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THE VOW OF CHASTITY IN THE LEGISLATION OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER

An older and more observant confrere at a ceremony of religious profession in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer will perhaps notice a small but significant change in the formula of profession since he made his own profession. In the former text of profession, the novice vowed «obedience, chastity, and poverty»¹; the novice of today vows «chastity, poverty, and obedience»². The change is no accidental one. It indicates a major shift in emphasis in theological and juridical conceptions of religious life since Alphonsus Liguori battled with the bureaucrats of curia and court to obtain approbation of the rule of life for his fledgling Institute. This paper will focus on this change — the shift from a theological/juridical tradition that sees obedience as the axis counsel constitutive of the religious state back to another, older tradition which sees in consecrated chastity the foundation of the religious life. Particular attention will be paid to the evidences of this shift in emphasis in the particular legislation of the CSSR, focusing on the treatment of chastity in the ascetical works of St. Alphonsus Liguori, the influence of his treatment on the various codices of the Rule of the Congregation culminating in the Pontifical Rule of 1749. It concludes with a consideration of the vow of chastity in the *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* which were issued, *ad experimentum*, by the General Chapter (XVII) of 1969 and were refined by the General Chapter of 1979 (XIX). This text, with some modifications, was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Sécular Institutes on February 2, 1982.

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¹ Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Rites of Clothing Postulants and Professing Novices of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 1949), p. 31.

² Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Constitutions and Statutes* (Rome: General Curia CSSR, 1982), p. 72.

In calling for a renewal of the religious life based on the following of Christ set down in the luminous pages of the Gospels and on the spirit of the founder of each Institute³, the Second Vatican Council opened a veritable Pandora's box filled with reams of paper on the nature of religious life, the place of the three traditional counsels in religious life, the basis of religious life in Sacred Scripture and in the history of the Church. It is far beyond the competence of this paper to organize this material in a comprehensive way, even as it pertains to the counsel of chastity⁴. It must suffice for our purposes to point out certain theological and canonical foundations that will shed light on the CSSR legislation on the vow of chastity.

An integral view of the place that chastity held in the theology of religious life for St. Alphonsus cannot be obtained merely by considering the texts of the Rule of the Congregation in its various stages of evolution without considering as well the place of chastity in the spiritual message of St. Alphonsus. He gives his longest systematic treatment of the religious state in his *La vera sposa di Gesù Cristo, cioè la monaca santa per mezzo delle virtù proprie d'una religiosa*. (*The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*), published in 1760, when Alphonsus was sixty-four years old and had acquired ample experience of both men and women religious⁵. It may be disputed from the start whether *The True Spouse* can be considered an accurate representation of the thought of Alphonsus for his own Institute of men. Alphonsus answers this objection himself in his preface to *The True Spouse*:

This work, as appears from the title, is intended particularly for Nuns. However, only a small portion of it is directed exclusively to them; the remainder, but especially what regards the observance of the vows of religion, regular discipline, and the perfection of the religious state, is equally suited to religious of all denominations; and what regards the Christian virtues, will be found highly useful even for seculars⁶.

Although the plight of cloistered nuns in eighteenth century Naples was the concrete situation that occasioned the writing of *The*

³ Vatican Council II, Decree: *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965), no. 2.

⁴ For a good survey of contemporary literature consult Michael Ivens, « Celibacy in Contemporary Writing », *The Way: Supplement* (May, 1966), pp. 98-116.

⁵ Maurice De Meulemeester, C.S.S.R., *Bibliographie générale des écrivains rédemptoristes*, I: *Bibliographie de s. Alphonse M. de Liguori* (Louvain: Imprimerie s. Alphonse, 1933), 107.

⁶ Alphonsus de Liguori, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ed. Eugene Grimm, C.S.S.R., (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1929), p. 12.

True Spouse, nonetheless the work contains much of the content and orientation of the theology of St. Alphonsus on the religious life in general.

For St. Alphonsus, the foundation of the spiritual life, and *a fortiori* of the religious life, is a personal relationship of love with Jesus Christ: « The whole of sanctity and the perfection of a soul consists in loving Jesus Christ our God, our greatest good, and our Savior »⁷.

In grappling with the limitations of human language to express the divine, Alphonsus makes use of the ancient tradition which sees the relationship between Christ and a human person as that of a Bridegroom to a Bride⁸. This is an image which pervades his ascetical works especially his early poems, his works on the passion, on the Eucharist (in particular the *Visits*), and his letters of spiritual direction. In *The True Spouse* Alphonsus, in a very rudimentary way but truly, accords with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the « universal call to holiness »⁹ inasmuch as all Christians are called to this spousal relationship with Christ: « St. Bernard assured us that all just souls are spouses of the Lord »¹⁰. However, religious by their special profession of chastity mirror the love of Christ for his Church in a particular way: « St. Anthony of Padua adds that virgins consecrated to God are his spouses in a special manner. Hence, St. Fulgentius calls Jesus Christ the only spouse of all consecrated virgins »¹¹. It is not the mere renunciation of marriage that gives consecrated chastity its dignity but its intimate connection with the love of Jesus Christ:

But to be the virginal spouse of Jesus Christ it is not sufficient to be a virgin; it is necessary to be a prudent virgin, and to carry a lamp always filled with oil, that is, a heart inflamed with the love of God... A virgin, then, who wishes to be a true spouse of the Redeemer ought to desire and to seek nothing but to love and please Jesus Christ¹².

