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DISPUTES ABOUT POVERTY AMONG THE REDEMPTORISTS

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, founded in 1732, took some eleven years about the fundamental task of formulating its identity. This was a matter of extreme delicacy in the climate of regalist Naples. Eventually, the first general congregation, held in 1743, carefully described the institute, avoiding terms that might be objectionable to the suspicious royal court¹. Presenting themselves as a body of priests coming together for the sake of pastoral work among those generally neglected, they expressed their commitment to their life in terms of the three religious vows. Particular attention was paid to the vow of poverty, which was described as the means of ensuring that perfect community of living that would facilitate the common pastoral activity. Understood in this way, poverty was seen as so important that it was fortified, not only by the vow, but by sanctions, even to the extent of automatic expulsion for serious offences.

It is the purpose of the present article to extend as far as modern times the account of how Redemptorists understood their observance of poverty². Until the end of the eighteenth century that earliest formulation seems to have been generally and harmoniously accepted. There was some change in terminology when the institute received papal approbation with a rule also approved by the Holy See; and there was a division occasioned by the *regolamento* imposed by the court of Naples; but in the general chapter which in 1793 healed the schism there was no problem about poverty.

Disagreement about how the vow of poverty should be interpreted appeared about the turn of the century. Redemptorists established in Poland developed quickly into a sturdy growth, but the troubled times made it difficult for them to keep abreast of developments among their fellow religious in the south of Italy. It came, consequently, as something

¹ The evolution of Redemptorist poverty up to 1743 was the subject of an earlier article in *Spicilegium*. Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 31 (1983) 85-102.

² The bibliography of works both published and in manuscript quoted in the previous article is applicable also to the present theme.

of a shock when they discovered the existence of different observances in some matters, including poverty. Attempts to explain the changes and calm the troubled spirits met with little success so that another division occurred about the middle of the century, this time between the Neapolitans and their confrères to the north of the Alps. The situation had not been made any the easier by the fact that even the latter had not shown themselves of one mind on the issues.

The transalpines, increasing in numbers, in time reached the point where their views prevailed. There remained then only the task of tidying up the loose ends. The long and, it must be confessed, tedious debates necessitated repeated appeals to the Holy See. These were described by a contemporary: « In all these decrees the Holy See never gave another answer than *standum regulae*; and when the Fathers represented that the rule was obscure, the answer was *standum in obscuris* »³. Long after that tongue in cheek description was written a final and precise definition of Redemptorist poverty was given with the authority of Pius X.

Recalling all the agitation over poverty, one is inclined to see it as a storm in a teacup. But during much of last century it was a major preoccupation of Redemptorist superiors. And some of the outstanding personages of the Congregation were involved in the debates: their participation helps one to know them better.

THE PONTIFICAL RULE

Papal Approbation

The concept of Redemptorist poverty formulated at the beginning in 1743 remained unchanged during the years that immediately followed. For the foundation in Materdomini in 1746 a text of the rule was prepared for the Archbishop of Conza, in whose see the new community was to be established⁴. This « text of Conza », as it is called by its editors, is a slight recasting of the more florid and verbose text inherited from Mgr. Falcoia, the first Director of the institute. It was followed soon by a new and much more concise text prepared in the hope of gaining royal approbation. This *Ristretto della regola* is to be attributed to St. Alphonsus, but in its considerably improved expression it does not alter the earlier formulation of the vow of poverty⁵.

³ Edward Douglas to R.A. Coffin, 11th August 1860 in Archives of the London Province, Bb 45. Father Douglas was one of the general consultors and Father Coffin superior of the vice-province of England.

⁴ Cf. O. Gregorio and A. Sampers (eds.), *Documenti intorno alla regola della Congregazione del SS. Redentore, 1725-1749* (*Bibliotheca Historica Congregationis SSmi. Redemptoris IV*), Romae, 1969, 282. The text is to be found on pp. 349-384.

⁵ *ibid.*, 283. The text is on pp. 385-399.

