** The ethnic groups originating in the southern and eastern areas of the globe continue to migrate to the countries of the north and west. Migrants generally are lacking in necessary pastoral assistance. This should be a major concern for us, since the preaching of the Gospel has no boundaries.

**The Laity.** In recent years lay collaboration has become a major feature of our ministry. The lay collaborators share our charism and work in conjunction with the professed members in the preaching of the Gospel. Restructuring cannot take place without due consideration being given to the lay collaborators or partners. This factor must be integrated and incorporated into the dynamic of restructuring.

The renewal that originated with Vatican II has changed much of religious life both on a personal as well as on a community level, but it has generally left

intact the structures of the Congregation. In a world that is ever more globalised and intercultural we are still tied to many structures that were put in place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, our present organisation of provinces, vice-provinces etc, although sharing the same charism, are like many separated islands. We have bridges, roads from one island to another, such as efforts at solidarity, canonical visits, regional meetings and general chapters, but we do not and we cannot plan long-term projects and common programmes that respond to the various situations of the world and the different regions.

When it comes down to it, there is one overriding reason for restructuring: so that we may continue our tradition. Our tradition is everything, and our tradition is mission. When we say, ‘our tradition is mission’ we don’t mean to imply that all of us are active, healthy and ready to go on the road. Many of us are old; many of us are frail or fragile, in one way or another. But it is still true that for all of us, without any exception, ‘giving our lives for plentiful redemption’ is the very core of the meaning of our life. We give expression to this central meaning in different ways, in different stages of life. This is the heart of the matter – for all of us.

If we believe in ourselves, then we must continue and we must develop our tradition. It is not enough for us to say that we Redemptorists *were* those who *in the past* made sacrifices to preach the Gospel of salvation to the poor, the abandoned who were not being reached. We have to say that *today* Redemptorists *are* those who are making sacrifices in order to preach the Gospel of salvation to the most needy, those not being reached by anyone else.

Very significant steps have been taken by the XXIV General Chapter (2009) to restructure the Congregation for Mission. The Congregation has been organised into five Conferences, new opportunities for international networking between the Conferences have been promoted and future general chapters will be held in three phases to encourage maximum participation. Quadrennia have replaced triennia. Restructuring for mission is a process that will always be with us.

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Vatican Documents: *Perfectae Caritatis*; *Vita Consecrata*

An excellent bibliography on the subject of Restructuring can be found at:

**[www.governance.com.au/chuch/./pdf2.01\\_restructuring\\_biblio.pdf](http://www.governance.com.au/chuch/./pdf2.01_restructuring_biblio.pdf)**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Are our existing structures effective in the service of our Mission?
2. Do our current structures truly help us address the demands of our charism and to respond to the pastoral needs of today's world?
3. Are there any pastoral needs of our world today to which the Congregation as Congregation is called to respond?
4. What structures would help us so that we might better respond to such pastoral needs?
5. What criteria do we have to identify our obligations to respond to the poor and abandoned?
6. What will help us to discern true pastoral imperatives?

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## RESURRECTION

Only after the resurrection of Jesus can his life, preaching, suffering, crucifixion and death be finally understood. Faith does not leave him dead and buried, but relates to him as the Risen One, ‘the Resurrection and the Life’ (Jn 11:25). To read the Gospels, to meditate on his words and deeds as he proclaimed the Reign of God, is to encounter Christ as a living presence. Christian faith needs continually to remind itself that God has raised up his crucified Son, and given him back to us as the source, form and assurance of life to the full. If that is left out, any Christian spirituality would be radically distorted.

### Origins

In the radiance of the resurrection, everything that Jesus was and stood for is interpreted in a new light. Unless he rose from the dead, the Gospels would be merely vaguely historical records of one more good man finally destroyed by the powers of evil and violence that he had opposed. Unless he rose, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Eucharist, no justification for the Beatitudes and the parables he taught – and no Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. To neglect the resurrection would mean preaching a defeat rather than the transforming power of God’s love triumphing over evil, death, and violence. Unless he rose, that day of his terrible death would never have been known as ‘Good Friday’, just as the long Sabbath of grief and failure would never have been called ‘Holy Saturday’.

For St Paul himself (writing about 54 AD to the Corinthians), and for missionaries of every age, it is a continuing challenge to keep the significance of Christ’s resurrection clearly in view. It was of ‘of first importance’ (1 Cor 15:3) in the Gospel that Paul proclaimed. A world-transforming event has occurred. Paul witnesses to it out of the transformation he himself experienced in his encounter with the risen Christ. He is acutely aware of what is at stake (1 Cor 15:12-19). To deny the resurrection of the crucified Jesus would undermine faith itself, and leave us without hope of forgiveness and with no hope for the dead. It would be to misrepresent God, and leave us all in pitiable state of illusion or despair.

Hence, Paul stresses the historic significance of Christ’s resurrection. It is an event that has already taken place and changed forever the meaning of life. A new age has been inaugurated, and the reign of sin and death has been terminated. In raising the Crucified from the dead, God is revealed as the creator and giver of life, leading creation to its fulfilment in Christ. In him, God’s design for humanity is already realised. Christ is the one who above all is made in God’s image,

for in him the final destiny of all creation is anticipated (cf. Gen 1:26-28; 3:17-19; also Ps 8 and 110). There is no room for doubt: 'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died' (1 Cor 15:20). His victory over death and evil looks forward to the point at which 'God will be all in all' (v. 28).

### Description

The resurrection of Christ is first of all a real event. What has taken place makes all the difference in our understanding of God and the power of God's love to transform the world. The inexhaustible creativity of love has not been defeated by the forces of evil. It has not answered evil for evil, but has revealed itself as an ever greater love through the resurrection of the crucified Christ. His empty tomb points to a reality that escapes all worldly calculation and control.

The resurrection of Christ transforms the consciousness of Christians. They have a new sense of identity: 'So if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old had passed away; see everything has been made new!' (2 Cor 5:17). We are now members of his body, temples of his Spirit, and share in his relationship to the Father.

His resurrection brings a new community into existence. The Church is the sign and witness of Christ's victory over death and evil, and inspires the Church's mission to the world. In the power of the resurrection, Christians are energised to act against all forms of despair, oppression and inhumanity, in the conviction that the inexhaustible power of God has already been displayed in raising Christ from the dead: 'Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:39). Faith in the risen Christ inspires solidarity with the poor and down-trodden, for God has acted, and will continue to act, to lead all to the fullness of life.

### Pastoral Application

Drawing on the energy of the resurrection, all the pastoral activity of the Church is a ministry of hope. The risen Christ first appeared to his early disciples as sending them on a mission to the whole world (Mt 28:16-20; Jn 20:21). Rising from the tomb, he is no longer contained in any one place or time, but is now present to all time and space, and to all nations and cultures. The resurrection is then the heart of all evangelisation. As the bearer of this good news, the Church stands with the poor and the hopeless, and engages in dialogue with all who seek the truth that will set us free.

The Congregation's Constitutions and Statutes use the word 'resurrection'

only once: we are called ‘to become signs and witnesses before people of the power of his resurrection, proclaiming the new and eternal life’ (Const. 51). But ‘the power of the resurrection’ permeates everything said about our vocation to live in union with Christ and to preach the good news to the most abandoned and oppressed. In the risen Christ we have the key to interpreting the great Alphonsian tradition of devotion to the Passion, to the Blessed Sacrament and to Blessed Virgin Mary. Because our Redeemer is risen, we are freed to share in his self-giving love in the service of God and our neighbour. Because the Risen Lord is the head of Church, his body, we find him present in Eucharist as the source of life. Because Mary is assumed into heaven, she is already united to Christ in a resurrected life. We invoke her as Mother of Perpetual Help, as the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church.

In the history of modern theology, Fr François-Xavier Durrwell’s, *The Resurrection*, published over 50 years ago, has been a major influence in recalling theology and spirituality to its paschal focus in mystery of the risen Christ.

Redemptorists are called to witness to the resurrection of the Crucified, whatever situation in which we live and work. Unless he is truly risen, nothing of our way of life and apostolate would make sense. But because he is risen, we witness to the boundless excess of God’s redeeming love – ‘with him there is plentiful redemption’ (*copiosa apud eum redemptio*).

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How does the resurrection of Christ affect:

1. Our understanding of religious life and the Redemptorist vocation?
2. Our celebration of the liturgy?
3. Our involvement with the poor and the oppressed?
4. Our understanding of the mission of the Church?
5. Our promotion of traditionally Redemptorist devotion to:
  - a) Our Lady?
  - b) The Blessed Sacrament?
  - c) The Passion of Christ?

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## REVIEW OF LIFE

Why am I doing what I am doing? It is very important for all of us to understand our life, the decisions we make, the direction in which we are moving; in other words, to live a reflective life. The index to our Constitutions and Statutes leads us to three places where we find reference to a Review of Life (Const. 45,2°; Ss 038; 046,2°c). Constitution 45,2° encourages us to work together to create an environment conducive to such a reflection: prayer and work, solitude and review of life, rest and relaxation. The community, then, provides us with the opportunity for personal reflection.

Statute 038 speaks about a Review of Life as a *community* exercise, since we are a community of conversion, desiring to make spiritual progress and correct our faults and mistakes. Statute 046,2°c speaks of a periodic review of the practice of poverty.

### Origins

The Old Rule required a twice daily examination of conscience, a daily particular examen and a regular Chapter of Faults reinforced by the work of a Zelator. A self-conscious observance of the Rule was part of a 'way of perfection'. Perhaps we were more aware of the work of the devil in our lives than the work of God! Today, perhaps through the influence of the Ignatian 'Discernment of Spirits', we have learned to move beyond an examination of conscience towards an '*examen of consciousness*': to be more aware of the action of the Holy Spirit, of how God is speaking in my life each day. The Review of Life, then, appears in the new Constitutions and Statutes as an aid to both personal and community reflection on and evaluation of our life. It helps us to assess our response to God's call and then to make the necessary choices to enable future progress.

### Description

A personal Review of Life involves taking a particular period of my life (day, week, month or, even, a year), trying to visualise the events of that time as I experienced them and then trying to listen to what God is saying to me about it. It is almost like *Lectio Divina* in that I am listening for God's word for my life, but instead of the Scriptures, I am '*reading*' the events, thoughts and feelings of my life. I am not simply looking for my failures, my missed opportunities, my sins, as in an examination of conscience. I am searching for how God has been active in my life. How have I responded to the invitations of the Holy Spirit during this time? The next step in my review will be my response. Having heard



God's word, what am I going to do about it? It may simply be a prayer of thanksgiving for all that God is doing, but it will surely involve also a commitment to future attentiveness and action and a surrender to the power of God's grace.

Similarly, a community Review of Life involves a discernment of the action of God in the life of the community. As Statute 038 suggests, it could be included in a monthly day of recollection, where this is held in common. The Review of Life could be based on a particular part of the Constitutions and Statutes, our missionary work or our Apostolic Community. It could be an evaluation of a community project. After an opening prayer, the topic could be introduced by reading a relevant Constitution or decision that had been taken. The community would be invited to reflect on how that has been lived out in the recent past. How has God been part of it? Was it successful or not? What has been happening?

Initially, this reflection is done in silence, but after a few minutes the members are invited to contribute their own thoughts without any interruption or discussion from the others. Their respectful listening is an ongoing attentiveness to the word of God. Once everyone has had an opportunity to contribute, there should be time to discuss what God seems to be saying through this community sharing so that practical conclusions may be drawn and future progress decided on.

However, it is important that the atmosphere of prayer and listening is preserved throughout and that differences of opinion are respected and do not become a cause of dissension.

The Review of Life concludes with prayer.

### Pastoral Application

The Review of Life can be made on any aspect of our life but can be especially useful for an evaluation of our pastoral ministry. It will always be a shared awareness of God's call and God's presence in all that we do together in mission. It is an opportunity to examine our pastoral priorities in order to maintain a freshness in what we do so that our ministry remains relevant and appropriate in our particular situation.

The Review of Life is not a Chapter of Faults. It is not an opportunity for group therapy. It is an act of faith in God's continuing presence and action in our lives both personal and community. We should take care therefore to avoid negative criticism and analysis of the motives and actions of others. We are in God's presence, open to the action of the Spirit through whom we are called as Redemptorists and sent out to bring good news to the poor.

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## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Is Review of Life a regular part of my personal/our community life?
2. Have I/we settled down in surrounding and structures in which the work is no longer missionary? (Const. 15)
3. Do I/we confidently engage in missionary dialogue with the world? Do I/we try to understand peoples' anxious questionings? How is God revealing himself and making his plan known? (Const. 19)
4. How faithful am I/we to the way of life I/we have organised for myself/ourselves? (Const. 44)
5. Do I/we seek continual renewal in spiritual, scientific and pastoral matters? Do I/we try to give new life to my/our ministry through constant study of the sacred and human sciences and by fraternal sharing with the confreres? (Const. 90)

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## REVIVALISM

The term Revivalism is used to describe the spiritual enthusiasm which flourished in many Protestant communities in Europe and North America in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (beginning from 1727). This ‘revival’ was characterised by the emphasis on conversion and acceptance of Jesus Christ, the importance given to emotion, and the rejection of rationalisation of faith, itinerant mission preaching, the search for simple and hardworking people. The interesting thing is that this is also found in the missionary movement initiated by Alphonsus in the same period.

In more recent times, the word ‘revivalism’ has also been used in architecture, music, literature, and even in politics to describe social or cultural movements which seek to rescue and revive traditional values.

### Origins

In the mid-17th century, different tendencies arose in Western Europe which preferred a theology more of the heart instead of a rigid and cerebral scholastic theology. (V. Conteson, one of the favourite authors of St Alphonsus, published his *Theology of the Mind and the Heart* in 1681, and he called it: ‘Full bloom roses amid the thorns of scholasticism’). This revivalist movement also began to favour an affective spirituality around the ‘new’ devotion to the Heart of Jesus (cf. Thomas Goodwin, an English Puritan who wrote about the Heart of Christ in 1651, St John Eudes, St Francis de Sales and others).

The temperament and spiritual formation of Alphonsus Liguori led him down this path of emotions over reason (‘the reasons of the heart’, to quote Pascal). ‘Beginning in 1723, the year of his conversion, Alphonsus comes to realise that his life is a call to love, and therefore, a call to self-giving. He begins to discover the importance of the heart in his relationship with Jesus Christ and then, especially as a result of his first missionary experiences, he discovers room for hope and joy’ (Communicanda 1: *Called to give our lives for plentiful redemption*, 2004, n. 19). Thus began the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, which has emphasised vibrant, dramatic, popular, affective preaching. Without ignoring rational argument it appeals more to emotional intelligence.