⁷ Alphonsus de Liguori, *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, in *The Holy Eucharist*, ed. Eugene Grimm, C.S.S.R., (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927), p. 267.

⁸ *Theological Dictionary* (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), s.v. « bridal mysticism », by Karl Rahner, p. 62.

⁹ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution: *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), chapter five.

¹⁰ Alphonsus de Liguori, *The True Spouse*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Flowing from the matrix of chastity as spousal commitment, Alphonsus sees chastity primarily as a response to the invitation of Christ: « All the affections of my heart shall be reserved for my God, who has loved me before I could love him »¹³. Chastity also has an eschatological dimension. For Alphonsus, religious life is « the bright image of the promised land of heaven »¹⁴. Religious life shares with martyrdom the character of witness and thus spurs the Church to perfection in God's service¹⁵.

While Alphonsus's theology of chastity develops many themes that have a certain appositeness even today, it also shows deficiencies. His work manifests the richness and poetic evocativeness of the centuries-old tradition to which he was heir; it is also burdened with the inadequacies of the tradition, especially « an appallingly low estimation of sex and marriage »¹⁶.

Oh! How unhappy and miserable is the life of the generality of married people! I have known the circumstances, the feelings and the dispositions of numberless married people, from the highest to the lowest classes of society, and how few of them were contented¹⁷.

In summary we may say of Alphonsus's treatment of the counsel of chastity:

1. It draws its inspiration from the Scriptures and the Fathers, as the numerous quotations attest, but uses these sources uncritically.
2. It is seen, in a certain sense, as constitutive of the religious state and is given more extensive development than the other counsels.
3. It is basically positive, connecting chastity with an intense personal love of Jesus Christ that is the source of its meaning.
4. It is not free from the typical elements of the tradition from which it derives, for example, seeing religious as in a higher state of life, pessimism about sex and marriage, etc.

An attempt to discern the mind of St. Alphonsus on almost any subject from an examination of the early Rules of the Institute is a problematic one (even in the crucial area of « the end (*fnis*) of

¹³ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁶ Alois Kraxner, C.S.S.R., *Changes in Our Spirituality*, one of the numbers of *Contributions to a Spiritual Directory for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Rome: June, 1976), p. 51.

¹⁷ Alphonsus de Liguori, Ibid., p. 23.

the Institute »)¹⁸. In dealing with the early Rules on the subject of chastity, or any other topic, we must place the discussion in the context of the struggles of St. Alphonsus to draft a Rule for his Congregation that would satisfy the numerous parties that had a vested interest in the question. We may point to the following as crucial influences:

1. The existential situation of Alphonsus himself and his early companions; the pastoral situation with which they were confronted and their desire to establish a stable form of living for themselves in response to the call of God to evangelize the abandoned in the Kingdom of Naples¹⁹.
2. The Falcoian/Crostarosan influence which saw in the missionary enterprise of Alphonsus the design of God as expressed in the revelations to Maria Celeste. Fidelity to the details of this revelation was an important early influence²⁰. Falcoia added a further influence, weighted by his position as the spiritual director of St. Alphonsus and the « direttore » of the Institute, which tended toward a very rigid spirituality of the imitation of the virtues of Christ.
3. The religio-political situation of the Kingdom of Naples; the desire of the civil government to regulate the control of the Church by breaking the hold of religious orders on extensive property. Thus, the new Institute had to avoid every appearance of being a new religious order²¹.
4. The influence of the Holy See concerned with providing for the spiritual care of the Kingdom of Naples in line with the policy of reform issuing from the Council of Trent and with maintaining the integrity of the jurisdiction of the Holy See in the face of an anti-ecclesiastical intellectual current and of a hostile government.

Given these various and conflicting influences, Alphonsus could not be overly concerned with the theological/ascetical integrity of his Rule. Of necessity the Rule had to satisfy both the Holy See and the regalist government with their antithetical interests. Of necessity, the Rule could not be what it was classically intended to be in the profoundest sense of *Regula* — an incarnation of Gospel values for a particular community, a school of the founder's spirit, « a channel toward a deeper experience of the life of the Church »²². Consequently,

¹⁸ For an analysis of the texts of the Rule relative to the end (*finis*) of the Congregation consult Francis X. Durwell, C.S.S.R., *The Purpose of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, one of the numbers of *Contributions to a Spiritual Directory for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Rome: April, 1977).

