



# CONGREGATIO SS. REDEMPTORIS

Superior Generalis

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Rome, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024

St. Alphonsus María de Liguori

*Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer*

## **YEAR DEDICATED TO MISSION FORMATION**

*The Lord instructs us to rekindle the gift of God that dwells within us.*

Const. 77-90, GS. 050-085; Mt 10:5-15; Lk 9:1-6; 2 Tm 1:6

DEAR CONFRERES, FORMANDI, AND REDEMPTORIST FAMILY:

1. We remember the death of our Founder, on August 1, 1787, a simple and intellectual man with a deep pastoral zeal who contributed to and continues to contribute to the Church of our time. The spirit of Alphonsus is still alive in the Church and in the Congregation, even if we are often unaware of it.
2. Of the many legacies left by Alphonsus, I would like to reflect on one that, in today's context, demands of us Redemptorists a more striking and intense ecclesial and social presence: the formation of consciences. On April 26, 1950, Pope Pius XII declared Alphonsus the Patron of Moralists and Confessors. What does this mean for us, as a Congregation and lay people associated with our mission?
3. To understand this theme and the contribution of Alphonsus, it is necessary to understand the religious context in which he lived, in which the doctrine of the rigor of the law and the conception of a God extremely distant from the human being, a judge who judges and condemns sinners predominated. There arose a morality of fear of being lost and condemned in the flames of hell. Human beings were measured by their actions, and the law was applied to them. This context did not consider the understanding of a loving and merciful God capable of leaving the ninety-nine sheep and searching for the one that was lost (cf. Lk 15:4-7).
4. Faced with this reality, *Alphonsus proposes a different approach. Instead of applying the rigor of the law, he seeks balance and mercy. In his opinion, the human being is fragile, and, even if they sin, they are forgiven by the love of God, which is greater than any human sin* (cf. Rom 5:20). With his death,



Jesus the Redeemer settled all the debts that we human beings have inherited from the sin of Adam. After the encounter with the Lord of mercies, through conversion and faith, forgiveness takes place, and the person continues his or her new path. In this vision, the human being is more than their actions and, through grace, can overcome the limits caused by sin.

5. By the grace of God, human beings are capable of conversion. This conversion takes place because God touches the most intimate dimension of the person: their conscience, the place of discernment, the dwelling place of the Spirit who enlightens and inspires them to seek the path of good. *Through conscience, each person can make their fundamental and free choice of life or death* (cf. Dt 30:19).
6. Conscience is the fundamental core of the person, as *Gaudium et Spes* 16 affirms: "In the depths of his conscience man discovers the existence of a law which he does not dictate to himself, but which he must obey, and whose voice resounds, when necessary, in the ears of his heart, warning him to love and practice good and to avoid evil: do this, avoid that. For man has a law written by God in his heart, in obedience to which human dignity consists and by which he will be personally judged. The conscience is man's most secret nucleus and tabernacle, where he sits alone with God, whose voice resounds in the innermost recesses of his conscience". It is there that the human being is what he or she is.
7. Scripture uses the term "heart" to refer to the conscience. "Hear, O Israel... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt 6:4-5). In other words, you shall love the Lord your God with all your conscience and with all your vitality. *It is in the depths of his or her conscience that the human being experiences this God mad with love, who empties himself of himself, assumes the human condition, and becomes flesh to live among us and save us* (cf. Jn 3:16; Phil 2:6-11).
8. Conscience is not understood here in a psychophysiological context. It does not exclude these aspects but is situated as a relational center, where the human being understands themselves with all their limits and encounters the redeeming love of God that frees them. It is in the conscience that the seat of human freedom is located, where the divine spark shines, and where *the human being responds to the call that the Lord makes to each one of us*.
9. *The conscience of the human being cannot be violated, and in the face of that which vilifies it, the human being can make a conscientious objection*. A Christian, faced with a law that obliges them to kill someone, could, in conscience, disobey it because taking the life of another constitutes an attack on life, a gift of God. Alfonso, when he loses a case because of the purchase of justice, renounces his profession, refuting that type of justice that does not consider or observe ethical criteria, but is sold and becomes a law that oppresses. This example of Alfonso should be remembered today for the remorse of conscience of many who deal with justice and deceive or buy it.



10. Alphonsus was a lawyer, a visitor to the hospital for the incurably ill, a priest, a worker among the poor goatherders, and the founder of the Congregation. He was a sensitive man who saw the need to train these simple people to be aware of their own value and dignity and to realize that they are the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:27) and that this is why God loves them. To this end, he uses all his cultural and theological-spiritual formation to help men and women understand the message of the Gospel. He writes, paints, and composes music to make people aware of God's deep love.
11. The spiritual and moral doctrine of St. Alphonsus makes us aware of God's immeasurable love for human beings. At the same time, it teaches us to discern the reality of evil in our society that anesthetizes our consciences and violates them little by little in a very subtle way, entering into our actions, our families, and our social institutions. *The Christian's conscience is inviolable because it is protected by the power of the Gospel, which reveals itself as a wise message for discernment and decision making.*
12. What would Alphonsus say when he sees the situation of our justice, our politics, and the social inequality in which we live? He provokes us to disagree with the reality that often begins to become normal for us. *Alphonsus' teaching leads us away from indifference to political corruption, violence, injustice, ecclesial division, and all that threatens human dignity. Alphonsus encourages us to go to the foundations of our being, looking within ourselves and forming a critical conscience, not allowing the forces of evil to vilify our conscience, because it is an inviolable tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Spirit who enlightens human action and gives it wisdom.*
13. In this year dedicated to Formation for Mission, it is important that all of us, both the members of the Congregation and lay associates of our mission, deepen our understanding of this important aspect of our lives. *Alphonsus used all his formation and never stopped forming himself for mission among the poorest and most abandoned. Today it is up to each one of us to form ourselves to be able to offer the People of God the keys to understand reality and become aware of their dignity as God wants.*
14. May St. Alphonsus and our Mother of Perpetual Help intercede for us in this arduous task of forming our own consciences, so that humbly, as Missionaries of Hope, we may follow in the footsteps of the Redeemer by being the light of the world (cf. *Communicanda* 1/2024).

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,



*Rogério Gomes, chr*  
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 Superior General

Original: *Spanish*