The same is to be said of the text prepared in 1748 for submission to the Holy See. This « transcription of Cossali », as its editors name it from the secretary of the Archbishop of Naples whose signature appears on the manuscript, may be regarded as the best of the earliest formulae⁶. It was the work of St. Alphonsus with the assistance of a few Neapolitan canonists and is couched in more juridic terminology than any of its predecessors. The obligation of poverty is expressed as previously with only one slight alteration. While repeating the earlier severe sanction of *ipso facto* expulsion for those who independently use their property, there is now a final summary noting « that this rule of poverty, unlike all the others, will oblige under pain of grave fault »⁷. Expressing themselves in these terms, St. Alphonsus and his companions commended their cause to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

The favourable answer was dated 25th February 1749, and with it came a new text of the rule⁸. The Pontifical Rule presented at first sight the appearance of a thorough reworking of the « transcription of Cossali », but a more attentive reading shows that the curial canonists had been careful to preserve the content and thought in the very considerably changed arrangement and expression. This is particularly so in the section on poverty⁹. Cardinal Spinelli, Archbishop of Naples, in offering to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars his favourable vote for the new institute suggested that the sanction of automatic expulsion for offences against poverty was in his view too severe¹⁰. The Pontifical Rule does not incorporate his proposal, and in fact the entire section on poverty is very much as it had been in the « transcription of Cossali », even though the wording was somewhat different.

The Declaration in limine acceptationis

The members of the Congregation assembled in Ciorani in October of 1749 to consider and formally accept the rule given them

⁶ *ibid.*, 283-285. The text is on pp. 400-412. Cf. also *Documenta miscellanea ad regulam et spiritum Congregationis illustrandum*, Rome, 1904, 58-74.

⁷ *ibid.*, 404.

⁸ *ibid.*, 285-286. Two texts of the Pontifical Rule are to be found on pp. 413-435.

⁹ *ibid.*, 416-419.

¹⁰ *Documenta miscellanea*, 77.

by the Holy See. On one phrase the capitulars added a brief explanation, which was to become the focus of close examination in the times of the subsequent disputes. This declaration *in limine acceptationis*, as it came to be called, referred to the paragraph dealing with the radical ownership of property retained by the members¹¹. The Acts of the chapter read in translation:

« An explanation was given of P. II ch. I par. I no. IV of the Rule, where it is said: 'Whatever is withdrawn (*si ritrae*) from what belongs by right to the subjects of the Congregation will be administered and used by the superior', and it was stated that what was meant was whatever was transferred by the subjects to the ownership of the Congregation ».

Writing more than a century later during the turmoil of ill-informed debate, Father Rudolf von Smetana gave an extraordinary account of this simple incident¹². When the rule was read in chapter, he relates, it was received with general rejoicing and consolation. One capitular, however, claimed that the rule was ambiguous in its treatment of poverty; and this occasioned the declaration, which, Smetana relates, was accepted by St. Alphonsus and the rest of the members with most edifying modesty and humility.

It was the suggestion of ambiguity, in Smetana's mind, that gave rise to the interpretation that the religious did not retain the rights to the revenues from their property. This was one of the matters that agitated the disputants after the turn of the century. Smetana, therefore, muses a little on who could have introduced this suggestion of ambiguity in the rule, so liable « to occasion sinister interpretations ». He is quite sure it could not have been St. Alphonsus, because he would certainly have clarified it « before he presented his Rule to the Holy See ». Obviously, with such little knowledge of the evolution of Redemptorist legislation he was conjecturing quite wildly; and it was in that way that he was able to conclude that the evil genius most probably responsible for the troublesome declaration could have been none other than the man « whom Tannoia calls Father Abbot »¹³. In view of the later career of the same

¹¹ The passage in question with the chapter's declaration, is to be found in *Acta integra Capitulum Generalium Congregationis SS. Redemptoris ab anno 1749 usque ad annum 1894 celebratorum*, Rome 1899, 10.

¹² [Rudolf von Smetana], *Dissertatio historica de voto paupertatis in Congregatione SS. Redemptoris*, Rome, 1856, 11-15.

¹³ Giuseppe Muscari, a Basilian monk, secretary to the Abbot General of his order, had assisted Father Andrea Villani in the negotiations with the Holy See over

Father Abbot one can easily understand why Father Smetana with so little foundation in fact was able to identify him as the villain who opened the way to the later « sinister interpretations ».