¹⁹ Maurice De Meulemeester, C.S.S.R., *Outline History of the Redemptorists* (Louvain: Imprimerie St. Alphonse, 1956), p. 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-19.

²² Vincent Martin, O.S.B., « Notes of a Sociologist on the Role of the Rule

issues of something less than theological centrality took the forefront in this battle of conflicting interests, e.g. jurisdiction of the local ordinary, the administration of temporal goods, etc. The charism of consecrated chastity which is at the heart of religious life and which received masterful treatment from the pen of St. Alphonsus occupies less prominence with each codex of the Rule.

In the texts of Rules that resulted from the Crostarosan revelations, chastity is not seen in juridical terms as one of the evangelical counsels, public profession of which constitutes the religious state, but rather as one of nine fundamental spiritual orientations, « virtues » in the Crostarosan sense of this word, which should form anyone who wishes to follow in the way of the Most Holy Redeemer. Recent scholarship on Maria Celeste lends credence to the view that she was not the headstrong, hysterical visionary as she has sometimes been painted in Redemptorist history but a person of deep faith and genuine spiritual insight²³. Falcoia, with his bent toward spiritual regimentation, insisted on adding the three theological virtues to the nine of Celeste, resulting in the ascetical practice of the Twelve Monthly Virtues which dominated Redemptorist spirituality until the General Chapter of 1967-69. Falcoian revision of the Rule of Maria Celeste formed the basis of our own earliest legislation; thus the title, Primitive Rule, belongs not to the Alphonsian text of 1747, to which it is traditionally ascribed, but to the *Regole Grandi*, written by Falcoia sometime between 1737 and 1740²⁴.

The *Regole Grandi* treats of chastity in its Rule and Constitution VI, entitled « Della Purità di Cuore » — the « Rule » dealing with the theological exposition of the virtue in which Christ speaks in the first person, the « Constitution », written in the third person, dealing with practical implications of living out the virtue. In the « Rule » Christ speaks of himself in spousal imagery taken from the Song of Songs and the Book of Wisdom. Those who follow this Im-

in Cistercian Life », in *Rule and Life: A Symposium*, Cistercian Study Series, no. 12, ed. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., (Spencer, Mass., 1971), p. 172.

²³ For a « rehabilitation » of the role of Maria Celeste in the history of the Congregation see Sabatino Maiorano, C.S.S.R., *L'imitazione per la memoria del Salvatore: il messaggio spirituale di Suor Maria Celeste Crostarosa (1696-1755)*, Bibliotheca Historica CSSR, vol. 7 (Roma: Collegium S. Alfonsi, 1978). An English translation of this in mimeograph form has been made by Joseph Oppitz, C.S.S.R., *The Imitation through the Memoria of the Savior: The Spiritual Message of Sister Maria Celeste Crostarosa (1696-1755)*.

²⁴ Oreste Gregorio, C.S.S.R., and Andrea Sampers, C.S.S.R., « Regole e costituzioni primitive dei missionari Redentoristi: 1732-1749 », *Spicilegium Historicum CSSR*, XVI (1968), 273. (This journal will be quoted henceforth simply as SH.).

maculate Lamb as his spouses must imitate his purity. Even the norms of modesty given in the « Constitution » are couched in highly spiritualized terms, e.g. although the use of perfumes is forbidden, chance fragrant scents should remind the confreres that their heavenly spouse is « the lily of the fields and the flower of eternal glory »²⁵. Rule VI is headed with the text of Matthew 5:8: « Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God », which will come to form the pivotal text for the monthly virtue of June — purity of heart.

With the death of Falcoia (April 20, 1743), Alphonsus takes decisive leadership of the Congregation and the mark of his spirit begins to be seen clearly in the Rule. Under the hand of Alphonsus, there is a clear trend away from the mystic flights of Celeste and the pious practices of Falcoia toward a more austere, juridical style. A text (Rules and Constitutions), approved by a *Congregazione Generale* in October, 1747, was basically an Alphonsian revision of the work of Falcoia²⁶. In its Rule VI treating of Purity of Mind and Body (as well as in the Constitution which follows), it leaves off the first person form of the Crostarosan revelations and uses the third person throughout. It continues to employ the spousal imagery. The members of the Congregation are « the doves chosen by Him [Jesus] as His spouses »²⁷, and thus the members are exhorted to « guard your heart and body with the greatest care against every stain that might prevent your union with God and deprive you of your happiness »²⁸. The Constitution expands considerably on the *Regole Grandi* in practical implications of the virtue of purity, with detailed restrictions on custody of the eyes, restraint of curiosity, restrictions on the visiting of women, rules for modesty in dress and in correspondence. These are a typically Alphonsian touch — a concern for practicality and for the needs of his Institute of apostolic religious who would find themselves in situations dangerous to their virtue.

