

First Publication of the Commission on Redemptorist Charism and Spirituality

Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology. Selected and Edited by Carl Hoegerl, C.S.S.R. Rome: Sant'Alfonso, 1981. (12 x 19), xxvi-329.

In the section on formation, the *Instructiones seu Orientationes* (October 4, 1979) of the recent General Chapter wished the General Council to establish a commission on the spirit of the CSSR, *De Spiritu CSSR*. Among its specific responsibilities, this Commission was « to see to the publication of the sources of our spirit in the vernaculars, especially the works of St. Alphonsus and our confreres, and the lives of our saints and beati » (*Acta Integra Capituli Generalis XIX CSSR*, p. 370). With the publication of this book in English, *Heart Calls to Heart: An Alphonsian Anthology*, a beginning has been made in fulfilling this request of the Chapter. (A French translation has been made by the Province of Ste-Anne-de-Beaupre, though it has not yet been published, and, it is hoped, others in Spanish and Portuguese will soon follow suit.)

While fulfilling the intent of the Chapter in establishing the Commission, by a happy circumstance, the book is able to fulfill another function: to serve as a commemoration of the jubilee year of the Congregation. The purpose of the jubilee, as expressed by Father General in the Foreword, has a close connection with the work of the Commission and the reason for the book. Thus Father Pfab: « The 250th Jubilee of the founding of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer should be for each of the confreres an occasion for returning to the sources and to the precious spiritual and pastoral legacy St. Alphonsus has left behind ». The jubilee is to be an occasion, and *Heart Calls to Heart* is to be one of the instruments, of a renewal of Redemptorist life through a deeper acquaintanceship with the spirituality of our Founder. Such a return to Alphonsus would be facilitated, it was argued, by placing in the hands of the confreres a book of selections from his spiritual writings that would not be too bulky and cumbersome, and yet would contain in a small scope the quintessence of his doctrine.

A number of things must be borne in mind if one is to understand more fully the book's contribution as a vehicle for grasping the charism Alphonsus has handed over to his confreres. First, a notable part of his charism is his spirituality, his unique synthesis of the truths of Revelation resulting from his graced understanding of the demands of the Gospel upon himself personally, and from his unique response to those demands. Hence, an integral part of the Congregation's charism today, as it always was in the past, is the Redemptorist's personal living of the

Alphonsian spiritual doctrine and the preaching and teaching of it to others. Then, one has also to keep in mind that Alphonsus's spiritual writings are truly the complement, the continuation, the perfecting of his moral theology. He knew well that no one on the way to salvation can stop at a minimum, but each must go on to develop to the full the spiritual gifts received from the Redeemer. His spiritual books are the second half of his moral teaching, whose purpose is to help all to come to an ever-increasing fulness of the Christian life and to a deeper and more personal union with the Redeemer in love.

The contents of the book are as follows. Introductory material: Foreword by Father General (ix-xi); Preface by Father Carl Hoegerl (xiii-xxvi). Then eight chapters of selections from the writings of St. Alphonsus in eight areas in which he wrote extensively and which contain, so to speak, the essence of his spiritual teaching: chapter 1: Love of Jesus Christ: the Heart of the Spiritual Doctrine of St. Alphonsus (1-41); chapter 2: The Birth of Jesus Christ: God's Love Made Visible (43-77); chapter 3: The Passion and Death of Jesus: the Excess of Love on the Cross (79-111); chapter 4: The Eucharist: Jesus Makes Us Sharers of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection in the Sacrament (112-151); chapter 5: Mary: Jesus Gives Us His Mother As Our Model and As the Mother of Grace (153-191); chapter 6: Prayer: the Great and Indispensable Means of Salvation (193-233); chapter 7: Zeal: Chosen to Share in the Work of the Lord (235-265); chapter 8: The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer: Beloved Sons of St. Alphonsus (267-329). Each of the eight chapters is prefaced with a four-page introduction which briefly explains the special Alphonsian emphases in these themes and shows also the place that each has in his spirituality. Every introduction ends with a reference to the source of the English texts.

The somewhat lengthy Preface (fourteen pages), which — to use words of Alphonsus himself — should be read, purports to develop, sketchily at best, two themes. The first is the conviction that a renewal of the Redemptorist charism must begin with a renewal of Alphonsian spirituality, which spirituality is best learned from his writings. The second theme is rather a cluster of hints on how best to read St. Alphonsus. This was thought indispensable for modern readers who, so used to reading for information and knowledge, may well have lost the ability to read for reflection and meditation — the purpose of Alphonsus.

The selections themselves were made with an eye to include the chief areas in which he wrote and which contain the seminal elements of his spirituality and charism. Admittedly, neither all the themes treated by him could be included; nor could those that were included be treated with that nuanced fullness of development that would rather find their way into a longer and more bulky presentation. Some might wonder why there is no section on the Eternal Truths, a theme dear to the heart of Alphonsus. An explanation may be found in two considerations: first, the themes of the Eternal Truths are present in everything Alphonsus wrote, accepting that phrase to mean thoughts that resolve around the reality of salvation; then, the dimension of eternity, the eschatological dimension, is contained for Alphonsus in the two realities that occur on every page he ever wrote: « sin » and « love ». Sin is the reality that projects into eternity; its consequences are not so much here and now as in what they portend for the future. Love for Alphonsus is always eschatological because it is never complete in this life, it is capable of endless growth; it looks for its fulfillment in the possession of and the being-possessed by God in eternity.

Then, one can argue about the specific selections in each chapter, pointing to others that might have done better. There is no room for argument here; however, an attempt was made to give a number of selections (while touching on these eight themes themselves) that also tended to point out some slight variety of style; as for example, in the two Discourses in the chapter on the Nativity; in the first four selections in the chapter on the Eucharist where the style is explanatory and discursive; in the Circular Letters in which the direct and poignant manner of Alphonsus is most clearly visible; in the prayers, where he is at his best.

Heart to Heart is not a new translation from the Italian of Alphonsus, and this for two basic reasons: the one of time; the other, a bit more involved. The imminence of the jubilee did not leave time to make an entirely new translation. However, the quotations from Scripture were updated by using the version of the New American Bible (except for the quotations from Ecclesiasticus — Alphonsus uses this very much in the section on Mary — which has undergone extensive revision by modern scripture scholars). The second reason for leaving the text somewhat alone, using previous translations, is that the difference of their style from modern journalistic English is not a hindrance when one recalls the purpose of these writings: not to inform the mind, and not to be read discursively; but to inflame the will, to get to the personality of the reader, and to stir up a response. Up-to-date English is not necessary for that, and meditative reading might rather be hindered than helped by a too prosy and prosaic a style. In this regard, it is better to have to pause than to be urged to move on, something that a somewhat older style can do.

A few points about the format of the book. The title is not taken from the motto of Cardinal Newman, *Cor ad cor loquitur*, as some might suppose, but from Alphonsus's Novena of the Sacred Heart, where we read in the Italian « *Il cuore dimanda il cuore* », literally, « The heart demands the heart, » or, somewhat loosely, « Heart Calls to Heart ». The cover picture is that of Casimiro Fryzel, a confrere from the Warsaw Province studying at the Schola Major in Rome, who is standing before the section of the works of St. Alphonsus in the library of Sant'Alfonso, Rome. (Picture credit to John Ruef, C.S.S.R.) A confrere from the Polish Province was selected because the English speaking Redemptorists for whom this particular printing is intended are all direct descendants of our first house north of the Alps, St. Benno in Warsaw, founded by St. Clement in 1787. The book is for private circulation and is not intended for sale.

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