### Description

The key that distinguishes this new way of perceiving the Christian life is that at the centre of the relationship between human beings and God is the heart. Therefore, although there does not appear a connection or dependence between the Protestant movements and the spirit of Alphonsus, it is convenient to mention the historical

coincidence ('the spirit of the age') in reaction to dogmatism in theology, coldness in spirituality and rigidity in moral theology.

**Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf** (1700-60) was a pious German noble who, after an experience of conversion that occurred on seeing an image of *Ecce Homo*, dedicated himself to the spiritual renewal of the faithful, preaching a religion of the heart. Much later, he welcomed on his property, *Herrnhut*, a group of poor families coming from Moravia and Bohemia, expelled from their land on account of their faith. From 1727, he began to care for them and served as their pastor and leader. Thus arose the Moravian Brethren Church and the World Pentecostal Mission movement. Zinzendorf was moreover a prolific writer of hymns and religious melodies.

**John Wesley** (1703-91), the father of Methodism, after a conversion experience ('warmth in the heart'), revolutionised the way of communicating the Gospel. In 1739 he began a movement of itinerant preachers for England and North America. He was convinced that faith is much more than accepting a doctrine; it means an openness of the heart to God and embraces all dimensions of life.

**George Whitefield** (1714-70) was a friend and colleague of Wesley, although he had major theological differences with him. He became a great itinerant Methodist preacher, and in some ways, the creator of the vibrant style of preaching to the heart of the faithful. He managed to gather several thousands of people in public places and he could spend as much as 50 hours weekly in the pulpit.

There are similar aspects to be found in Hasidic Judaism, a spiritual movement that emerged among Jews in Eastern Europe. Starting around 1740 with the work of the itinerant preacher Israel ben Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov (1700-60), this movement proposed that communion with God is the fruit of personal mysticism and fraternal service.

### Pastoral Application

Speaking of theoretical preachers and an elevated style, Alphonsus said that they were like high clouds that did not produce rain.

According to the Redemptorist tradition, there is a special way of understanding the initiative of God's love. He seeks our response of love in sending us his Son Jesus Christ. That is why we call redemption plentiful or abundant: 'it proclaims the love of God the Father "who first loved us and sent his Son... and through the Holy Spirit gives life to all who believe in him"' (Const. 6).

Our missionary action corresponds to this 'heartfelt' style and closeness to the people. Preaching and the sacrament of reconciliation, which are largely our distinctive pastoral activity, must be heart speaking to heart. Perhaps we no longer need the externally sensitive and sentimental forms that were used in the time of the

founder, but there must be a clear and direct call to conversion, born of the consciousness of love denied (sin) and the experience of love accepted (the option for Christ).

### Present Manifestations

In putting together some of the best spiritual writings of Alphonsus, Carl Hoegerl did not hesitate to entitle it: *Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology* (1981). On his part, Marciano Vidal has studied the moral works of Alphonsus and summarises them with these words: ‘In the face of moral rigorism, pastoral benignity’ (1986).

Many Redemptorist communities are involved in spiritual movements in this style of revivalism, such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. And among the characteristics of Redemptorists across the world are the closeness to people, a plain and direct style of preaching, pastoral compassion or benevolence, and being attuned to the cries of the people.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. In his paintings of the Child Jesus and the Crucified, Alphonsus often placed arrows of love emitting from Christ to the world. How can we capture this today in a visual language?

3. We Redemptorists were born at a time in the history of Christianity in which the personal experience of faith, once again was seen as a value. What does this mean for us?

3. The pastoral style and Redemptorist ‘devotions’ promote a friendly attitude, that is, they appeal to the emotions as a driving force of conversion and the Christian life. How can we balance this with a solid doctrine against the see saw of emotions?

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## SHRINES

The Church gathers her faithful together in all sorts of different places such as cathedrals, parishes, monasteries, chapels and centres of pilgrimage. Among these, the Code of Canon Law establishes that ‘by the term *shrine* is understood a church or other sacred place to which numerous members of the faithful make pilgrimage for a special reason of piety, with the approval of the local ordinary’ (Canon 1230). Even if the Church gives greater value to the more local and institutional religious centres, she also recognises Catholic meeting places that are more charismatic and open to everyone. Christians, coming from all directions to a shrine, can join together to manifest the kingdom of God and celebrate the mysteries of faith.

### Historical Situation

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he left on earth a living movement of an ecclesial nature capable of growing through the teaching of the Gospel and the saving presence of the Paschal Mystery. The Risen Lord commissioned the eleven disciples: ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time’ (Mt 28:17-20). The apostles multiplied the commission of Christ, by announcing the Word, and by forming groups known as ‘local churches’. They established communities to live in fraternity, to celebrate his sacred acts and to become centres for sending out missionaries (cf. Acts 11:19-30; 1 Cor 1:10 – 6:20; Heb 10:19-39). Besides the territorial meeting places, the People of God regarded as sacred certain places marked by the sanctifying presence of Jesus: Nazareth, Bethlehem, The Garden of Olives, Calvary, the grotto of the Resurrection and other sites where grace in abundance was manifest.

### Shrines as ‘Open’ Meeting Places

Shrines tend to be places which facilitate an open and free approach to the great mysteries of faith, hope and love. Pilgrims bring with them a sense of the Christian journey, a sensitivity to the things of the spirit and an openness even to the miraculous. Often shrines are places sanctified by the presence of saints or steeped in a history of grace and blessing. Pope John Paul II called shrines ‘permanent antennae of good news’. They function as memorials of grace and goodness in the past, as calls to holiness in the present and as pointers to the reign of

God in the future. In fulfilling these functions shrines show themselves to be manifestations of abundant redemption.

The freedom associated with a shrine allows one to concentrate on what is absolute and essential. The great variety of spiritual opportunities associated with a shrine greatly enhances the attractiveness of these holy places: apparitions, miracles, variety of devotions, celebration of the sacraments, use of symbols, music and art, opportunities for meditation and contemplation, and integration of social and pastoral concerns. All the elements at a shrine combine to deepen one's relationship to God as loving Father, with Jesus as the incarnation of God's love and with the Holy Spirit poured out in abundance. The focus on Mary, Mother of the Lord, and/or on a variety of saints adds to the grace of the shrine.

When pilgrims, complete with religious souvenirs, return to daily life, they carry within them the memories, graces, conversations, examples, the pardon and peace which they experienced. The time was short but intense. As a result of the visit to a shrine faith is more coherent, more personal and also less complicated. Almost without noticing it, wholesome memories are formed from what was seen and heard. The religious environment of the shrine is something both profoundly personal and yet deeply shared.

Sanctuaries or shrines occur even outside the Church. Then they are truly altars 'to the unknown God' (cf. Acts 17:22-34). They are found among all peoples and illuminate sacred choices, as Peter said: 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him' (Acts 10:34-35).

### Redemptorist Ministry

Spirituality in the time of St Alphonsus was divided between the rigorists, who grounded themselves in the security of structures and in the threats of punishment, and the laxists, who defended the indulgent as normal and always excusable. Alphonsus rejected both and preferred a spirituality where each one has the obligation to seek to do the best possible with sincerity, according to one's ability, consciously and responsibly with openness and coherence. He placed great importance on fundamental conversion and on the exercises of the devout life. He invested heavily in popular missions and in making Redemptorist houses centres of spirituality for the local people. He was especially sensitive to those who felt alienated or abandoned by the normal Church structures. The spirit that pervaded his popular missions can still be found in the many Redemptorist shrines around the world. These shrines are a form of 'permanent mission' where

those in greatest need can hear in their hearts the words of the dying Jesus: ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ (Lk 23:42-43).

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Can a Christian be content just with the prayer at a shrine?
2. How can one use the prayer of a shrine for personal sanctification?
3. How should the sacraments be celebrated in the shrines?
4. How can one complement and perfect normal community life with the experience undergone at a shrine?
5. Is there a place for shrines in life of the Church of the future?

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## SIMPLICITY

The ‘simplicity’ referred to in the title of this article is a religious category with roots in the Old Testament. There it evokes ideas of sincerity of heart, single-mindedness and integrity. It carries the weight of a whole spirituality which focuses on what is whole, innocent, straight, direct, unified, upright and perfect. In the Hebrew Scriptures it is contrasted with duplicity, with those who have divided hearts.

This tradition is continued in the New Testament where the idea of simplicity receives a distinctive character coming from the teaching of Jesus. ‘If your eye is sound [simple], your whole body will be filled with light’ (Mt 6:22). A ‘sound’ eye is one which does not see double as is the case of a diseased eye; to see one thing clearly becomes an image of simplicity and integrity which points to purity of heart and total dedication to God.

The Patristic tradition made much of the contrast between ‘singleness’ of mind or heart and the ‘double heart’. Much is made of the distinction between the way of light and the way of darkness, the former revealing God and the latter blinding one to the divine. The eye becomes the organ for recognising divinity in line with the beatitude about the pure of heart *seeing* God. Simplicity, in early Christian writing, is undiluted attention to God and utter absorption in the divine. In the Middle Ages the virtue of simplicity assumed such significance that it was presented as an attribute of God. The simplicity of God was understood in terms of God being ‘a single act that at once is unrestricted understanding and perfect affirming and perfect loving’ (Loneragan). In God intelligibility, truth and goodness are one.

By the time of Alphonsus there had developed a ‘spirituality of simplicity’ which has continued to bear rich fruit down to modern times. Both Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux witnessed to the beauty of simplicity in their lives and in their writings. The enduring popularity of many versions of ‘the little way’ and the continuing joy of discovering ‘God in all things’ bears witness to the evangelical value of simplicity.

### Simplicity of Language

When reference is made to simplicity of language, many Redemptorist recall Constitution 20. The simplicity of language referred to here goes right back to Alphonsus’ preoccupation with a style of preaching which ran counter to the prevailing notions of his time. Dennis Billy has pointed to the influence of ‘Constitution on Simplicity and Manner of Preaching’ – a document submitted to the

second General Congregation of the Redemptorists in 1747. Of interest in terms of simplicity of language is the insistence that Redemptorists must preach in an apostolic manner, i.e. in a way that focuses attention on Jesus and not on the preacher. Hence the ornate rhetorical style so prevalent was to be avoided. According to the 1747 document Redemptorist preaching had to be ‘clear, simple, familiar and popular’. This simplicity of language has been a characteristic of popular preaching (and writing) in the Congregation ever since.

### Simplicity of Life

Simplicity of language cannot be ‘put on’ just for the pulpit. It is of a piece with simplicity of life. The early focus in the Congregation on asceticism, not to say austerity, meant that the life itself was marked by a strong sense of simplicity. The details of what was and what was not allowed in terms of the vow of poverty may seem exaggerated today. However, behind such details lay a profound religious conviction that ‘...having Him, I must have naught beside’ (Thompson). The call to simplicity of life is finding more space in the lives of religious today. With the frantic accumulation of gadgets and the rapid transformation of luxuries into necessities, many thoughtful religious are rediscovering the beauty and value of a simple lifestyle. Faced with the relentless hardships of the poorest of the poor, confreres are increasingly sensitive to the question of personal and collective simplicity: ‘In the face of the unmet fundamental needs of so many poor, perhaps some of our plans for houses, cars, furnishings, etc. become sinfully extravagant. We believe that our prudent financial planning ought to take care of the present generation without creating a dangerous richness for the next one’ (Lasso).

### Simplicity of Presence

This kind of simplicity is often described in terms of ‘closeness to the people’ and it remains an attractive aspect of the profile of a Redemptorist. It remains a characteristic of our popular missions, our shrines, our media work and our missionary parishes, that there is a preference for simple anonymous people, the ‘little ones’ of this world. Being with the poor, speaking their language, caring for their children, such pastoral priorities help us to celebrate gospel simplicity. Fr Raponi quotes the words of Pope Pius XI to the Superior General (Fr Murray) in 1935: ‘The Redemptorists are truly missionaries, missionaries of the heart. They know how to move people’s hearts. And also, they are very simple, they are not difficult and they content themselves with little.’

### Formation for Simplicity

In listing the virtues necessary for the Apostolic Life of Redemptorists we see ‘simplicity and sincerity of heart’ in Statute 057. That Statute contains a reference to *Optatam Totius* (1965) on the training of priests. In referring to those in formation (#9) we read: ‘It is not their lot to lord it over others and enjoy honours, but to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry.’ Constitution 62 requires that ‘all goods should be simple in style, in keeping with their state and held for common use’. Such a simple lifestyle grows out of a way of life in which our real wealth is our relationship with Jesus our Redeemer. Unless we are captivated by him and by his kingdom no amount of virtuous exhortation to simplicity will make any difference.

### Conclusion

Simplicity is akin to humility and like humility, it is endless. In the end it is a dazzling (if hidden) gift celebrated in the life of Jesus and in those who are in him. It finds inspired expression in psalm 131:

*O Lord, my heart is not proud  
Nor haughty my eyes.  
I have not gone after things too great  
Nor marvels beyond me.  
Truly I have set my soul  
In silence and peace.  
A weaned child on its mother's breast  
Even so my soul.  
O Israel, hope in the Lord  
Both now and for ever.*

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**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you distinguish between simplicity and simple-mindedness?
2. Is gospel simplicity different from natural simplicity?
3. Did ‘simplicity and sincerity of heart’ figure prominently in my initial formation?
4. Do they have any place in my live now?

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## SIN

The context for a consideration of sin is God's intense desire to be in relationship with humanity and the recognition that human beings were created for God, for an everlasting relationship with him. St Alphonus wrote: 'Heaven for God is the human heart... God's greatest pleasure is to be with you; you should delight to be with God, to spend your whole life in the loving company of the God with whom you hope to spend an eternity of delight.' Centuries earlier, St Irenaeus wrote that the Glory of God is a man fully alive, and that life 'consists in beholding God'. People are called to a covenantal relationship with God, the God who says to them 'You will be my people and I will be your God.'

Sin thwarts God's plan for humanity's full life by damaging one's relationship with God, with others, with oneself, and with the created world. God's plentiful redemption is evident and experienced when sin is diminished and when relationships are restored. Sin, then, is an action or a state of affairs that results in harm to human beings and to right relationships. The offense we give to God is due to the effects of sin on his beloved children and his creation.

### Origins

Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. The key quality that distinguishes them from all other creatures is the gift of freedom, the ability to do God's will and to conform themselves to his likeness. Yet from the beginning of time human beings have abused their freedom. Rather than using it to behold God and to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters, they often choose a self-centred life, one marked more by self-absorption than self-gift. People struggle with a heart divided between a desire either to respond to God's loving advances or to withdraw from God, seeking finite goods contrary to humanity's true destiny. Offered plentiful redemption, people choose to deprive themselves of the fullness of this gift through sin.

Redemptorist spirituality focuses on God's attempts to love us as evidenced in the Incarnation, in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and in the gift of the Eucharist. The spiritual life must take account of the way in which sin frustrates God's designs and stunts the deepest longings of the human heart, the very life and holiness to which people are called.