A rather drastic revision takes place in 1748 as the Rule is

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

²⁶ *SH*, XVI (1968), 349-384. This has come to be called the Text of Conza because it was approved in January, 1748, by the archbishop of Conza, Joseph de Nicolai, for the foundation at Materdomini. A Latin translation, entitled *Primaevae Regulae*, is found in *Documenta Miscellanea ad Regulam et Spiritum Congregationis Nostrae Illustrandum* (Romae: Della Pace, 1904), pp. 11-55. There is also an English translation: *The Primitive Rules and Constitutions Observed by the Missionary Priests of the Most Holy Saviour until the Approbation of Their New Rule by the Holy See, A.D. 1749* ([Ilchester: Ilchester Press], 1907).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

prepared for submission to Rome for papal approbation. This work was done by St. Alphonsus in collaboration with the canonists Julius Torni, Nicholas Borgia, Matthew Testa, and Charles Blasco²⁹. The matter which formed the Rules of the 1747 text, generally the theological/ascetical material, is almost entirely eliminated and the matter of the Constitutions of 1747 becomes Rules — generally the more juridical considerations. The matter on chastity becomes greatly reduced:

Purity of Body and Mind

In dealing with women or any dangerous objects, they shall keep their eyes cast down or fixed somewhere else. Let them never read profane books which can suggest images that are less than pure. They shall mortify all curiosity for hearing news or accounts of the world. They shall never go into the houses of penitents or other seculars, except for some urgent reason, and always with the express permission of the superior, who shall examine the reason for it. And then they shall go always accompanied by some father or brother. In their sermons let them avoid any word less than proper. And for the acquisition of this virtue, let them be most devoted to the Blessed Virgin, Mary Immaculate³⁰.

As is clearly evident, all the positive theological thrust is eliminated. Florid though it was and in confusing metaphorical language, the style of the earlier codices attempted to place the vow of chastity into something of a biblical/ascetical perspective. This is largely lost in this codex which is negative in tone and lacks any connection between the virtue of chastity and the love of Jesus Christ. An interesting addition, a typically Alphonsian note, is the reference to devotion to the Immaculate Virgin which is not found in any of the Falcoian/Crostarosan texts.

This text also underwent considerable revision in Rome to conform to current curial practice³¹. The twelve virtue/rule format disappears even as the practice of the monthly virtues is not retained

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 283-285. This text is called the Transcription of Cossali because it was transcribed and notarized by Cardinal Spinelli's secretary, Joseph Cossali; cf. Raimundo Telleria, C.S.S.R., *San Alfonso Maria de Liguorio: fundador, obispo y doctor* (Madrid: Editorial el Perpetuo Socorro, 1950), I, 447.

³⁰ For the original Italian of this text, cf. *SH*, XVI (1968), 405. For a Latin translation, cf. *Documenta Miscellanea*, p. 65. This English version is from a collection of early texts of the CSSR Rule prepared for publication by Carl Hoegerl, C.S.S.R.

³¹ For a basic account of the reformulation of the Rule in Rome, cf. Telleria, *Alfonso*, I, 453-472.

in the text until the Constitutions of the General Chapter of 1764³². Chastity is now dealt with in the section, *Degli obblighi particolari de' congregati*. For the first time, it is dealt with purely juridically, as an obligation of the members. The text reads:

Since this virtue is so pleasing to the Son of God and so necessary for the Evangelical Labourer, the Subjects of this Congregation shall guard it most carefully. Therefore, they shall be most cautious in dealing with persons of the other sex. Without an urgent reason, and the express leave of Superiors, they shall not go to the houses of penitents, or of other seculars, and they shall always have a companion assigned them by the Superior³³.

This text is remarkable for its sparseness. From the « virtue » as the profound orientation of life that purity was for Maria Celeste and for St. Alphonsus, chastity has become just one of the « obligations of the members ». Successive general chapters would add Constitutions to this jejune text until, by the 1936 edition of the Rules and Constitutions, two Constitutions had been added: the first, « Of the Punishment of Those Who Sin against This Virtue », consisted of two articles; the second, « Of Modesty », consisted of nine articles³⁴.

It is important to note at this point that St. Alphonsus did not regard the Pontifical Rule as the quintessence of the Redemptorist charism and had little confidence in the ability of legislation to guarantee observance. While he was devoutly grateful that the approbation of the Rule on February 25, 1749, gave his Institute a place in the Church and a freedom to exercise its mission, he almost never appeals to the Pontifical Rule to call the community to stricter observance but rather to, « our sacred *costumanze* », or « what has always been done from the beginning »³⁵. Thus, especially in the context of the vow of chastity, it is unfortunate that the Transalpine Congregation and its American heirs put such emphasis on the Pontifical Rule as the express will of the Founder. As we have seen, chastity, for

³² Maurice De Meulemeester, « Les 'Vertus du mois' », *SH.*, II (1954), 107-124. The contention of Father De Meulemeester that the Redemptorists in the Kingdom of Naples placed little stress on the practice of the Monthly Virtues is addressed by Oreste Gregorio, « L'esercizio della virtù mensile tra i redentoristi napoletani », in the same volume of *SH.*, pp. 367-388.