All of this speculation of Father Smetana, which after all was no more than the sort of talk that was current outside Italy in his day, had no justification in that declaration *in limine acceptationis*. If proof were needed it is to be found in the reports of the earliest historians of the Congregation. They naturally related the papal approbation and the reception of the Pontifical Rule in the subsequent chapter with pardonable enthusiasm. They certainly discovered no important significance, let alone « sinister interpretation », in the declaration. Father Tannoia, the first biographer of St. Alphonsus, concludes his description of the chapter of 1749 with a brief sentence. « Some other matters, which I do not describe were decided in this chapter, especially for the strengthening of holy poverty and of the perfectly common life »¹⁴. Father Giuseppe Landi completed his *Istoria della Congregazione del SS. Redentore* in 1782, while St. Alphonsus was still alive. Concerning the chapter in Ciorani he writes: « In the chapter many clarifications were given of certain points of the rule not well explained and clearly expressed »¹⁵. The declaration that was to exercise the minds of northern Redemptorists was for Landi no more than one point among many that needed to be clarified. It is undeniable, in fact, that for the Redemptorists of 1749 the Pontifical Rule in the matter of poverty did no more than say in other words what they had known since 1743.

The Constitutions

Further chapters in 1755 and 1764 were concerned with constitutions or statutes to apply the Pontifical Rule to the details

the approbation of the Redemptorists. He was admitted into the new Congregation and took part in the chapter in Ciorani; *l'anima del capitolo*, Tannoia calls him. Two years later he had to be dismissed from the Congregation for his having occasioned discontent among the clerical students. Cf. Maurice de Meulemeester, *Origines de la Congrégation du Très Saint-Rédempteur*, II, Louvain, 1957, 199; Antonio M. Tannoia, *Della vita ed istituto del Venerabile Servo di Dio, Alfonso M. Liguori, vescovo di S. Agata de' Goti e fondatore della Congregazione dei preti missionarii del SS. Redentore*, Book II, Naples, 1798, 218, 225-229; Francesco Minervino, *Catalogo dei redentoristi d'Italia 1732-1841 e dei redentoristi delle provincie meridionali d'Italia 1841-1869 (Bibliotheca Historica Congregationis SSmi. Redemptoris, VIII)*, Rome, 1978, 126.

¹⁴ Antonio M. Tannoia, *op. cit.*, 219.

¹⁵ Cf. Maurice de Meulemeester, *op. cit.*, 320. Concerning Father Landi and his work cf. Francesco Minervino, *op. cit.*, 97; *Spic. hist.*, 2 (1954) 400-420; 8 (1960) 181-300.

of observance. The task was completed in 1764. In treating poverty the capitulars repeated the explanation made in 1749 *in limine acceptationis*, with a little further clarification, making it plain that what was excluded was any practice of continuing to administer property freely surrendered to the Congregation¹⁶. They also required all superiors to bind themselves by oath not to condone any practice harmful to the perfectly common life that had been prized so highly from the beginning¹⁷. This had been suggested by Cardinal Spinelli of Naples in his comments on the draft rule submitted to the Holy See in 1748¹⁸.

All of this legislation Father Smetana subjected to minute scrutiny¹⁹. Again he seems to suggest that it was all initiated by St. Alphonsus himself²⁰. He expressed fears that a couple of points could be misinterpreted; but in that he was speaking with hindsight, as he had found himself obliged to deal with many a misinterpretation. His strictures, however, he reserved for certain propositions of Father Villani attached to the Acts of the chapter²¹. Of these four propositions the one that troubled him most was the first, which seemed to require that each member renounce all income from his property prior to profession. Even though this was to be a matter debated at length outside Italy, the provisions of Villani do not seem to have had any effect on observance. The propositions are, in fact, something of a puzzle.

Father Villani, Vicar General of St. Alphonsus who was by then Bishop of Sant'Agata dei Goti, stated in the introduction to the propositions that he was fulfilling a commission given by the chapter of 1764. There is no mention of such a commission in the Acts of the chapter, nor for that matter in any contemporary source. The propositions were never accepted as imposing any sort of obligation, and they reappeared in the general chapter of 1802 as a quite unexpected discovery²². Whatever about the commission given to the Vicar Gen-

¹⁶ Cf. *Codex Regularum et Constitutionum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris necnon statutorum a capitulis generalibus annis 1764, 1855, 1894 editorum*, Rome, 1896, 124-125.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 110-112.

¹⁸ Cf. *Documenta miscellanea*, 77.

¹⁹ Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 15-19.

²⁰ See, however, the thorough studies of Fathers O. Gregorio and R. Tellera in *Spic. hist.*, 1 (1953) 121-168.

²¹ Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 19-21. The propositions can be consulted in *Acta integra*, 46-47.