### Description

Sin can best be described as an abuse of freedom that harms God's creation and thus offends God. Freedom is given to human beings for their flourishing. Sin is

freedom's enemy precisely because it impedes people from forming a harmonious relationship with God, with their brothers and sisters, and with the creation entrusted to their care.

Traditionally moral theology spoke of personal sin, that is, an action contrary to the good that is committed with sufficient knowledge and freedom. While the action was harmful to others, it also hurt the person who committed it. A metaphor for personal sin that captures its effects is a pathology or disease that destroys a person from within. Left untreated, sin may well destroy a person's ability to behold God and to love one's neighbours.

A development in moral theology in the latter half of the 20th century introduced the concept of social sin. Some examples are racism, sexism, and corruption in governance. While individual acts may be racist, sexist, or corrupt, the category of social sin points to a much larger social and global environment that facilitates these unjust actions. Sometimes portrayed as the embodiment of personal sin, social sin describes dehumanising structures that harm the life and dignity of people.

Concern for plentiful redemption should encourage Redemptorists in their personal lives and in their ministry to attend to sin and its effects. Aware of God's call to the fullness of life, they view and speak of sin, both personal and social, as harmful to themselves and others, and offensive to God.

### Pastoral Application

Preaching the good news of God's plentiful redemption brings Redemptorists face to face with sin daily. In ministry they encounter the brokenness of individuals sick with sin and with structures that oppress persons. The Redemptorist mission to continue the reconciling work of the Redeemer compels them to seek ways to set things right.

In their work with individuals, particularly through the sacrament of Penance, Redemptorists remind people of God's great desire for their love. Frequently priests find penitents questioning God's willingness to forgive or God's ability to love them in spite of their sins. St Alphonsus says: 'If they only understood God's desire not to punish them but to see them change their lives that God might embrace them and press them to his heart.' Redemptorists preach conversion and remind people of God's heaven, the human heart. They remind people of 'the very high destiny of the individual and the whole human race' (Const. 6).

Redemptorists also denounce structures that oppress human beings and that present obstacles to plentiful redemption. In word and deed they confront systemic injustice so that the good news may be heard and experienced, especially in the lives of the poor.

### Current Manifestations

Naming manifestations of sin is, unfortunately, a seemingly endless task. Fr Tobin's communicanda, *Redemption*, identifies 'a culture of death that prizes power, pleasure and possessions to the point of the dehumanisation, enslavement and wholesale displacement of entire societies'. These contemporary realities give birth to both personal and social sin and underscore all the more the urgency and relevance of the charism of Redemptorists to live and to preach plentiful redemption.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How does my understanding of God affect my view of sin?
2. How do I experience sin, both personal and social?
3. Have I experienced plentiful redemption in the Sacrament of Penance?
4. How do I speak of and respond to sin in ministry?

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## SPIRITUALITY

Redemptorist spirituality is a way of life, *a lifestyle*. In Jesus, Son of God and ‘born of woman’ (Gal 4:4), Redemptorists discover the presence of God in human life and in history as Love that gives itself freely and abundantly for us and for our salvation. Redemptorists are so taken up by this experience that they dedicate themselves entirely to Jesus and assume his mission as theirs. They want to bring all to God’s love. ‘For to me life is Christ’ (Phil 1:21).

St Alphonsus de Liguori, Doctor of the Church, insists that ‘some identify perfection with austerity of life, others with prayer, still others with frequenting the sacraments and others with almsgiving. But they fool themselves: perfection consists in *loving God wholeheartedly*’ (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*). This is the heart of Redemptorist spirituality.

Redemptorist spirituality is Christian spirituality with a specific *Redemptorist* character. It is not a system that can be put into a logical schema. It is dynamic. We may compare it to a river. The riverbed of Redemptorist spirituality is established by St Alphonsus. He gives it shape, consistency and direction. Many tributaries flow into this river and continue to do so in our days. Redemptorist spirituality incorporates diverse persons, cultures and history into its flow.

Redemptorist spirituality is guided by Alphonsus’ intuition in founding the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: the Redemptorist is called *to follow the example of Jesus Christ*, the Redeemer, in preaching the good news from God to the poor.

The Latin term ‘*vita apostolica*’ (apostolic life) is used to describe the Redemptorist lifestyle. The *apostolic life* is a way of following Jesus that ‘comprises at one and the same time a life specially dedicated to God and a life of missionary work’ (Const. 1). Contemplation and action come together, are *intertwined*, in the life of the Redemptorist.

To follow Jesus and to give ourselves to the preaching of good news to the poor constitutes a unified process, just as fulfilling the Father’s will and preaching the good news to the poor were one and the same for Jesus. It would be a serious mistake to separate the following of Jesus (‘contemplative dimension’) from the preaching of the good news to the poor (‘apostolate’), disrupting an underlying unity that is fundamental to Redemptorist spirituality.

Certainly, our missionary spirituality demands *contemplation*. The contemplative dimension leads us to ‘share in the love of the Son for his Father and for people’. It enables us ‘to see God in the people and in the events of everyday life, to see God’s plan of salvation in its true light and to distinguish between what is



real and what is illusory' (Const. 24).

At the same time, the Redemptorist vocation of *pastoral charity* is a life of prayer. Without a lifestyle characterised by prayer, the Redemptorist cannot grow and remain faithful to the Christian calling and the Redemptorist charism.

Redemptorist spirituality is inherently *missionary*. In experiencing God's love and mercy, the Redemptorist is driven to bring everyone to God's love. Our own sanctification is inextricably bound to the sanctification of others. All Redemptorists are called to be missionaries, 'whether they are engaged in different activities of the apostolic ministry or hindered from working at all' (Const. 55). The missionary nature of our lifestyle is not based on specific apostolates but on our insertion into the mission of Jesus himself.

Alphonsus experienced God's passionate love for us in Jesus. 'If faith had not assured us of it', writes Alphonsus, 'who could ever have believed that a God, almighty, most happy, and the Lord of all, should have condescended to love man to such an extent that he seems to go 'mad' for the love of him?' Redemptorists are 'incorporated in a particular way into the mission of Christ as ministers of the Gospel, under the direction of the Holy Spirit' (Const. 47). Redemptorist spirituality demands a lifestyle of *continual conversion*, seeking to change ourselves and the world in response to God's love, ever obedient to the promptings of the Spirit.

St Alphonsus insists that the Redemptorist should seek out *the abandoned*, especially the poor. Such a priority will keep our spirituality focused. The whole of the Redemptorist lifestyle evolves around the poor.

Redemptorist spirituality leads us to live and work *in community*. God chose each of us to come together with others to live the *Apostolic Life*. In doing so we witness and contribute to the 'new' that God wants to bring about in the world, common unity among persons and nations. Community life ought to reflect the very communion of the Trinity, the 'best of all communities'.

Our traditional meditations on the Incarnation and the Passion of Jesus, on the Eucharist and on Mary were typical in the Church at the time of Alphonsus. They configured in time a Redemptorist approach to understanding God's love and the mystery of salvation.

Redemptorist spirituality meditates on the significance of the *Incarnation* in the life and history of humanity: God is among us to give us abundant life and mercy. The Redemptorist understands that all are called to enter a relationship of love with God; that, in the mystery of God's love, the poorest, the most abandoned and sinners all find the welcoming arms of mercy, forgiveness and solidarity. Jesus offers salvation to all. No one is excluded and the poor are favoured

where Jesus is present.

Redemptorist spirituality seeks to understand the meaning of *redemption* for humanity today. St Alphonsus continually meditated and preached on the meaning of salvation. The Redemptorist continues in his footsteps, studying, meditating and proclaiming the meaning of the salvific and liberating presence of Jesus Christ.

Redemptorist spirituality proclaims that the *Eucharist* reveals, makes real and effective the love of God in Christ. In the Eucharist Jesus remains with us here and now. In the mystery of the Eucharist, the Redemptorist understands that *eternity is now!* Jesus is present sacramentally, waiting for us and reaching out for our love. This is the sacrament of common-union that nourishes the life and vocation of the Redemptorist.

Redemptorist spirituality finds in *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, not only his own mother but also a companion in the pilgrimage of life and a perpetual help. She is also a missionary who inspires and strengthens his own vocation. She is a fountain of love and mercy.

Jesus had an intimate relationship with his Father. He never felt alone or lost on his own. He knew and experienced his Father as always with him (Jn 8:16). He always did what the Father asked of him (Jn 5:19-30; cf. 8:28-29). His food was to do *the will of the Father* (Jn 4:34). The Father, his 'Abba', gave sense and purpose to his life as man. Jesus revealed to people the 'face' of God in his way of being, living and relating to them. He was able to make God good news for human life, particularly for the poor. His goodness and tenderness reflected the experience he himself had of God as Father. Jesus' own life style characterises the Redemptorist lifestyle.

These are some of the fundamental aspects of Redemptorist spirituality. This *Lexicon* will include many other elements. The hope is that the guiding principles and ideas presented here will help in developing and growing in a life style that continues to fill with enthusiasm and zeal so many in the Church in the search for meaning and sense in today's world.

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Raponi, Santino C.Ss.R.: *The Charism of the Redemptorists in the Church. A Commentary on the Constitutions*. Translated from the Italian by J. Robert Fenili C.Ss.R., Roma: Center for Redemptorist Spirituality, 2003.

Hoegerl, Carl C.Ss.R.(ed.), *Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology*, Roma: Collegio Sant'Alfonso, 1982.

Permanent Commission for Redemptorist Spirituality: *Readings in Redemptorist Spirituality* (5 Vols.), Roma, 1989.

Ulanov, Barry (ed.): *The Way of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1999.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe your Spirituality, your Christian life style? What do you notice are the most important elements?
2. What makes your life style 'Redemptorist'? What means do you employ to grow in a Redemptorist life style?
3. What role do the poor concretely play in your Spirituality, in your Redemptorist life style? How do you relate to them and how do they 'form' you?
4. How do you seek to integrate contemplation and action into a unified life style?

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## SUFFERING

When I was a young professed Redemptorist studying theology at Mount St Alphonsus Seminary, I faced a very strong temptation that caused extreme inner turmoil; I seriously considered leaving the Congregation. I could not understand how a good and loving God could allow suffering.

Now, after 40 years in the Congregation, and 33 years as a priest, the question is no longer merely philosophical. ‘Why does God allow suffering in the world?’ I come face-to-face with that question almost daily in my priestly ministry.

While giving a parish mission, I visited a young man, who, at the most, was 35 years old. His strong and vigorous body lay captive in bed, facing a lifetime of paralysis due to recent stroke. His family, who hovered around his bed, little realised that their lives, too, had changed forever.

I recall celebrating a Mass and watching a little boy painfully walk to Holy Communion on severely crippled legs. On 26 December 2004, amid the joyful Christmas season, a tsunami killed hundreds of thousands of people. The faces of the innocents of war and terrorism visit us daily. I still carry the pain of the sudden death of my sister Gerry, who left us too soon, at the age of 45, in 1983. No one journeys very long without encountering suffering, nor can we avoid pondering its meaning. There are no easy words found in the desolation.

St Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually throughout his life. Fr Frederick Jones wrote about Alphonsus’ physical suffering in old age: ‘His hearing and eyesight were both seriously impaired; to communicate with him one had to shout. When assisting at Mass, he could not hear the priest nor see the Host elevated at the Consecration. His arthritis worsened, with the result that the curvature of his spine and the deformity of his neck were both greatly accentuated... To these conditions were added a hernia... He had to be lifted in and out of bed, and confined to his wheelchair, which he detested.’ In 1780 as an elderly man, our founder’s heart was broken when he was informed that the Neapolitan communities, by the decree of the Pope ‘ceased to be members of the Congregation and no longer enjoyed the favours and privileges granted to the Congregation by the Holy See.’ As a young man in Scala, he experienced deep sorrow as his newly founded Congregation was on the point of death when his first companions abandoned him. This great Doctor of the Church, compassionate confessor to the poor and abandoned, suffered, too, with the great cross of scrupulosity.

So many agonising moments of Redemptorist history, with the cross evident to the men, led to sanctification and glory for their people. The saintly Br Gerard

Majella remained silent before a calumnious charge of impropriety. St Clement Hofbauer wept at the death of his dear friend and confrere Fr Thaddeus Hubl. On 6 August 1944, the Nazis slaughtered an entire Redemptorist community in Warsaw, Poland. Our Congregation reveres the heroic witness of confreres martyred by the Communists: Blessed Dominik Trčka, Nicholas Charnetsky, Vasly Velychkovsky, Zenon Kovalyk, and Ivan Ziatyk.

Our confreres ministered to dying boys on American Civil War battlefields, prayed with the Irish during famine's dark days, rode on horseback to struggling Brazilian farmers, buried dead South African apartheid victims, and stood with World War II refugees throughout Europe. We continue to offer presence to the suffering in our world: AIDS victims in Africa, starving street people in India, grieving families of the victims of the terror attack of 11 September 2001, the many orphans in Thailand, the religiously oppressed in Vietnam, and the undocumented immigrants in the United States.

St Alphonsus founded the Congregation to search out the poor and abandoned. Constitution 4 states: 'Among groups of people in need of spiritual help, they will give special attention to the poor, the deprived, and the oppressed. The evangelisation of these is a sign of messianic activity (cf. Lk 4:18) and Christ, in a certain sense, wished to identify himself with them.' In the face of the suffering of the people of God, be it from poverty, disease, or political oppression, a Redemptorist is a man who must be with the poor. He preaches the message of eternal life, while actively working with his people to alleviate the causes of their pain.

St Alphonsus was deeply devoted to the Crucified Christ – the Cross was the primary way to understand God's passionate love for us. He writes: 'He loved us and...gave himself up to sorrow and shame and to a death more painful than anyone on earth could have endured.' The Redemptorist sees Jesus' suffering visage when he gazes on every face of God's people. Our founder wrote in his Stations of the Cross: 'You have made this journey to die for me with unspeakable love.'

Elie Wiesel, the Jewish author who, as a boy, survived Nazi concentration camps describes one horrific scene in his autobiographical book, *Night*. Wiesel watches, along with thousands of other prisoners, the execution by hanging of two men and one small boy. The two men died quickly, but the little boy, weighing less, took more than 30 minutes, 'struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes'. The man behind Wiesel cried out: 'Where is God now?' Wiesel silently answered: 'Where is he? Here he is – he is hanging here on this gallows.'