³³ Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, *Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of Priests under the Title of the Most Holy Redeemer* (London: St. Mary's, Clapham, 1939), p. 166.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, part II, chapter I, no. 2: The Vow of Chastity, pp. 166-170.

³⁵ Samuel J. Boland, C.S.S.R., « The Origins of the Redemptorists », *Apostolicum*, 67 (March, 1979), p. 61.

St. Alphonsus, is integrally linked to the love of Jesus Christ, experienced and responded to, in the great tradition of the Fathers, St. Bernard, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross. This richness was lost among the minutiae of the stilted and artificial rules of behavior that constituted observance of the virtue of chastity and of modesty for most of the sons of St. Alphonsus almost until our own day.

It is illustrative also to note two strains of spirituality that have influenced the theology of religious life and which have left their mark on Redemptorist legislation: one, viewing religious life from the point of view of its charismatic character, sees the essence of religious life in its witness to the exclusive love owed to God by the profession of perfect chastity. This school reaches its apex in the writings of the Carmelite school with its predilection for commentary on the Song of Songs and its nuptial imagery. The other strain sees religious life primarily in its ecclesiological aspect — as an arm of the institutional Church which is deployed in carrying out its mission. As religious orders began taking on a greater apostolic thrust with the mendicant movement of the thirteenth century, obedience and not chastity came to be seen as the counsel constitutive of the religious state. This school reaches its most definitive form in the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus which had a formative influence on the spiritualities of the active religious congregations of the next centuries. For the Carmelite school, to love Jesus Christ means to be his spouse, to surrender to him as a bride to her bridegroom; consequently the emphasis on chastity. For the Ignatian school, to love Jesus Christ is to be his companion in the work of redemption; thus the focus on obedience — the prime virtue for a « task-oriented » perspective³⁶. Given cultural circumstances, it is natural that the Carmelite school would be more appealing to women, the Ignatian to men. As Austin Flannery remarks in his commentary on *Venite Seorsum*, the « Instruction on the Contemplative Life and on the Enclosure of Nuns », of the Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes:

The liturgy in the West adapts and applies nuptial metaphors only to holy women, illustrating their holiness as the splendor of the spiritual betrothals plighted with our Lord their Spouse. Conversely, never for them — as for men — does it ever employ themes relating to the new man, or to other motifs indicating a relationship with

³⁶ Maurius Nepper, *Origins of the Sisters of St. Joseph* (LePuy, 1969), p. 61.

Christ as priest, pastor or prophet. Likewise, from the 4th century, the religious profession of women entailed a special ceremony distinct from that of monks: this was the taking of the virginal veil, thought to have been adopted from the marriage veiling of brides, and which signified a form of marriage³⁷.

St. Alphonsus was influenced by both strains of spirituality. When writing of religious life from a moral/canonical perspective, he sees obedience as constitutive of religious life³⁸. This influence is seen in the 1936 edition of the Redemptorist Rules and Constitutions:

Therefore all, both Superiors and Subjects, should bear carefully in mind, that, though it is true that obedience rather than chastity constitutes the essence of the religious state, still by impurity more than by disobedience is that state weakened, degraded, made contemptible, and even utterly destroyed³⁹.

As we have noted, however, his ascetical writings have a clear preference for the Carmelite school. Interestingly, this influence, although absent from the Pontifical Rule, was preserved in the Rite of Investiture of Novices which is replete with spousal imagery taken from the Song of Songs and the Book of Wisdom, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Vox Dilecti mei pulsantis* egredere et abi post vestigia gregum.
 En Dilectus meus loquitur mihi: * surge, propera, amica mea, et veni.
 Surgam et quaeram* quem diligit anima mea.
 Veniat Dilectus meus in hortum suum* fasciculus myrrhae Dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur.
 Veni, Dilecte mi, egrediamur in agrum, commoremur in villis* jam enim hiems transiit, imber abiit et recessit⁴⁰.

This is typical of the investiture ceremonies of religious women; it is almost unique in the rites of congregations of men. This traditional rite was revised in 1959 and all spousal imagery was eliminated⁴¹.

³⁷ Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), « Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns », p. 668, n. 41.

³⁸ *Theologia Moralis*, ed., Leonard Gaudé, C.S.S.R., vol. II (Roma: Typographia Vaticana, 1907). Liber IV, cap. I: *De statu religioso*, p. 443 ff.

³⁹ *Constitutiones et Regulae CSSR* (Romae: Domus Generalitia, 1936), no. 255 (p. 188). For English text. cf. n. 33.