Where is Christ today? God is Emmanuel: a name which means 'God with

us'. He is among the suffering poor and abandoned everywhere. He is with the sick, the lonely, the anxious, the oppressed, the victims of wars and natural disasters, and the dying. The Lord hears the cry of the poor through the presence and proclaimed Gospel message of God's redeeming love. The Redemptorists are challenged to seek to overcome the root causes of suffering people when possible. However, many times we must stand as silent, impotent witnesses to the suffering of those we pastor, pointing to the cross of Jesus Christ and reaffirming our faith in a God who is with us in the darkest moments. Redemptorists live and die with and for their people.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

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Nouwen, Henri: *The Wounded Healer*, Image Books, 1979.  
Nouwen, Henri: *Inner Voice of Love: A Journey from Anguish To Freedom*, Image Book, 1999.  
John Paul II: *Salvifici Dolori (On the Christian meaning of suffering)*, Apostolic Letter, February 11, 1984.  
Kreeft, Peter:: *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, Servant, 1986.  
Metz, Johannes: *Poverty of Spirit*, Paulist Press, 1998  
Wright, N.T.: *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*,. Word Among Us Press, 2008.  
'Into Your Hands: Meditations and Prayers on the Passion, Death, and Resurrection' from the *Writings of St Alphonsus Liguori*, edited by Norman Muckerman C.Ss.R., Liguori Press, 2001.  
Lewis, C.S.: *The Problem of Pain*, Harper One, 2001.  
Durrwell, François-Xavier C.Ss.R.: *Christ our Passover*, Liguori Press, 2004.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Can you recall a time in your life when you experienced or witnessed great suffering? How did that change your understanding of God?
2. Where do you see suffering today in your life? How is God calling you to respond in love to what you see?

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## THREE WAYS (Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive)

The Christian life has often been described as a journey of three spiritual stages: the purgative, illuminative, and unitive. These stages share some traits in common, yet also remain very much distinct. For centuries, they have been a helpful way in which Christians have marked their progress in the spiritual life. They continue to do so even today.

### Origins

Although Scripture does not specifically refer to these terms, certain passages have been presented as resonating with the ideas involved. In the Old Testament, for example, Psalm 34:15 is said to correspond to the purgative emphasis renunciation ('Turn from evil'), the illuminative focus on the virtuous life ('and do good'), and the unitive stress on communion with God ('seek peace, and follow after it'). In the New Testament, Jesus' call to discipleship in Luke 9:23 has been associated with the purgative focus on self-denial ('Whoever wishes to be my disciple must deny his very self'), the illuminative on good works ('take up his cross each day'), and the unitive on intimate union with Jesus ('and follow me'). A number of passages from the letters of St Paul have been interpreted in a similar light: the purgative (1 Cor 9:26-27); the illuminative (1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:13-17); the unitive (2 Cor 12:2; Gal 2:20).

Among the Church fathers, Clement of Alexandria (died circa 215AD) outlines of a threefold process for achieving perfect *gnosis*. At first, one shuns evil through fear and mortification of the passions. Then one practices the virtues out of hope. Finally, one does good simply out of love for God (*Stromata*, 6.12). In a similar vein, John Cassian (died circa 215AD) speaks of the three degrees of a soul's ascent to God: fear, hope, and love. The first is characteristic of slaves; the second, of mercenaries working for a reward; the third, of children of God (*Conferences*, 11.6-8). Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD), in turn, presents this process in terms of incipient love, growing love, full-grown love, and perfect love (*On Nature and Grace*, 70.84). The first two stages correspond respectively to the purgative and illuminative ways; the third and fourth, to the unitive.

As far as medieval authors are concerned, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) says that a person loves God first solely on account of the gifts he bestows, then for God's sake and the hope of benefits, and finally out of disinterested love (*Epistle*, 11.8). William of St Thierry (d. 1149) presents the three ways in terms of a progression from the animal to the rational to the spiritual states (*The Golden*

*Epistle*, 140), while Aelred of Rievaulx (c. 1110-67) speaks of the carnal kiss, the spiritual kiss, and the intellectual or mystical kiss (*Spiritual Friendship*, 2.24). St Bonaventure (c. 1217-74) refers explicitly to the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways (*The Triple Way*, Prol.), while Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-74) speaks of beginners, who focus on the avoidance of sin, the proficient, who exercise the virtues, and the perfect, who cling to God and take their delight in him (*Summa theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 24, a. 9).

Through these and other authors, the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways made its way into the fabric of the Church's spiritual doctrine. St Alphonsus de Liguori was acquainted with these stages from his vast knowledge of the Church tradition, the lives of the saints, and more directly through his close reading of the works of Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and Francis de Sales (1567-1622).

### Description

Although traditionally referred to as the 'three ways', these terms actually represent different stages in a single journey. The purgative way is for those who at the outset on their journey must turn away from evil through fasting, prayer, and ascetical practices. The illuminative is for those who have made progress in the spiritual life and have become proficient in the life of virtue. The unitive is for those who have achieved mystical union with God and are closely in touch with the inspirations of the Spirit.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that one stage abruptly ends when another begins or that one is somehow left behind when another arrives. On the contrary, the purgative way is subsumed into the illuminative; the illuminative, into the unitive. When seen in this light, determining where a person is in his or her spiritual journey is usually a question of which of these 'stages' is predominant in a person's life as his or her relationship with God deepens.

Those who reach the state of union with God continue to make good use of the various prayer forms and ascetical practices used in the earlier stages. To convey this nuance, the cyclical image of an upward moving 'spiral' (as opposed to the more linear metaphor of the 'journey') has been offered as a more accurate way of describing how these various 'stages' or 'ways' relate.

### Pastoral Application

The doctrine of the Three Ways is a metaphor that can be used by spiritual directors as they help those who come to them to deepen the relationship with God. When coupled with insights from psychology and theology, it can help people arrive at a sense of where they are in their spiritual journey and what concrete



steps they now need to take. Beyond the ministry of spiritual direction, it can also be used to raise awareness of what goes on when people gather for Eucharist, which has distinct moments of purgation (e.g., Penitential Rite), illumination (Sharing the Word), and union (Communion).

### Current Manifestations

The Three Ways is an important component in the ministry of spiritual direction and is often highlighted in courses for adults in Catholic spirituality. It can be used as a helpful metaphor for teaching people to deepen any relationship where there is the potential of intimacy (e.g., with God, between husband and wife, between two friends). It is sometimes adapted in RCIA programs to help people understand their role in the Church, especially when they gather for Liturgy. It can be applied to almost any ministry which uses the metaphor of the journey to explain how a person begins, makes progress, and arrives at his or her destination.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Downey, Michael, ed.: *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993. S.v. 'Three Ways,' by Thomas D. McGonigle.

Groeschel, Benedict J.: *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development*. New York: Crossroads, 1984.

Lozano, John Manuel: *Praying Even When the Door Seems Closed: The Nature and Stages of Prayer* New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Tanquerey, Adolphe: *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*. Translated by Herman Branderis. 2d ed. Tournai: Desclée & co., 1930.

Waijman, Kees: *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Translated by John Vriend. Studies in Spirituality, Supplement 8. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Do the three stages of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways make sense to you? What are the strengths of this presentation? What are its weaknesses?
2. Can you improve it in any way? How else could you describe this journey? How far along are you in your own journey to God? Have you made consistent progress in it? Have you wandered about or digressed in any way? How can you use the metaphor of the three ways to help others draw closer to God?

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## TWELVE MONTHLY VIRTUES

The Second Vatican Council's decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, on the renewal of religious life, states 'that the final norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel,' which 'must be taken by all institutes as the supreme rule' (n. 2a). From the very beginning of the Congregation, this norm has been an integral part of Redemptorist life through the practice of the Twelve Monthly Virtues.

### Early Formulations

A text dating from 1733, 'Summary of the Institute and Rules', lists the daily community prayers and then continues: 'There follow here the Twelve Rules on the Virtues, taken from the Gospels, to one of which Rules they are to give special attention each month.' In this formulation and in subsequent ones, the matrix of the Rule consisted of the twelve monthly virtues. As the Congregation grew, various texts were formulated for the bishops who invited Redemptorist to work in their dioceses.

Only one of these early texts, *Ristretto*, or a summary of the Rule, is in the hand of St Alphonsus and has the clear imprint of his practical mind. He first states the purpose of the Congregation: 'To follow the example of our common Saviour Jesus Christ' by helping people most deprived of spiritual help. He then continues: 'There are Twelve Rules laid down for this purpose concerning twelve most principal virtues of the Christian life. In a special way, the subjects are to strive each month to advance in that virtue which has been assigned to that month and for this purpose upon them they shall make their conferences, meditations, readings, and resolutions.' The text that was sent to Rome for the approbation of the Holy See in 1749 follows closely this formulation.

### *The Pontifical Rule, 1749*

The completely revised Redemptorist Rule was approved by Pope Benedict XIV on 25 February 1749. The formulation of the Rule around the twelve monthly virtues was completely gone. In its place was a more juridical format. However, the virtues were mentioned under Prayers and Practices of Humility. The three periods of mental prayer each day 'shall be made especially on the theological virtues and on the life and virtues of Jesus Christ, which they must in a living way, reproduce in themselves. Every month they shall direct their particular attention to one of these virtues in order to practice it better'.

### *The Revised Rule of 1982*

The strategy of the Monthly Virtues nourished the spiritual life of the Congregation until the XXVII General Chapter, 1967-69. Since Pope Paul VI's instruction *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (1966) directed all religious institutes to revise their rules to reflect the needs of the times, the capitulars voted for a complete reformulation of the Redemptorist Rule. The 1982 approved Constitutions and Statutes do not mention the Monthly Virtues, ending a tradition that goes back to Saint Alphonsus himself.

### Description

The practice of the Twelve Monthly Virtues was a strategy to imitate the life and virtues of our Blessed Lord. Each month a Redemptorist was to try to grow in a virtue integral to the following of Jesus. Meditations, conferences, examinations of conscience, and spiritual reading concentrated on that virtue. The virtues for the months are:

**January:** Faith

**February:** Hope

**March:** Love of God

**April:** Love of Neighbour

**May:** Poverty

**June:** Chastity

**July:** Obedience

**August:** Meekness and Humility of Heart

**September:** Mortification

**October:** Recollection and Silence

**November:** Prayer

**December:** Self-denial and Love of the Cross

### Pastoral Application

The relevance of the monthly virtues to the pastoral ministry of a Redemptorist is obvious. The effectiveness of his ministry depends on how genuinely he is conformed to Jesus and his mission. His authenticity is important for the depth and the lasting effect of his apostolate. The twelve virtues are qualities we contemplate in Jesus and his work of salvation. Although this practice is no longer part of the Redemptorist Rule, it can be an effective strategy for progress in being conformed to Jesus.

### Current Manifestation

There is today no external manifestation of the practice of the twelve monthly virtues in Redemptorist life. Those seeking a historical perspective of the spirituality of the Congregation, however, cannot truly understand it without realising how much the Twelve Monthly Virtues were an integral and pervasive part of it through the years. Study and comment sees that the practice is based on the principle of divide and conquer. Each month a Redemptorist was reminded of an essential ingredient of the serious imitation of Jesus, the model of all Christian life.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

The most recent study of the rules that embody the Twelve Monthly Virtues is found in:

*Founding Texts of Redemptorists: Early Rules and Allied Documents*, edited, introduced and annotated by Carl Hoegerl C.Ss.R. (Collegio Sant'Alfonso, Rome: 1986). The standard work in English is: Arthur J. Mouton C.Ss.R., *Imitating Jesus Christ by the Practice of the Monthly Virtues*, 3 vols, translated from the French by Henry J. Otterbein C.Ss.R. and Thomas W. Mullaney C.Ss.R. (Privately printed, 1937.)

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Has the practice of the twelve monthly virtues something to offer to Redemptorist spiritual and apostolic life today?
2. What practical strategies or practices have been substituted for the monthly virtues in the new Constitutions and Statutes?
3. From your experience are there indications that the present Constitutions and Statutes foster a more fervent imitation of the life and virtues of Jesus?
4. Can you think of any ways that the strategy of the Twelve Monthly Virtues can be applied to modern Redemptorist life.

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## VITA APOSTOLICA

In Church history the concept '*vita apostolica*' embraced three basic principles: imitation of the primitive church, with a simple and penitential life-style and with interests and activities restricted to the spiritual domain; secondly, a passionate love for souls at home and far afield; and finally, evangelical poverty in common, either rooted in mendicancy or mediated by the work of one's own hands.

During the age of the Gregorian reform it became a compelling programme with the fervour, spontaneity and humanity of the first community at Jerusalem (Acts 4:32; cf. Lk 10:1-12). It postulated reform and criticism in a restless age of expanding economic and geographical horizons, a more rational political system, an increasingly complex social organisation, and a multiplicity of divergent intellectual currents with corresponding new spiritual needs. Such a momentous evolution of society demanded a reappraisal of the resources and ends of the Church, the most powerful and tenacious defender of tradition.

The first principle suggested above demanded imitation of the Apostles and of Christ. It offered examples for direct experience, the turning within oneself in search of God together with outward signs of repentance. The second principle put a premium on itinerant preaching and this, both in contrast to monastic stability and as a supplement to the episcopal pulpit, became a primary method of reform from the first third of the 12th century. While Rupert of Deutz construed the realities of the primitive church around the 'common life', other evangelicals stretched it to the work of conversion rather than purely subjective experience. The apostolate makes the apostle.

The 'cure of souls' afforded a fresh context for the apostolic life in the generation of St Norbert of Xanten. As apostolic preachers on foot, Robert d'Arbrisselles, Bernard de Tiron, Vital de Savigny, Lambert le Bègue, Peter Waldo, St Francis of Assisi, and John Huss, all wished in one way or another to judge daily life by the criterion of Scripture. It sharpened the social conscience of the Friars Minor.

So the concept *vita apostolica* has a long history. It contains three basic principles: following of the early Church in its simplicity and penitential mode, a fervent zeal for souls at home and abroad; and an evangelical poverty which keeps all things in common and where people support themselves by their mendicant preaching and manual labour.

### *Vita Apostolica* in the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes

Our Constitutions and General Statutes emphasise *vita apostolica*. No definition is given; we have to fill out content of the term from the various Constitutions and General Statutes taken in their context.

*Vita apostolica* in our Constitutions and Statutes:

***De Vita Apostolica Redemptoristarum*** (p. 17, ed. lat.): The very title of our Constitutions and Statutes is *De Vita Apostolica Redemptoristarum Constitutiones*. For Redemptorists life and apostolic life are one. A Redemptorist is a man whose life is apostolic, apostolicity characterises his whole life. We do not say apostolate is his whole life, but apostolicity is. The title is not ‘de vita religiosa’. Although ‘religious life’ is also characteristic of the life of Redemptorists, it is not *the* characteristic, not the one that unifies all the other aspects.

**Const. 21:** *Community life* is the most unsuspected form of apostolic life. A good community is a living proclamation of the word of God.

**Const. 29:** ‘In the liturgy they discover and live the mystery of Christ and of salvation. This is true in a special way of the Eucharist, which they recognise as the summit and source of their whole apostolic life, and the sign of their missionary solidarity. Consequently, priests will give first place to the daily celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Other members who are not priests will participate every day in the Eucharistic sacrifice, taking account of the circumstances of life and work in their own community.’ This Constitution brings us to the heart of what we mean by ‘apostolic life’: the Eucharist is the *source and summit* of the apostolic life, it is not merely important but is the source of our apostolic life. Without Eucharist no apostolic life, without Eucharist no Redemptorist life.

**Const. 88:** Students. The prefect of students has to train the minds of the students for the apostolic life, more specifically to ‘help them to relate their theological studies and spirituality in such a way as to give unity to their life’. S. 051: ‘The suitability of candidates for life in the Congregation must be clearly established. Therefore inquiry should be made...concerning the physical and mental health for our apostolic life, and their capacity for normal social relationships.’

**Const. 98:** The Chapters being the primary institutions through which the members exercise responsibility for the apostolic life of the Congregation, both the general chapters (Const107, S. 0116a) and the provincial chapters (Ct. 123) have to care for the interests of the apostolic life of the entire Institute and of the Provinces respectively.

**S. 0114:** Secretariates. On the General as well as on the Provincial level there have to be secretariates for the apostolic life. Const. 123, S. 0140c: They have to issue directions for the promotion of the apostolic life of the members.

The formula of profession does not have the term ‘apostolic life’ in so many words; still it underlines dedication to the apostolic life: ‘Eternal God, who established the mystery of salvation in your Son, and made human beings share in the work of redemption in the Church, I, N.N.... guided by your Holy Spirit, resolve to *dedicate myself entirely to you, by following closely Christ, the Saviour*

*of the world [...] I bind myself to live faithfully a life of brotherly love, imbued with apostolic charity in this same Congregation, founded by St Alphonsus especially for preaching the Gospel to the poor'.*

### Description

*Vita apostolica* is a life like that of the apostles who followed Jesus (Mt 4:22; Mk 1:18-20, Lk 5:11) and encouraged others to do so; 1 Cor 11:1: 'Imitate me just as I imitate Christ.' Characteristics of that kind of life: all were witnesses of his resurrection, all gave their lives for Christ as martyrs as tradition tells us. St Paul describes the basic attitude of their lives: 'I become all things to all people that I may save some of them by any means possible' (1 Cor 9:22); in Philippians 1:21 Paul says: 'What is life? To me it is Christ'. Or in the words of Peter: 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of give eternal life'.

Apostolic life supposes apostolic spirituality, and apostolic spirituality for its part will bear fruit of apostolic life. By apostolic spirituality we mean the attitude of mind and heart that inspires us to follow Jesus, sent by the Father, who brings the good news to the most abandoned and sends his apostles to do the same ('as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you', Jn 20:21).

### Pastoral applications

What does this mean to us Redemptorists of the 21st century? How is apostolic life possible for us? The concrete way to live our apostolic life will be quite different from the life of the apostles in the first centuries of the Church, different also from the way St Alphonsus and his first companions practised it. But what we call the soul of our apostolic commitment should be the same. It means a life whose centre is Jesus Christ, living among us in the Eucharist, a life where Our Lady has her special place, a life totally dedicated to all those who are entrusted to our pastoral care, where we become all things to every person irrespective of age, social condition, education, race, even religion, and with a preference for the poor, i.e. the pastorally forgotten and among them particularly the materially poor. A paradigm of that apostolic life we find in the mission of seventy-two (Lk 10:1-12).

### Current manifestations

Better than many words, the lives of a great number of saints show what apostolic life is; I think of St Augustine, St Francis Xavier and of our own St Alphonsus, St Clement, St Gerard, St John Neumann, Peter Donders, Francis Seelos, who are living examples of 'apostolic life'.

When we look at our history, it can be said without exaggeration that all our saints and beati are examples of this apostolic life as we tried to describe it: Alphonsus was a man of many talents, an artist, lawyer, musician, painter, bishop, author of so many books – but above all he is an apostolic man, an apostle through and through. The same is true for Clement, apostle of Vienna and Warsaw, for Gerard, an apostle by his whole life. Peter Donders became everything to all particularly the poor lepers and slaves. We learn the meaning of *vita apostolica* from those who have gone before us in the Congregation, marked by the sign of faith.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Letters of Father General Joe Tobin:

- ‘Called To Give Our Lives For Plentiful Redemption’, *Communicanda* 1 (2004)
- ‘Redemption’, *Communicanda* 2 (2006)
- ‘Spirituality Our Most Important Challenge’, *Communicanda* 1 (1998)
- ‘I Am Ruined If I Do Not Preach The Gospel,’ *Communicanda* 2 (1999)
- ‘One Heart And One Mind’, *Communicanda* 4 (2002)

Català F.: ‘Vita Apostolica’, in *Religious Life*, 4-5; Rome ...;

Kraxner, Alois: *Elemente einer neuen Spiritualität*; Herder, Wien, 1977.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do apostolic life and community life relate?
2. What can apostolic life realistically mean in my country?
3. What does apostolic life today mean with reference to poverty?
4. How can we give our candidates an idea of apostolic life?
5. How can we help our candidates to become sensitive to the beauty of apostolic life?
6. What about apostolic life in the history of our Congregation?
7. How did St Clement, Joseph Passerat, Achille Desurmont, Bernhard Häring see and practise apostolic life?

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## VIVA MEMORIA

The words ‘*viva memoria*’, commonly translated as ‘living memory’ or ‘living memorial’, are both the core and general theme of the charism or spiritual mission of the Redemptoristine Nuns (Order of the Most Holy Redeemer). These words are product of the mystical inspirations of the Venerable Maria Celeste Crostarosa. When Maria Celeste (1696-1755) and St Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) met in 1730, each was at a critical point in life and spiritual development. Alphonsus became a supporter of Maria Celeste and, in turn, her mystical inspirations influenced his effort to found the Redemptorist Congregation. Key elements of her inspired Rule were adapted and appear in various versions of the Redemptorist Rule.

The words ‘living memory’ first appeared in the rule for contemplative religious life revealed to Maria Celeste. Following her reception of the Eucharist on 25 April 1725, she ‘heard’ these words in her mystical prayer: ‘I have been pleased to choose this Institute to be a living memory and image of the works of salvation and love accomplished by my only-begotten Son during the thirty-three years he lived as man in this world.’ The dynamic concept of ‘living memory’ is a variation on the theme of imitation of Christ as a means of attaining holiness of life and union with God. However, ‘living memory’ moves beyond imitation into personal transformation in Christ. It is a constant and dynamic process by which one is changed interiorly, gradually stripped of the false self, so as to reveal the Christ dwelling within.

In accord with the intention of God the Father, this is the Jesus in whose life we were intended to participate by virtue of his Incarnation as a human being. Gradual revelation of the dynamic life of Jesus within the soul makes present in our world and time the person and works of Jesus Christ. According to Maria Celeste, the constant and dynamic personal spiritual process of transformation is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in an environment born of virtue and availability to God in times of silence and solitude.

For Maria Celeste, the realisation of the living memory of Christ in each nun would be accomplished through development of nine virtues: union of hearts and mutual charity, poverty, purity, obedience, humility and meekness of heart, mortification, recollection and silence, prayer, self-denial and love of the Cross (they were later increased to twelve by Bishop Falcoia, who added faith, hope and love of God).

Studies of the various early versions of the Rule for the Redemptorist Congregation indicate that key elements, especially personal pursuit of the twelve virtues

as the means of spiritual transformation, were directly influenced by the original rule received by Maria Celeste. By this participation in the life of Jesus, the individual becomes a *living memory* of the Saviour, the active presence of Christ in the world. From an early rule formulation: ‘All those called to this Institute are to esteem highly and rejoice in such a calling and are to strive as much as possible to make themselves *living copies* of that divine model, becoming like the life of the Saviour’ (*Complesso*, 1732: Founding Texts p76). The first sentence of a later formulation of the Rule, ‘The purpose of the new and least Institute... is none other than to imitate, *as much as possible with divine grace, this divine Master and model...*’ (*Compendio of Bovino*, 1745: Founding Texts p156). The *Primitive Rule* of the Redemptorists begins: ‘The purpose of the Institute is that of *the closest imitation of the most holy life of our Savior Jesus Christ and of his most adorable virtues*’ (*Text of Conza*, 1747 Founding Texts p179). This is the first text of the Rule approved by the Congregation as a whole. All of these documents express two ends or purposes for the Congregation: to live as Jesus Christ and to be in missionary service of the poor and most abandoned.

Other evidence indicates the extent to which the inspiration of living memory influenced early Redemptorist spirituality. In 1741, Alphonsus wrote that Gioacchino Gaudello, the first to die in the Congregation, ‘manifested to all the life of Jesus Christ’. When Vito Curzio, the first brother in the Congregation died in 1745, Redemptorist Giovanni Mazzini eulogised him, saying he had ‘achieved his objective to become a living copy of Jesus Christ’.

Nonetheless, as Alphonsus earnestly laboured to obtain approval in Rome for the Rule of his Congregation, texts clearly began to depart from early versions which retained so much of the flavour of the Rule of Maria Celeste as revised by Bishop Falcoia. In order to receive official approbation of the Rule concessions were made in terms of emphasis and format and primary influences were obscured.

Today, interpretation of ‘living memory’ is appropriating theological understandings of the Eucharist *memoria* or memorial of the Mass. In the words of consecration (the institution narrative or *anamnesis*) not only is the Body and Blood of Jesus made present under the appearance of bread and wine, Jesus Christ and all of the Paschal Mystery are also made present and active among us. We are not merely remembering Jesus’ life and death or imitating the Last Supper with his disciples. Those events are rendered as living and actively working in their redemptive power for the world in our time. By our presence and expression of faith we too become gifts transformed. The level of participation penetrates even more deeply if the community offers itself along with the gifts of bread and

wine, uniting itself with the words of the Eucharistic Prayer III: ‘Father we bring you these gifts. We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.’

The theologian Johannes Metz (b. 1928) wrote that consecrated religious fulfil an important role in the Church. ‘They press for the uncompromising nature of the Gospel and of the imitation of Christ. In this sense they are the institutionalised form of a *dangerous memory* within the Church.’ Proclamation of the memory can be dangerous as it may be threatening to the *status quo* in any institution and to the norms of the surrounding culture. The living memory spoken of here is the dangerous living reminder of God’s redemptive love, of the desire of God to be incarnated in every human being, of a divine reality open for participation by all humanity.

For Redemptoristine and Redemptorist religious in our time, transformation into the life of Jesus Christ remains primary. The chief means to this end continues to be the ascetical practice of living the virtues of Jesus, living his Mission: Life, Death and Resurrection, the entire Paschal mystery, within the community. In this shared charism, community life, human relationship at every level, is the locus of those who would become *viva memoria*, living memories of the generous love of the Redeemer. The invitation of God, to participate in divine life and divine love in such a way as to become a living memory of Jesus Christ is the missionary message of everyone who promotes the Redemptorist/Redemptoristine charism.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. To what extent is the imitation of Christ a conscious part of your spiritual practice?
2. How might the ideal of becoming a living memory of Christ be manifest in your own life?
3. How can the connection between living memory and the Eucharist made here enhance understanding of both the Liturgy and practice of the virtues?
4. How has your appreciation of the Redemptorist charism and mission been expanded?

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## VOCATION

Everyone receives a vocation to be fully human. This we call our human vocation. As Christians, we are called to live out our baptism and to be holy, in communion and cooperation with God, and also to bear witness to the kingdom by solidarity and cooperation with others. This is our Christian vocation. Finally, we need to discover the particular vocation (as lay persons, consecrated religious or hierarchical ministers) that will enable us to make our specific contribution to the building of the kingdom.

### Vocation According to St Alphonsus

Alphonsus believed that our salvation is closely related to the choice of our state of life. God gives everyone a vocation through which a person is to be saved. ‘And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified’ (Rom 8:30).

In order to discern our vocation, Alphonsus suggested that we do the spiritual exercise of placing before our eyes the state of life we are thinking of choosing, and then we should consider the end we have in view within that choice, and finally we should weigh all the circumstances of the case. It is not unusual to have doubts, but we need to follow God’s voice closely. ‘No one who sets a hand to the plough and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Lk 9:62). It is essential to have faith and understand how important our salvation is, and to consider that we have but one life, and should that be squandered, all is lost. ‘What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?’ (Mt 16:26).

Alphonsus strongly encouraged that those who feel the call to the Congregation should understand that the purpose of joining is to follow the footsteps and example of Jesus, who led a life of detachment and suffering. ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me’ (Mt 16:24). Let those who wish to enter our Congregation not forget to resolve to become saints, and so to suffer, in order to be faithful to God, and not to lose their vocation.

Alphonsus cautioned that those who have begun the journey towards God have to confront the possessive power of attachment to wealth, power, and reputation. In his day, his Neapolitan contemporaries carefully cultivated the cult of the *bella figura*, of the public image. This made it difficult for people to have the sort of spiritual freedom as to make an honest vocational decision. One example, which is still relevant, is parents’ influence on their children in choosing

or discarding a vocation. There are those who ignore a vocation in order to please their parents, and there are those who would enter the religious or clerical state simply in order to avoid displeasing their parents.

Alphonsus recommended to those who feel they may have a vocation to say the following prayer for nine days:

*'My Lord Jesus Christ, who has died for my salvation, I implore You, through the merits of your passion, to give me light and strength to choose that state which is best for my salvation. O my Mother, Mary, obtain this grace for me by your powerful intercession.'*

### Vocation and Mission

Those who wish to join the Congregation must understand that their vocation is closely linked to the mission of Christ. Scriptures also confirms that to be a prophet (OT) or an apostle (NT), one is called or invited to become identified with the mission. In studying the text of our founder, Santino Raponi concluded that the Congregation intends to reaffirm that the Redemptorist vocation is to follow Jesus, our Redeemer, the First Missionary. Furthermore, *Communicanda 12 (I am ruined if I do not preach the Gospel, 1999)* stated that our mission is not only a personal or communal option, but most importantly a vocation to which we have been called.

He who is called to the Congregation will never be a true follower of Jesus Christ, nor become a saint, if he does not fulfil the purpose of his vocation. Nor can one be a 'true Redemptorist' if one lacks the spirit of the Institute, which is to save those who are most in need of spiritual help, such as the marginalised people. By his vocation, therefore, a Redemptorist is a missionary to the simple people, to the most humble social groups. Our vocation indeed is to be living images of Christ Crucified so that we can become effective images of Christ the Redeemer.

### Reflection

Like other congregations, Redemptorists are facing a decline in vocations in many parts of the world. The Old Rule emphasised that we need to have faith in God, sending workers according to his will. The members do not strive to attract candidates by any other means than by prayer and good example.