⁴⁰ *Ritus investiendi candidatos et suscipiendi oblationem novitiorum CSSR* (Romae: Cuggiani, 1910), pp. 11-12. This conflation of texts from the Song of Songs was the second psalm for the beginning of the ceremony of investiture. A third psalm also was made up of texts from the same source.

⁴¹ *Ordo suscipiendi habitum et professionem emittendi in CSSR* (Romae: Domus Generalitia CSSR, 1959), pp. 16-29.

Despite the strong Alphonsian tradition that linked in a positive manner chastity to the love of Jesus Christ, the main tradition that received expression in the Pontifical Rule was a negative one. Sexuality was seen as a human reality more to be ignored than to be dealt with, a dangerous commodity fraught with occasions of sin. As Alois Kraxner remarks:

Too much emphasis was placed on sex, and incontinence is made the source of all evil, continence the source of all goodness. Is this emphasis on sex, that makes «Thou shalt no commit adultery» the «first and greatest commandment of the law», justified? Is not too high a value placed on sex?⁴²

The Pontifical Rule may have erred on the side of caution but it did succeed in reminding those who were faithful to it of a prime reality of human existence — man is not a pure spirit or a Cartesian «ghost in the machine». He is an integral unity of spirit and flesh — the acts of the flesh affect the spirit and are expressive of it. At the heart of all the minute rules of modesty there was, beyond a fear of sexuality, a more profound realization that the gift of the body to the Lord is at the heart of religious consecration.

It is possible here only to advert to the vast growth in understanding of the importance of sexuality in the human personality that has taken place in the last century. The contributions of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the other empirical sciences are too extensive even to sketch. It was in this atmosphere of an explosion of information and change in mores regarding sexuality that the Church, in general, and the religious orders in particular have struggled to enunciate a clear and cogent theology of sexuality and virginity for the modern world.

In the years immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council, the incongruity of many of the practices of Redemptorist life with the increasingly diverse demands of the apostolate necessitated yet another revision of the Pontifical Rule in 1963. This text was not really a new one but substantially the 1749 text «cum mutationibus»; it was the work of the XVI General Chapter and was approved by the Holy See. The text on chastity, Constitution 33, adds nothing to a theological understanding of chastity. This text makes a few stylistic changes in the text of the 1749 Rule and eases the norms

⁴² Kraxner, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

of this Rule, permitting the confreres to enter the house of seculars « *rationabili motivo* » instead of the « *urgenti motivo* » of the Pontifical Rule, and grants the superior the right to appoint a companion for the visit but does not make this a necessity⁴³. The forces of change are seen here at least *in nuce*; as is usual in human society, practices change and a theology rises to explain them. It would be the task of the 1967-69 General Chapter, the renewal chapter mandated by the Holy See, to draft a rule that could provide a basis for contemporary CSSR life.

The circumstances surrounding the revision of the Rule are complex and confusing and have yet to be recorded in any detail — the over 500 pages of the *Acta* of the XVII General Chapter is remarkably uninformative. Thus we will confine our consideration to the text evolved in the XVII General Chapter (1967-1969), revised by the XIX General Chapter (1979), and finally approved with some changes by the Holy See in 1982. We will treat of some of its implications for a theological and juridical understanding of the vow of chastity.

Of crucial influence on the renewal of religious life in the past twenty years has, of course, been the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. It would be well here to note the teaching of the Council on the counsel of chastity, as its teaching provides the theological basis and, in some places, the very text of the CSSR Constitutions and Statutes.

In both *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Council Fathers evidence a great emphasis on the close bond between the religious life and the mystery of Christ. This is a trend away from the narrow juridicism that characterized the ecclesiastical understanding of a former age which resulted in a separation « of theology from discipline, of spirituality from law, of the spirit of the Gospel from standards expressed in rules »⁴⁴. Thus the Council, while affirming the right of ecclesiastical authority to legislate for religious life⁴⁵, prefers to leave canonical considerations in the background so as to place certain essential elements before the eyes of the Church with renewed value.

⁴³ *Constitutiones CSSR* (Romae: Domus Generalitia CSSR, 1964), p. 8.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Wulf, « Commentary on the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life », *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, II (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), p. 334.

⁴⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 45.

While not settling the question of whether chastity or obedience is the pivotal counsel in religious life, the Council gives a clear primacy to the counsel of virginity or chastity:

The holiness of the Church is also fostered in a special way by observance of the manifold counsels proposed in the gospel by our Lord to His disciples. Outstanding among them is that precious gift of divine grace which the Father gives to some men (cf. Matt. 19:11; 1 Cor. 7:7) so that by virginity, or celibacy, they can more easily devote their entire selves to God alone with undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34). This total continence embraced on behalf of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in particular honor by the Church as being a sign of charity and stimulus towards it, as well as a unique fountain of spiritual fertility in the world⁴⁶.