However, the new Constitutions and Statutes (c.79-80) put the emphasis on incarnational theology which stresses that God uses his creatures to reveal his

will and to accomplish his work. Therefore, every Redemptorist, as part of his own vocation, should engage young people to listen for the call of God in their own world. Fostering vocations is a duty for every Redemptorist.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How has my vocation changed my life?
2. Would I do the same if I were starting out in life again?
3. Have I ever personally invited anyone to follow my example and become a Redemptorist?

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## VOWS

Many religious were educated about the vows within the traditional vision which stressed the point that this was the only way to reach Christian perfection. It was as though the vows were in fact *the essential being of the consecrated life*. Unfortunately there was more emphasis on a juridical and moral vision than on a gospel-inspired vision. This emphasis was mostly negative because it legislated more *what could not be done* than what should be practiced according to the Gospel. There was also much more emphasis on the aspects of renunciation and suffering (*external*) than on the joyous offering of one's life to God and to the Church (*internal*).

The Second Vatican Council recognised that the consecrated life was in an identity crisis as to the essential being of the consecrated life. There was a re-discovery of the theology of the consecrated life which was based on our baptismal consecration and not on the vows: 'Profession is deeply rooted in baptismal consecration, and is a fuller expression of it. Consequently, by this act, the members are incorporated in a particular way into the mission of Christ...' (Const. 47).

The purpose of the vows changed from 'rigorous laws and traditions' to the original idea of the Fathers of the Desert. That understanding always existed, but it had been forgotten; that the only reason for the vows was the fulfilment of the two great commandments of Christ: Love the Lord your God with your whole heart; and love your neighbour as yourself (cf. Mk 12:28-38). Thus the vows are not the essential being of the apostolic consecrated life, but an *existential means* for living a radical love. If we do not understand this, we will never understand the meaning of the vows. I am chaste, poor and obedient *in order to love God and humanity*. This is the reason and the essence of the apostolic consecrated life.

Theological consideration of the vows enters into the reflection about following Jesus Christ in a radical way. Jesus called some to follow him more closely. It was an invitation to freely continue the same choices that the Incarnate Word took on himself in order to be able to love in a radical way. The first thing the vows do is to invite us to follow Christ decisively in his way of loving. Christ first lived certain evangelical values and then he invited some to take on the *same way* of living as his disciples.

The notion of renunciation is necessary here because Christ knew that we have within us three tendencies which can militate against living this radical love of the Father and of humanity: 1) possessions; 2) pleasure; 3) power to



dominate others. They are three signs of modern idolatry where we substitute God for these worldly values. Christ also suffered these same temptations against his consecration and mission in the desert. These three tendencies demand renunciation if we wish to fulfil our baptismal covenant in a radical way. And these three renunciations manifested themselves later in history under the form of the three vows. Thus the vows fight against our tendencies to pride and egoism, which do not permit us to love the Father and humanity. We take on the vows in order to be better able to live prophetically Jesus Christ who first took on this radical attitude of love.

Therefore, there is only one fundamental vow – the desire to fulfil in a radical way the covenant of love from our baptism. All the content of the vows of apostolic consecration take their meaning and power from this unique vow of consecration. I am poor, not in order to be poor, but to love. I am chaste, not because I cannot marry, but because I want to direct all the energy of my sexuality to loving and serving God and my brothers and sisters. I am obedient, not in order to say ‘yes’ to a superior, but in order to freely place my will in the hands of God as a radical offering of my love. This is love and it is renunciation.

Therefore, the vows are the means and not the end. The vows take their prophetic force from the concept of the baptismal consecration now assumed in a much more radical way. They speak only of the love that demands self giving and commitment to God and to humanity in search of plentiful redemption.

### The Vows Are Christ-centric

Whoever wishes to live baptismal love in a profound way needs to contemplate Christ who first lived these same values and renunciations. We must search the Gospel with more attention to the manner in which Christ was poor, chaste and obedient in order to understand better his radical consecration to the Father and to humanity. Christ is the Master and we are his disciples. The vows lead us to discipleship in Jesus. He, the Master, shows us how to live a radical love through our consecration. Without the contemplative aspect in Christ it is impossible to live our consecration and follow Christ.

### The Vows Are Interrelated

Each vow influences and assists the living out of the other vows. I cannot be chaste if first I am not poor and dependent on God and if I am not a person of prayer. I cannot be obedient if first I am not chaste and in love with God. The living out of the vows demands not only the contemplation of each vow but also the discovery of how each vow assists the living out of the others.

The living out of the vows helps us to become *sensitive* to perceiving the loving presence of God in our lives and in the signs of the times. We must remain vigilant so as not to be seduced by the principles of the world which limit our ability to see God in all things and in everyone. The vows are ways to attain intimacy with God. The vows help us to place God in first place and at the center of our lives. They displace the dominance of material things, pleasures or power.

### The Vows Encourage Us to Fulfil Our Redemptorist Mission

‘The members of the Congregation confirm their personal and community life by religious profession, so as to bind themselves totally to the work of the Gospel and to the perfect practice of apostolic charity, for this is the very purpose of the Congregation’ (Const. 46). ‘The members live their union with God in the form of apostolic charity’ (Const. 53). Chastity, poverty and obedience are means to ‘follow the example of Jesus Christ the Redeemer’ (Const. 1). We can see all these elements in our new Constitutions:

**Chastity:** ‘The members of the Congregation, giving themselves to this same mystery of love, choose celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. They do so to dedicate themselves, as individuals and as a community, to God and the mission of Christ’ (Const. 58).

**Poverty:** ‘As missionaries, Redemptorists will embrace in a spirit of trust the poverty of Christ, “who, being rich, became poor for our sakes”’ (Const. 61). ‘Missionary charity requires of the members that they live a life that is really poor, and adapted to the condition of the poor they are evangelising’ (Const. 65).

**Obedience:** ‘Since the fundamental norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as presented in the Gospel, this must be considered as the supreme rule’ (Const. 74). ‘Evangelical obedience contributes to the true development of the human person dedicated to Christ. It bears witness before the world to the genuine freedom of the children of God and to their common union in Christ, and fills the missionaries with apostolic energy’ (Const. 75).

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### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. What credible face can be given to the vow of poverty in today's world?
2. Why take a vow (and oath) of Perseverance when perseverance is implicit in 'Final Profession'?
3. Is there a Redemptorist way of living the vows?

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## WAY OF THE CROSS

The Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis*, sometimes *Via Dolorosa*, in Latin) is a Christian devotion, in which one reconstructs and commemorates the sorrowful route of Christ from the Praetorium to Calvary, the place of his crucifixion. It consists in a meditation on the Redeemer, covering a symbolic itinerary (usually inside or outside of a church), traditionally indicated by 14 crosses which recall, and often artistically portray, the sorrowful events of the last journey of Christ. The Way of the Cross represents a moment of prayer, of reflection and a penitential journey for believers, especially in the Catholic and Anglican traditions.

### Origin

From the beginning, the early Christians of Jerusalem visited the places of the Passion of the Lord with devotion, recalling and reflecting on the events of their salvation. In the medieval period, especially in the time of the Crusades (11<sup>th</sup> to 13th century), the places of the passion of Christ, then called ‘stations’, became the destination of processions and pilgrimages.

From the time that such pilgrimages became impossible for many, the representation of stations in local churches became a mode of imaginatively bringing a believer to the Holy Land. It also afforded them the same indulgences offered to those visiting all the Holy Places in Jerusalem. The representation of various sorrowful episodes, which occurred along the route, contributes to the involvement of the participants by their strong emotional and spiritual content. This popular practice was spread in Europe by pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. From 1342, it was principally the Franciscans who had the custody of the Holy Land of Palestine. In 1731 Pope Clement XII extended the faculty to institute the Way of the Cross also in churches which did not belong to the Franciscans. Thus, after St Leonardo di Porto Maurizio, St Alphonsus Liguori was considered one of the great propagators of this devotion (P. Beaufays OFM, *Exposé historique de la Devotion au chemin de la Croix*).

### Description

For St Alphonsus, the Way of the Cross was a much loved spiritual exercise and a means to meditate on the plentiful redemption of Christ. From his youth until he was 88 years (*Tannoia*, libro 4, c. 34), even when confined to his wheelchair in the house at Pagani, he undertook this meditation every day. He entered into this sorrowful journey of Jesus with intense emotion and profound reflection. Alphonsus was sensitive not just to the sorrows and offences that the Redeemer

experienced, but also to his authentic compassion, and to the unconditional divine love. The power of this love takes the ungrateful human heart by surprise because it was capable of such sacrifice. Therefore, the Way of the Cross was for him a practice which helped him to see and live the spiritual dimension of daily life. Alphonsus could conclude that through this meditation the Redeemer ‘emitted from his wounds, the fire of divine love to inflame the hearts of all’ (Alfonso M. de Liguori, *Condotta ammirabile*, p. 817). He introduced it in the houses of Redemptorists and trusted his confreres to spread it during the popular missions (*Proc. Canonizzazione, Summa super virtut.*, p 182). He therefore recommended that it be practiced ‘with all tenderness, thinking of accompanying the Saviour with our tears to suffer with him and to thank him’ (*From the to the Way of the Cross*).

For Alphonsus, the Way of the Cross was also an exercise in penitence, which he saw as an expiation for sins, a request for God’s pardon, and the desire to inflame the heart with divine love, so as to live in communion with the Lord: ‘But now I love you with all my heart, and because I love you, I am sorry for having sinned. Pardon me, my God, and allow me to go with you on this journey. You accepted your cross because of your great love for me; I desire, my beloved Redeemer, to die for love of you’ (From *The Way of the Cross*). Alphonsus meditated on the Way of the Cross as a way of gradually maturing in his communion with the Lord. He learnt a true *distacco* from his own will and from the ‘things of the world’; he learnt to conform himself to the will of God in daily events and thus to become a saint. ‘I love you, my beloved Jesus; I love you more than myself. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me as you will, I accept all that is pleasing to you.’

### Pastoral Application

Even today, inspired with the example of their Founder, Redemptorists meditate on the Way of the Cross of Christ to nourish their own spiritual life of grace in the Holy Spirit. It permits them to live their charism and face with joy the task of evangelising the poor and spiritually abandoned. They are firmly convinced that the journey of life is travelled together with Jesus and with humanity on the ways of the world, and that this journey does not come to nothing with death, but leads to the newness of the resurrection.

### Current Manifestations

Thus many add a new station to the traditional itinerary. This represents the resurrection of Christ; it confers on the meditation on the passion of the Redeemer,

the Christian sense of saving victory. For this same reason, in some places in the world, together with the faithful, they complement the itinerary of the Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis*) with the Way of Light (*Via Lucis*). These new ‘stations’ celebrate the glorious mysteries, the events of the life of Christ between resurrection and Pentecost. In Redemptorist churches, the celebration of the Way of the Cross is very common during the Fridays of Lent, especially Good Friday. Frequently the celebration has a communitarian characteristic, above all with youth, and it is often accompanied with various hymns and prayers, particularly the sequence of *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How can the celebration of the Way of the Cross strengthen our relationship with Christ?
2. Can our sufferings of life enable us feel the nearness of Christ?
3. Why does the celebration of the Way of the Cross urge us to proclaim the Gospel?
4. Why do the poor, the spiritually abandoned draw strength from the Way of the Cross?
5. Do you, like St Alphonsus, experience gratitude for the Passion of Christ?

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## WILL OF GOD

In the thought of St Alphonus, the Will of God occupies a primacy of place not only in his spiritual and ascetical writings, but also in his moral and systematic theology. God's salvific will reveals the very essence of God's divine nature. Jesus' identity is revealed in his fidelity to God's will. 'I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me' (Jn 5:30; also 6:38; 8:29; 14:31; Mt 11:26; Heb 10:5-7). This is highlighted in the scene in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39).

God's will is the essential good we put into action in moral living. Obedience to the will of God is not only the heart of formal religious life, it is also the heart of all Christian discipleship, and all morality. 'Your will be done' is the prayer of the Christian (Mt 6:10; 7:21; Eph. 6:7; cf. Ps 143:10). The principal object of all our prayer is to discover the will of God and become more fully united to it, so that we might also receive the graces necessary to carry out God's will in daily living.

Alphonus makes a distinction between the *general will of God* which embraces all creation, and *the particular will of God* for individuals. The general will of God is that all people be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth, in Jesus Christ. Alphonus quotes 1 Timothy 2:3-4 to emphasise the universal salvific will of God (cf. also Rom 8:28; 1 Thess 4:3; 2 Pet 3:9). God's will is best expressed in God's desire to save all people, and indeed, all creation. It is for this reason that God sent the Son. At the heart of any theology of the will of God must be a profound conviction that God always wills what is good for his creatures. This is a 'gospel theology' of the will of God.

The particular will of God is God's will for me, so that I may more fully participate in God's universal salvific will which embraces every creature and all creation. How does God call us to be 'helpers, companions, and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption?' (Const. 2). Discovering God's will for me is the key to understanding my vocation and my call to holiness. For Alphonus, a vocation is not so much a 'road map for life' to be uncovered as it is a call to become one with God's universal salvific will, so that I also desire the salvation and happiness of every human being, and the good of all creation – and do everything I can to facilitate the coming of the Reign of God. The vocation of each Christian is to become a helper, companion and minister of Jesus Christ – but the concrete ways in which I am entrusted with this partnership is the expression of God's particular will for me. In other words, the particular will of God for me is the expression of the general will of God in my contemporary

context and circumstance.

Alphonsus presents Mary ‘the most perfect of all the saints because she most perfectly embraced the will of God at all times’ (cf. also Const. 32). He goes on to say that ‘the most difficult thing of all is to accept the will of God no matter what happens, that is, both in those things which are agreeable to us and in things which are not’, and, he says, especially in those that are disagreeable. At the end of the first section of his treatise on *Conformity to the Will of God* (CWS), he concludes: ‘Let us then abandon ourselves in all things to whatever pleases the Lord. Being most wise, he knows what is best for us and since he is most loving, even to the point of giving his life for us, he also wants what is best for us’ (CWS, p 81).

The goal of all our prayer is to unite our will with the will of God, and so to will the salvation of all people and all creation.

‘Our whole perfection consists in loving God, who is so deserving of our love: “And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14). The perfection of the love of God consists in uniting our will with this most holy will, since the principal effect of love...is to unite the wills of those who love each other that they both seem to have but one and same will (CWS, pp. 69-70).

‘If we really want to please the heart of God, then we must be sure to conform to his will and not only conform but we should actually make ourselves one with whatever he ordains. *Conformity* means *joining our will to the will of God* but *uniformity* means *making the will of God and our will into one single will*, as it were, so that we do not want anything but what he wills and so his will becomes ours. This constitutes the most perfect condition to which we should constantly aspire and which should be the goal of our actions, desires, meditations, and prayers’ (CWS, p. 72).

What conformity with the will of God consists in is clear from the summary of circumstances Alphonsus envisages: external happenings, internal happenings, natural defects, sickness, loss of loved ones, spiritual abandonment and temptations, the moment and manner of death, the degrees of grace and glory. If we have the profound conviction that God does will our salvation, and the salvation of everyone, then we know that all things work together for good for those who love God (cf. Rom 8:28). Alphonsus concludes: ‘We should look upon everything that happens or will happen to us as coming from the hands of



God. We should direct all our actions to the single end of doing God's will, and doing it simply because it is his will... By doing his will we will become saints in whatever state of life he places us' (*CWS*, p. 92). It is in the latter context that he speaks of understanding God's will for us through the guidance of our superiors in external matters and on our spiritual directors in internal matters. Thus obedience becomes a privileged means of conforming ourselves to God's Will (*Practice*, pp. 141-45).

Fr Henk Manders C.Ss.R. sees 'conformity' as the accommodation to whatever God wants from us: the *factual submission* to the special arrangements of God's will in relation to us as they happen. It coincides with the meaning of 'resignation'. Conformity is a spiritual discipline which we practice, and through which we grow in holiness. The practice of conformity to the will of God ('resignation', acceptance) prepares us for uniformity with the will of God, which is a gift of grace and the fruit of prayer. Uniformity is the action of God within us.

'Uniformity' consists in *identification of our will with that of God*, as far as this is possible in this life. It is a question of our *willing the same thing* (in relation to our own persons) *as what God wills*. ...Its most characteristic act is the *surrender* – *'do with me as You will'* (in *Readings*, 2, pp. 63-64).

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**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you actively seek to discern and carry out God's will in your life?
2. Is your obedience shaped by the mission, discerned within and in solidarity with the community and directed by your dedication to Christ the Redeemer?
3. How do dialogue and co-responsibility with leadership figure in the discerning and the carrying out the will of God?

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## WITNESS

The verb ‘to witness’, in the Greek sense, means to testify. Therefore an authentic witness is someone who sees something and gives testimony about what has been seen.

Witnesses, from the juridical perspective, are people who are able to give an account of what they know, because of what they have seen or heard. Thus the testimony does not only have the value of information. It is an account, at a trial, that the one witnessing gives regarding an event, about the motives behind an action, or the character of a person. At a deeper level, witnesses, through their testimony, commit themselves fully. At a higher level of commitment, witnesses seal their commitment to the cause they defend, through a public profession of their inner conviction. This may lead them to the sacrifice of their own lives in martyrdom. That is why the action of risking one’s own life can properly be called ‘testimony’, inasmuch as such a surrender is the living proof of the inner conviction and the total devotion of the witness to the cause at stake.

According to the Old Testament, ‘to give witness’ means to express one’s own will or someone else’s. For St Paul to be a witness means to be the bearer of God’s revelation, of his offer of salvation. According to the New Testament, testimony is a statement of a fact and its truth depends on the very word of the witness. In the early Church, this testimony manifested itself in the life shared in joy, charity and prayer by a community (Acts 2:44-47).

In Christian tradition, the witness of religious life has its fundamental reference, inspiration and ultimate justification in Jesus, the Son of God. From this perspective, ‘to give witness’ is an absolute requirement, since Christianity is not a system of thought only theoretically communicated but a message of salvation based on an event that has changed the whole direction of the human condition, and continues to challenge the very life of the one who receives the message.

Contemporary people, more sensitive to human values, admire and respect those who are committed, faithful and conscientious in their tasks, and who have certain common values that allow them to live in community. Therefore the members of the Church must bear witness to the love of Christ in a pluralistic society such as ours. This witness must be a sign of the presence of salvation in the world for people today. This sign will be more convincing if the witness is not only the work of a few individuals, but of a whole group, an entire community, even the whole Church. If Christians are indifferent or do not show respect for the genuine values recognised by the secular world, their profession of Chris-

tian faith, even though open and emphatic, runs the risk of sounding empty. At a time when so many people hunger for prophetic signs of the kingdom of God, we ask ourselves: who else but religious communities can bear witness to the rest of the Church? Who can offer a visible and tangible proof of the reconciling power of Christ's love if not a religious community that publicly declares that its mission is to follow the Lord more freely and radically? The witness of our profession of faith, the living of the vows and our fraternal life must be able to make an impact on the world, being witness both to the attractiveness of God and to our yearning for God.

'The first duty of the consecrated life is *to make visible* the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world' (*Vita Consecrata* No. 20).

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, as an apostolic community, has been marked, throughout its history, by two characteristics: closeness to the people and the strength of the witness of the community as a sign of the presence of the kingdom. Our community life bears witness, not in isolation but, as a presence, in openness to God's people, in service, and in the ability to share with the people everything we are and have. Redemptorist Community life is inserted in the real world, the world of the abandoned and especially the poor. Redemptorists testify to the love of Christ through the witness of their lives (Const. 9). The 'silent witness of their brotherly presence' (Const. 8) is for the Congregation the most demanding and engaging challenge. This is where the future, the credibility, the ecclesial and social fruitfulness of consecrated life is at play. The witness of 'presence' is universally demanded as the first and unwavering response to the 'signs of the times' that challenge religious life today.

Being present to the people gives credibility to the testimony of the Word. Therefore the first and most effective form of evangelisation is the witness of our consecrated life, lived authentically. The apostolate of 'witness of presence' is a legitimate form of evangelisation. However, one must avoid the idea that the aspect of presence is purely passive, and that the 'proclamation' is the active aspect in evangelisation (cf. Const. 10). In fact, they go hand in hand. 'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41).

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What does it mean to be a counter-witness in society?
2. What kind of witness do our buildings give?
3. How do we witness to one another?

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## WORD OF GOD

Out of love, God entered into communion with humanity offering us salvation. In ancient times, he spoke by means of the prophets, to us he has spoken by means of his own Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Word of God *par excellence*, the centre and the totality of divine revelation (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

### Origins

The Hebrew term '*dabar*' means at the same time 'word' and 'thing'. In the history of the chosen people, the word was a decisive force, an effective instrument of revelation and salvation (Is 55:10ff; Heb 4:12). It transmits truth and precept, and is also a dynamic element, having the force of life, since it emanates from the source of life. It is creative, it says and does, announces and realises, teaches and inspires, illuminates and strengthens, heals and restores. It is sent, goes out, runs, lives and builds.

The expression 'Word of God' means all divine revelation, expressed in word and deed which both completes and clarifies (cf. *Dei Verbum* 2). In the Bible, written by persons inspired by the Holy Spirit, we have the concrete form which the Word of God has assumed. The Bible is the book of God's love and of the marvels he has done and is doing. It is the manifestation of grace and of the mercy of the Father.

### Alphonsian Tradition

Jesus commissioned his Apostles to preach the good news to the whole world. St Alphonsus was pained to see many of his contemporaries not preaching the Gospel, and for this he founded the Redemptorist Congregation, entrusted with proclaiming plentiful redemption. The Congregation proclaims the love of God the Father 'who first loved us' (Const. 6). For his preachers, he wrote *Selva di Materie Predicabili*, a treasury of biblical and patristic citations; he exhorted his missionaries to seek the literal sense of Scripture, avoiding so-called accommodations. At the age of 78, he translated the Psalms for those who were reciting them in Latin without understanding them. He enriched his many books with appropriate phrases of the Bible. He made this marvellous affirmation when presenting his book: 'Just one word of Sacred Scripture makes more of an impression on a Christian than a thousand meditations and revelations.'

### Evolution

In the last hundred years, the Church has taken some giant steps in her way of

reading the Bible and proposing it to the faithful. The Protestant Reformation, with its principles of *Sola Scriptura* and free interpretation, provoked in the Catholic Church, as an opposing reaction, a discipline of caution, which reserved the Bible almost exclusively to the clergy.

The Second Vatican Council, with its marvellous Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, was a point of arrival of the biblical movement which had been growing since the time of Leo XIII. It proclaimed the centrality of the word of God in the Church, prescribing that, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture (21). Catechesis, theology and spirituality meet then in the Bible which gives them their solid foundation. With the liturgical reform, the table of the word offered to the faithful has become more abundant, varied and suitable (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 35). The Council has exhorted all the faithful to read the Bible frequently because '[I]gnorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' (*Dei Verbum* 25 [quoting St Jerome]). Teaching the absolute primacy of the word of God, the Council has renewed the position of Catholics with regard to the Bible, to a point never before attained in the Church.

### Pastoral Application

It is in the setting of the Church that the Bible must be read and interpreted in the Spirit in which it was written. In fact, it is Christ who sees to it that our encounter with the word of God be perfect. This supposes a climate of faith and prayer, in order that a salvific dialogue between God and people be established, since 'we speak to him when we pray, we hear him when we read the divine oracle', as St Ambrose noted (*Dei Verbum* 25).

Evangelisation demands an attentive and constant listening to the word. St Augustine affirmed: 'The one who does not listen to the word in private becomes an empty preacher of the word in public' (*Dei Verbum* 25). The Church must be a sign and witness of what she proclaims: the Gospel as a source of conversion, of justice, hope and peace.

### Current Manifestations

But there is reason to rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring a more penetrating light to its interpretation and to its actualisation, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies solely upon its own resources (cf. Mt 11:25), as the Pontifical Biblical Commission has noted.

In effect, the poor are reading the Bible and reading it in community, from

the viewpoint of their faith and their life. In this, they find the light and strength for their journey. They are imitating the holy Fathers of the Church, who read the Bible with their life, and their life with the Bible. St Gregory the Great gave this testimony: ‘I know, in fact, that often many things in Scripture, which I could not succeed in understanding alone, I was able to understand when I was in the midst of my brothers.’

The Synod of Bishops 2008 on the word of God, made an appeal with regard to an improvement of homilies. The concrete proposal very often repeated by the Synodal Fathers has been the spread of the practice of the *Lectio Divina* or *Lettura Orante* (*Prayerful Reading*) of the Bible. This is an attempt to respond to the word of God with all one’s heart, by means of the following steps; reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation; to which sometimes is added: consolation, discernment, proposals and action. This method of reading Scripture, which arose in early Christianity, can also be found in the recommendations of Vatican II (DV 25) and our Constitutions (n 28).

The Redemptorist has, as his principal mission, the explicit proclamation of the word of God in the light of fundamental conversion (Const. 10). Through him, Christ continues his preaching in the world. The missions ‘are a continued redemption which the Son of God is always effecting in the world through means of his ministers’ (S. 017). From the time of his formation, the future Redemptorist is nourished abundantly on the word of God, meditating assiduously on the mystery of salvation (Const. 81). He learns to seek and arduously love Christ the Redeemer through the faithful meditation of this same word (S. 056).

The beautiful Constitution 28, fully woven with conciliar quotations, synthesises in this manner, the inestimable value that the Bible has for us: ‘The word of God gives support and energy to the Church, strengthens the faith of her children, nourishes the soul and is the pure and never-failing wellspring of the spiritual life. Therefore, as ministers of the revelation of Christ’s mystery among people, the members shall often have recourse to his living and life-giving word and steep themselves in it, both by constant reading of the Scriptures and by community celebrations of the word of God. With faith enlivened in this way, they become more effective apostles in every good work.’

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The Liturgy of the Hours teaches us to listen, interiorise and interpret the word of God. What steps must we take, that it may be 'a pure and perennial source of spiritual life'?
2. Compare the *Lectio Divina* method with that of the style of the Alphonsian meditation. In what ways, are our religious communities open to the proposal of *Lectio Divina*?
3. More than in other times, today the faithful possess the Bible, but there are still only a few who read it. How can we awaken in Catholics, an interest and love for the word of God?
4. In the Liturgy, we have the principal moment, which for many is the only encounter with the word of God. How can we make our celebrations a strong moment of evangelisation?

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## WORK

God worked for six days and rested on the seventh (Gen 2:2). Jesus said: ‘My Father is working still, and I am working’ (Jn 5:17). St Alphonsus himself made a vow never to waste a moment of his time. The first chapter of our Constitutions and Statutes is entitled ‘The Missionary Work of the Congregation’. This work is nothing but ‘the work of evangelisation,’ which is the title of the second section of the same chapter.

The aspect of evangelisation is the lens through which we see work. Precisely because we proclaim the good news of redemption, our work is considered apostolic. Another aspect quite crucial to understanding the concept of work is the way we look at being and doing. Often we tend to say ‘to be’ is more important than ‘to do’. When we trace the history of the notion of work among us we will discover that Alphonsus never sees ‘work’ as distinct from ‘being’ or inferior to it.

Another understanding of ‘work’ is to be found in Constitution 64 in the context of the vow of poverty where we are reminded that we should regard ourselves ‘as bound by the law of labour’.

Alphonsus’ original idea was to help the people in the countryside who were deprived of spiritual aid. When he saw how neglected they were in every sense of the word, he wanted to travel continually through the country districts in order to reach out to them. From the beginning Alphonsus saw himself and his confreres as ‘helpers, companions and ministers of Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption’ (Const. 2). They do this by following Jesus Christ in preaching the Gospel to the poor. This is their work. It is this work that will unify both being and doing, community life and work. In working for the salvation of people the sanctification of the members is achieved. This is obvious in the *Ristretto* and the Cossali texts presented to the Holy See for the approval of the Congregation. In seeing redemption this way, Alphonsus was ahead of his times. Unfortunately various influences and spiritualities clouded this vision and introduced dichotomies between ‘personal sanctification’ and ‘external ministries’. We had divided the soul from the body.

When Pope Paul VI invited all congregations to go back to the spirit of their founders (*Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 1966) he was thinking both of fidelity to the past and fidelity to the present, with an eye on the future. The challenge was taken up by the special General Chapter of 1967-69 which was able to resurrect the insight of Alphonsus once more. The capitulars now chose to speak in favour of the unity of missionary life, being and doing, observance and ministry, by use of the for-

mula *apostolic life*. Our apostolic life was at one and the same time a life specifically dedicated to God and a life of missionary work. Everything else gained momentum from this insight. Even though Alphonsus does not use the term Apostolic Life in the sense intended in the Constitutions, the concept of apostolic life conveys the essence of his founding inspirations.

The Holy Spirit inspires and moves us as poor men to bind ourselves by the law of labour (Const. 64). Our missionary vocation obliges us to the demands of labour precisely because what sets us apart is our *missionary* dynamism. The dynamism is *missionary* for it is with great love that we choose the persons and groups who are poor and more neglected within the Church and society (Const. 14). Again, it is our missionary dynamism that connects our work with Gospel poverty and leads us to ‘reinvent’ poverty for our times. Even leisure is seen in a new light. It is disconnected from self-gratifying or self-centred goals. Both work and leisure are creative and dynamic for the sake of the kingdom to which everyone is called.