Likewise, *Perfectae Caritatis* speaks of chastity for the sake of the kingdom as « an exceptional gift of grace »⁴⁷. The Council avoids seeing chastity in a negative sense as merely establishing one in the state of not being married. The Council sees chastity as decisive for the religious as « he consecrates himself wholly to God, his supreme love »⁴⁸. In speaking of the union with Christ for which the religious should strive, the Latin text of *Perfectae Caritatis* does not merely say « Christo uniuntur » but « Christo junguntur » — making use of a verb that is characteristic of the union between spouses⁴⁹: « That spiritual intimacy, held out and considered requisite in religious life, between Christ and his followers, is and ought to be such that in its own way it has the profundity of conjugal union »⁵⁰. In the same spirit the Council teaches that « all Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God, which will be fully manifested in the future age, and in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse »⁵¹.

Before considering the text of the Constitutions and Statutes on chastity, we must place the question into the context of the general guiding « theology » of the revised Rule. While the Vatican Council II sees consecration to Christ as the heart of religious life, the

⁴⁶ Ibid., no. 42.

⁴⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 12.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 24.

⁴⁹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, nos. 1 and 3.

⁵⁰ Gustave Martelet, S.J., « A Theological Reflection on *Perfectae Caritatis* », *Review for Religious*, 25 (1966), 987.

⁵¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 12.

Constitutions and Statutes have as their « theme »: « Mission, the Unifying Principle of Their Whole Life » (title of art. 3 of chap. III); « The Mission of Christ the Redeemer, the Reason of Their Dedication » (title of art. 1 of chap. III). There is a clear change in theological point of departure here, a shift from an emphasis on consecration *to* Christ to collaboration *with* Christ. In terms of our discussion above, this is a change from a Carmelite model to an Ignatian one. Obviously, the two approaches are not separable but they are distinguishable. This change of paradigm has occasioned not a little controversy; for example, the debate of Father Santino Raponi and Father Alois Kraxner⁵². Thus, to anticipate our conclusion, the Constitutions and Statutes restore a certain primacy to the counsel of chastity but are not very successful in showing how it relates to its central motif, « the mission of Christ ».

The revised Rule deals with chastity in art. 6 of chap. III, consisting of four Constitutions (57, 58, 59, 60) and one General Statute (042, art. 1 of chap. III)⁵³. Of the evangelical counsels, chastity receives the briefest treatment. Since this vow comes first in the text, it has been given a certain primacy of place, in accordance with the practice of Vatican II. Though brief, the treatment of chastity restores a positive theological perspective that was lost from CSSR legislation from the time of the Pontifical Rule. It is seen in terms of the love of Jesus Christ, as in the Alphonsian tradition, but this is given an ecclesiastical perspective that broadens the individualistic Alphonsian perspective: « The members of the Congregation, giving themselves to this same mystery of love [between Christ and his Church], choose celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven » (Const. 58). This text tries to avoid the pessimistic view of marriage of the Alphonsian tradition by affirming that chastity and marriage both are signs of the love of Christ for the Church, though in different ways (Const. 57). The text gives chastity an apostolic dimension that was lacking in previous legislation. The profession of chastity finds its motivation in a dedication « to God and the Mission of Christ (cf.

⁵² Santino Raponi, C.S.S.R., *A Commentary on the Study of Father Alois Kraxner, « Changes in Our Spirituality »*, one of the numbers of *Contributions to a Spiritual Directory for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (Rome: June, 1976).

⁵³ *Constitutions and Statutes CSSR* (Rome: General Curia CSSR, 1982). This is an English translation, made by the Dublin Province, of the *Constitutiones et Statuta CSSR* (Romae: Curia Generalis CSSR, 1982). While only the « Latin text is to be considered the authentic text », as Father Joseph Pfab, the superior general CSSR, notes on p. 17, still it is a version that he declares and testifies « conforms to the original text ».

John 17:19), so that they may concern themselves wholeheartedly with the things of the Lord [and] love and serve their neighbor » (Const. 58). There is a strong emphasis on chastity as a genuine « gift of grace » from the Father and not merely as one of the « obligations of the members » (Const. 59). In general, the text is a melange of themes drawn from the Scriptures (Luke 20:35-36; John 17:19; Matt. 19:12; I Cor. 7:32-34; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32), and from the theology of the Council on chastity, with citations taken from *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16 and *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 12.

The text of the revised Rule, as presented to the Holy See for approval, contained three Constitutions, 57, 58, and 59; and three Statutes, 043, 044, and 045 (these were numbered 042, 043, and 044 in the 1969 text)⁵⁴. The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, whose competence it is to review and approve the revised rules of religious institutes, in its modifications suggested that the material in Statutes 044 and 045 be put into the Constitutions. This was done by the General Curia by combining the matter in these two Statutes into one new Constitution 60, leaving only one Statute in the text (042). Let us now consider briefly some of the material in these numbers.

In general, the content is merely a reworking of *Perfectae Caritatis*. The first paragraph of Constitution 60 (formerly Stat. 044 in the submitted text) tellingly repeats the recommendation of the Council document (no. 12) that « natural helps which favor bodily and mental health » should be employed but, interestingly, omits the admonition of the Council that they « practice mortification and custody of the senses ». Perhaps this represents a certain reaction on the part of the Chapters Fathers to the rigid and artificial practices of mortification and the rules of modesty required by the Pontifical Rule. The second paragraph of Constitution 60 (formerly Stat. 045 in the submitted text) affirms that positive human relationships in community foster rather than endanger chastity, an admonition taken from the Council document (no. 12). Statute 042, the only remaining Statute under the section on chastity, adds a reference to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin for fidelity to chastity, an important Alphonsonian theme. Further practical norms regarding chastity are left to the individual (vice)provinces, local communities, and individuals, since

⁵⁴ *Acta Integra Capituli Generalis XIX CSSR Romae Celebrati 1979* (offset printing), Constitutions, p. 248; Statutes, p. 293.

the Rule is not intended to be a textbook of ascetics or a manual of pedagogy⁵⁵.

In reviewing the development of the revised Rule, one discerns a process toward a more practical and more concrete approach. It seems that the ten years that intervened between the first formulation of the text in 1969 and the preparation of the text for approval by the Holy See in 1979 pointed to a certain lack of specifics in the section on chastity. Thus, the 1979 Chapter added to the text of Constitution 59 (58 in the 1969 text) that the members « should constantly use suitable means of fostering it, « in addition to the traditional use of prayer for fidelity to chastity which had already been mentioned. Constitution 60 (Stat. 044 in the presented text) added: « They must not neglect to follow those ascetical norms which have been tested by the experience of the Church ». A certain realism is added to the text: chastity is not only a matter of theological conceptualization but also a style of life and relationship; it is, indeed, a heavenly gift but one which must be appropriated by human cooperation⁵⁶.

The text of the 1969 Chapter, with the changes by the 1979 Chapter, has in large measure restored essential perspectives on the vow of chastity that were at the root of the Redemptorist vocation but which were lost in the overly juridical style of our previous legislation. In this sense, the text is faithful to the Alphonsian heritage, although the text lacks a certain Alphonsian flavor in style. If the text on chastity may be said to be deficient it is in a lack of integration of the counsel of chastity with the concept of the « mission of Christ » which is the leitmotif of the new text⁵⁷. The concept of the « mission of Christ » is a controversial one and is too complex to be treated at length here⁵⁸. For our purposes it is sufficient to point

⁵⁵ Kraxner, *op. cit.*, p. 55. For some general norms for the renewal of the legislation of religious institutes set down by Pope Paul VI, cf. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (August 6, 1966), nos. 12-14.

⁵⁶ Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (June 24, 1967), especially nos. 65-72.

⁵⁷ For a confirmation of how much the revised Rule is permeated with the idea of « mission », cf. « Index Alfabeticus-analyticus » (142 pages — longer than the text of the Rule itself — 118 pages) of the *Constitutiones et Statuta* (1982) under « missio-missionalis-missionaribus », pp. 193-195. This index, prepared by Hernán Arbolada Valencia, C.S.S.R., is an invaluable aid to a study of the Constitutions and Statutes; unfortunately, however, it did not appear with the approved English translation of the Rule.

⁵⁸ Santino Raponi, C.S.S.R., *Some Thoughts on the Constitutions and Statutes* (private Redemptorist publication), pp. 33 ff.

out that when religious life is seen as a particular consecration of a person to Christ, it is easy to see how the vow of chastity is necessitated by this consecration and is also expressive of it; when religious life is seen as a collaboration with Christ in his mission, it is more difficult to see why the « collaborator » must be chaste, other than that chastity gives a certain freedom to exercise the mission — a perspective that substitutes a pragmatic motive for a theological one⁵⁹.

Religion, as Cardinal Newman often remarked, must be real and not of paper — the same is true of religious life, and even the finest rule is only paper. A necessary perspective to maintain is that of St. Alphonsus — that Redemptorist life is governed more by « what has been done among us from the beginning » than by legislation, by a living tradition which is (as the word itself implies, finding its root in *tradere*) passed on from « hand to hand ». In any of the stages of its evolution, Redemptorist legislation on chastity could only hint at the nature and exigencies of the mysterious call to be unmarried for the sake of the Kingdom of God. In the last analysis, it is the living community which gives example, challenge, and support to each of the members as he grows in his experience of the love of Christ for his Church by the profession of evangelical chastity.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the distinction between a functional and a spousal understanding of chastity, cf. David Knight, S.J., « Spousal Commitment in the Religious Life », *Review for Religious*, 32 (1973), 85-96.