The message of redemption is at the heart of our work of evangelisation. The message of redemption gives the tone to the particular character of Redemptorist work (Cc. 1-2). As apostles of conversion, the purpose of our missionary work is to build faithful communities that celebrate and radiate the redemption they have received in word and sacrament (Cc. 11-12). We bring this message to the abandoned especially among the poor through diverse forms of apostolate (Cc. 13-16; SS 016-024). As everything in our life is ‘apostolic’, whatever we are doing – better even when we are sick or dying – is integrated into the work of evangelisation. The Congregation is a living *opus Dei*, a sacrament of abundant redemption.

Our apostolic work is in relation to community and the Church. Alphonsus laid great emphasis on both the community and ecclesial dimension of our work. It was the Superior who sent confreres on missions, mostly in teams, and always at the request of bishops. The Constitutions ask us to harmonise our work with that of the universal and local Church, and the people (Cc. 18, 78; S 109a). We are conscious that we belong to the ecclesial community of the Church and that our work must be in collaboration with this larger community as well (S. 04, 037, 049).

Of course, we carry out our apostolic work through community for which reason the community must always be kept in mind when we accept any missionary work (Const. 21). Alphonsus used to say: ‘If we look after our work, our work will look after us’. Constitution 54 tells us that ‘Community life is really at the service of the apostolate’. Even the vow of perseverance was meant to ensure

the continuity of work. There is nevertheless, the danger of interpreting these Constitutions or the practice of Alphonsus so narrowly as to neglect community life altogether. Communicanda 11 of 1988 reminded us that our very community life is itself a missionary work.

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What precisely distinguishes 'workaholics' from those who 'work for persons'?
2. Do you agree that duty makes us do things well but love makes us do them beautifully?
3. In what way could the laity help us achieve a better coordination between work and community life? How did Alphonsus involve the laity towards this end?

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# YOUTH

Very few words echo so much the cultural change taking place today, as the term ‘youth’. The age bracket to which it refers can be very flexible. The diverse social contexts in which youth live can give this term a totally different connotation. Well aware of the risk of approximation, we consider ‘youth’ as those who have completed adolescence and have not yet definitively assumed the responsibilities proper to adult life. The breadth of age to which we refer ranges from 16 to 35 years. As regards the social context, the Redemptorist option for the most abandoned youth, and among them the poor, must remain a priority in every situation.

## Description

Youth, understood as addressees of a direct pastoral action, are a relatively new theme in the mission of the Redemptorists. St Alphonsus spoke several times about youth. Our Saints and Blesseds, in particular Blessed Gaspar Stangassinger, were concerned about them. The Redemptorists of the past and present have dialogued with them. Youth are addressees of the Redemptorist mission on a par with other age groups, however with a predominant characteristic of their age group: that of people still making up their minds about the future and who are still seeking their place in the Church and the world. In the Redemptorist pastoral tradition, youth are not considered a category apart.

To understand youth as a pastoral challenge, we must turn to 1968, with all that this symbolic date represents. It marked the start of a dialogue between the younger generations and the adult world, between Youth and the Church, and consequently the Congregation – a dialogue that has become even more difficult over the last 20 years.

The revision of the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes (from 1967 to 1982) faithfully reflects this situation. The only mention that the Constitutions make of youth is in the context of vocations (Const. 80). The Statutes speak of ‘formation of youth’ in 015; but whether here or elsewhere (034; 052), it is evident that is always a vocational concern. Youth still appear only as a resource, not as a ‘pastoral concern’.

## Pastoral Application

Beginning with the 1985 General Chapter, youth began to be seen as a ‘pastoral option’ for the Congregation, meriting special attention and an appropriate methodology, insofar as they were recognised among the most poor and aban-

done (*Final Document*, III, A). Since then, every General Chapter has required that the Redemptorist mission make a commitment to young people. Recent years have seen more Units taking risks in this area, investing persons, energy and finance in this ministry. The picture which we have today is like a leopard skin – rather spotty and patchy! There are Units which have a consistent programme for Youth Ministry, some organise events and meetings, others seem to have lost all interest in this ministry, while in others the youth are part of the ordinary pastoral care and do not have a specific programme as such.

Whatever the difficulties, it has to be said that the Redemptorist world regards young people as a pastoral urgency. This becomes increasingly compelling for historical reasons.

For almost half a century, three wounds have been created worldwide, despite obvious differences according to culture and countries:

1. Youth have distanced themselves from the rest of society. The language, shaped increasingly by the media, makes the world of youth a planet apart – where what dominates is advertising, individualism and freedom.
2. This epochal passage has weakened the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next. Ever more increasingly, young people face life practically ‘illiterate’ in terms of catechesis and above all in terms of a faith that illuminates and gives meaning to life. In several instances, what has been transmitted to them has been merely devotional – even superstitious – practices.
3. The third wound is a consequence of the first two: the separation of faith from life, and even more clearly, of faith from vocation, i.e. from a dialogue with God which helps to discover one’s proper place in the world.

In his Discourse to the XXIII General Chapter, John Paul II invited the Redemptorists to give to the ministry the rhythms of the ‘pedagogy of holiness [...] beginning with the young people who are often faced with conflicting life choices’ (no. 5). In this sense, our service to the youth is situated in the context of redemption, a liberation from superfluous things and from enslaving needs, an antidote to nihilism, a new and clear look at the world, and the prospect of new life in Christ. In a word, we must help the youth to rediscover a true and deep desire. It is not an accident that the first question of the adult Christ – ‘What do you seek?’ (Jn 1:38) – is also the first question of the Risen Christ: ‘Woman, whom do you seek?’ (Jn 20:15). And it is this desire which links youth and the vocation ministry. But if education in Christian life as a way to holiness is a natural and typical part of their tradition, Redemptorists should recognise with humility that they do not have that specific preparation which this world of youth

asks for, in order that the proclamation of redemption can have fruits that are hoped for. Perhaps the greatest challenge with regard to youth ministry is that it does not consist in giving lessons. What is really important is to know how to ‘waste time’ and to ‘be’ with them – and in doing so, much can be learnt and transmitted through dialogue and understanding.

In summary, young people are a challenge to the Redemptorists inasmuch as they are ‘objectively abandoned’. On the other hand, the youth are also a key to the future, the privileged antennae to capture the signs of the times: ‘Young people, one might say, have an inborn “sense of truth”’ (John Paul II, *Dilecti amici*, 13). To lose contact with them means to lose a connection with reality.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

An idea as to St Alphonsus relationship with youth can be found in his *Letter to his nephews Joseph and Alphonsus Liguori in the College of Nunziatella in Naples* (cf. comment by S. Fiore in A.M. De Spirito [ed.] *The figure and the work of Alphonsus in Sannio*, Milano, 1999, pp207-223). [Italian]

An attention to young people is widespread in various stages of the life of the founder: a word search for *giovane* (youth) in the site [www.intratext.com/BAI/](http://www.intratext.com/BAI/) (available in Italian).

For a broader view in recent times, the messages of John Paul II and Benedict XVI on the occasion of World Youth Days are helpful.

The Aparecida Document 2007, esp. Nos 43 to 59, gives a good idea of cultural change in action, with special reference to youth, not restricted to Latin America alone.

Guidelines for Redemptorist Youth and Vocations Ministry. General Secretariat for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry (RYVM) Rome 2000

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. How far are we willing to review our priorities, our lifestyle, our language, so as to proclaim Jesus Christ to young people?
2. Are we willing to patiently weave threads of solidarity and ecclesial communion in the service of young people?

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## ZEAL

Language dictionaries define zeal as ‘an enthusiastic fervour for/devotion to a person, cause, ideal, goal or object’. For Thomas Aquinas, zeal, is ‘a necessary effect of love’, being ‘the vehement movement of one who loves to secure the object of his love’. Zeal arises from an intensity which is proportioned to that of the love felt and seeks to resist everything that opposes it. That is why, in some Old Testament texts concerning God, zeal is synonymous with jealousy (Num 25:11-13).

Christian zeal is manifest in its devotion and love for God and a love for God’s people, a fulfilment of the two great Commandments. Such enthusiastic devotion may be enlightened (Jn 2:17; 2 Cor 7:11; 9:2), or ignorant and misdirected (Rom 10:2; Phil 3:6). One must discern between true and false zeal, on the basis of the judgment guiding it. Contrast the zeal showed by Paul when he persecuted the Church before his conversion, with the zeal when he became its Apostle. In a religious context, one often speaks of ‘apostolic zeal’.

### History

Zeal was in the heart of St Alphonsus. He was passionate about God and about the abandoned. As a young man he visited the neglected incurables. As a diocesan priest, he cared for the poor in Naples who were forsaken by its numerous priests. When his health broke down, he was advised rest. While recuperating at Scala, he was drawn to the abandoned goatherds. The Congregation grew out of that zeal. Alphonsus used every possible means – books, art, music, and, above all, dynamic preaching – to convey God’s love to all he met. In this setting, we can understand his vow ‘never to lose a moment of time’.

In the Alphonsian and Redemptorist tradition, zeal addresses the interior reality of prayer as well as an outreach pastoral activity. It embraces the two-fold aspect of the love of God and the abandoned poor. It is significant that Alphonsus is described both – as the Doctor of Prayer and the Most Zealous Doctor (the latter title was given when he was pronounced a Doctor of the Church in 1871).

We are heirs to what was in the DNA of Alphonsus! Thank God for the men who were on fire with the zeal that energised Alphonsus. Gerard seemed tireless, Clement was a man of pastoral passion, Neumann died literally in action. Several have blazed new trails and crossed new frontiers. The extensive missionary growth of the Congregation was possible because this apostolic zeal brought the charism and mission across the world.



### Description

The Constitutions and Statutes preface ‘zeal’ with adjectives like apostolic or missionary. They use synonyms like dynamism, fervour, energy and vitality. In particular, words like apostolic, missionary or pastoral charity occur several times. According to the Constitutions, apostolic or missionary charity is the motive for pastoral zeal.

Zeal is intimately linked to the vitality of the Congregation. We see this especially in the areas of community discernment of mission, prayer and vocation promotion.

**Mission:** Zeal is commonly seen as a personal virtue. But the Constitutions speak of zeal as a collective spirit in the context of the Congregation and community (Const. 2). Statute 093 indicates that a sense of belonging to the province is shown in zeal for its apostolic enterprises. An authentic zeal must be enlightened and accompanied by discernment. The missionary must be able to see ‘[God’s] plan of salvation in its true light, and be able to distinguish between what is real and what is illusory (Const. 24) as well as ‘interpret the signs of the times...and have a proper appreciation of human values’ (Const. 83). This discernment makes a confrere capable of evaluating his personal charism in balance with the common good (see S. 049). These apostolic enterprises should not be individualistic ventures but the fruit of community discernment.

**Prayer:** Zeal is expressed in outward activity as well as in prayer. The early rule exhorted Redemptorists to ‘be very zealous in the practice of the presence of God’ (Const. & Rule, Text of the Rule, Part II, chapter III, I.). Our current Constitution 30 highlights this when it says that prayer gives ‘expression to the unity of the members and *fosters their missionary zeal*’.

**Vocation Promotion:** In Constitution 79-80, vocation promotion is highlighted as an expression of zeal. To the traditional ways of fostering vocations, i.e. prayer, and the witness of ministry, apostolic zeal is further added.

### Pastoral Application

Redemptorists are well appreciated by those who frequent their pastoral endeavours in parishes, missions etc. But zeal impels us to constantly and actively seek those abandoned either by society or the Church itself, and to look for new initiatives and strategies in the process of evangelisation. Zeal impels us to look at the present reality with new eyes. It does not allow us to stay content with past achievements, or the quiet security of the present. Zeal is expressed in a generous availability, ‘always ready to undertake what is demanding’ (Const. 20). It pro-

vokes a positive restlessness. Where there is zeal, there can be no room for apathy, passivity and mediocrity. Zeal is best nourished through a life of serious study, research and prayer.

A Redemptorist dies with his shoes on. This saying reminds us that we continue to be active missionaries (Const. 55), ever available to the needs of the people. This is true not only when we are physically able, but also when we are sick or ageing. Missionary prayer knows no limits.

In his *Consideration XIII: On Zeal for the Salvation of Souls*, Alphonsus indicates the reason for which the Congregation was formed, i.e. devoting itself to the most abandoned. Besides Constitution 1, this is also evident in Statutes 09 and 044.

The 1986 Communicanda 4 (cf. 9.2) reminded us: ‘As Redemptorists we do not have to wait for the poor to come to us; our traditional charism challenges us to meet the poor and to concentrate our apostolic zeal on their special needs.’ The theme of the XXIII General Chapter in 2003 was a call to ‘Give our lives for plentiful redemption’. Rather than proposing something totally new, it was a pledge of commitment and availability – expressed through a dynamic apostolic zeal. It was more an emphasis and affirmation of our identity.

Constitution 20 could be called our genetic code, as it emphasises some traditional characteristics of Redemptorists, placing ‘on fire with zeal’ immediately between the theological virtues of faith, hope and love and values such the spirit of prayer, simplicity in act and word, self-denial, radical availability. The Formula for Community Renewal of Profession concludes with the words ‘so that *apostolic zeal may increase in me and in the whole Congregation*, for the good of the whole Church’. The renewal of vows is therefore a pledge to renew and nourish that zeal not only in individual confreres, but also in the community and in the Congregation.

### **SUGGESTED READING**

Raponi, Santino C.Ss.R: *The Charism of the Redemptorists in the Church. A Commentary on the Constitutions*. Rome: The Center of Redemptorist Spirituality 2003.

Liguori, Alphonsus: *Opusculi relativi allo stato religioso* [Short Works on the Religious State], in *Opusculum III*, entitled: “Considerazioni per coloro che son chiamati allo stato religioso” One of the 15 Considerations is: *Consideration XIII: On Zeal for the Salvation of Souls*”.

Communicanda 4: *Evangelizare Pauperibus et a Pauperibus Evangelizari* Rome, 30 March 1986

Kraxner, Alois (translated by Karl Hoeppe): 'The Pastoral Passion of St Clement, pp159-165 in *St Clement Hofbauer: His Writings and Spirituality*, ed Raymond Corriveau.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Since your first profession, what concretely have you done/ are doing to nourish zeal within yourself and the community in its two dimensions: the presence of God and for those abandoned?
2. Can you say that you go beyond your comfort zone? What new initiatives have been born because apostolic zeal has impelled you and the community?
3. What factors are responsible for the lessening of zeal in your community and Province?
4. How have experiences like retreats, renewal programs, sabbaticals helped to increase your apostolic zeal and that of the community?

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