²² *ibid.*, 116-121. The «discovery» of the propositions during the chapter of 1802 is treated by M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta quae spectant ad historiam Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris a primo schismate a. 1780 usque ad perfectam unionem*

eral and the propositions that resulted, the chapter of 1764 certainly did not introduce any change in Redemptorist observance of poverty. In no way did it modify the Pontifical Rule; and that itself as we have noted confirmed what had been practised since the vow of poverty was first taken in 1743.

DEVELOPMENTS AMONG THE NEAPOLITANS

In 1780 the Redemptorists suffered a grave misfortune of a kind that had always been a possibility in regalist Naples. An attempt to gain the royal *exequatur* for the papal approbation led to their being presented by the court with a *regolamento*, which was simply incompatible with the Pontifical Rule²³. The difficulties that inevitably followed with the Holy See brought about a division of the institute, with the houses that had been established in the Papal States placed under an independent major superior. Father Francesco de Paola, first president and then Superior General of the Roman houses, was a strong character, whom Tannoia even represents as scheming and ambitious; and he gave rise to a further matter of concern in later discussions about poverty.

The Chapter of Scifelli, 1785

Father de Paola brought his subjects together in a general chapter which was held in Scifelli in the diocese of Veroli during October and November of 1785. This body confirmed Father de Paola in his office and made a review of the existing constitutions²⁴. For a very long time it remained almost impossible for Redemptorists to be dispassionate when speaking about this chapter of Scifelli. Naturally, the division was a most unhappy memory which made it hard to recall events as objectively as one would wish. For

sub Rectore Majore residente Romae, Nicholao Mauron anno 1869, s.l., s.d. Ms. in the general archives of the Redemptorists, Rome, pp. 230-232. From a letter of Father Michael Heilig quoted p. 215 it seems that the work was completed by Father Hugues in the late 1870's.

²³ The *regolamento* and the troubles it occasioned are treated by Antonio M. Tannoia, *op. cit.*, Book IV, Naples, 1802, 93-150.

²⁴ The Acts of the chapter have been published in *Acta integra*, 53-71. The constitutions formulated in the chapter are to be found in *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 250-312.

those outside Italy it was especially hard to be without prejudice, since their knowledge of the *regolamento* and its consequences derived solely from Tannoia; and he, involved in the troubles himself, was unable to avoid evident bias. The sort of thinking that prevailed for too long is to be found in the letter of Father Edward Douglas already quoted²⁵. When he speaks of the decree of 1860 as ending eighty years of strife, he obviously sees all the trouble as beginning with the disturbances occasioned by the *regolamento*. Concerning the chapter of Scifelli he writes to Father Coffin:

« Your reverence knows that the idea of making the superiors administrators of the property of their subjects was one of the ruinous projects of Father Leggio, the famous procurator of 1780²⁶. In the chapter of Scifelli the rule translated into Latin took this form — the *proprietà dei suoi beni* was converted into *ius proprietatis*²⁷ — but the innovations of this chapter were formally rejected by the Holy See in 1787 ».

In his history of Redemptorist poverty Father Smetana also takes an unfavourable view. He too gives some attention to the attitudes, real or suspected, of Leggio before the chapter. And he also finds that in Scifelli there was introduced some modification of the ownership the professed members retained²⁸. It is necessary, therefore, to take a brief look at the evidence of the chapter itself.

There is no need to delay on the complaint of Father Douglas about what he suggests is the erroneous translation of *proprietà dei suoi beni* as *ius proprietatis*²⁹. It is obviously straining at gnats to see that as wrong and revealing Father Leggio's intriguing hand. But the complaint does emphasise the fact that what troubled the northern Redemptorists was the matter of ownership. The Scifelli constitutions are much more concise than those of 1764³⁰; but they do not treat the matter of ownership, the provisions of the rule apparently being considered adequate. They do, however, contain a severe prohibition

²⁵ See note 3 above.

²⁶ Father Isidoro Leggio, procurator general under Father de Paola, appears in Tannoia's account as responsible for much of the trouble that occurred after 1780.

²⁷ Father Douglas is referring to the Latin version of the Constitutions and Rules made, not during the chapter, but at some later date and used by St. Clement and his companions in Warsaw. Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 11 (1963) 480-482.

²⁸ Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 27-41.

²⁹ The passage of the Pontifical Rule referred to is in Part II, ch. I, section 1, no. VIII. See *Documenti intorno alla regola*, 418-419 and *Acta integra*, 347.

³⁰ Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 264-272.

of any independent use of money³¹, something which would surely have been approved by the men who had taken their vows in 1743.

The Acts of the chapter reveal serious attention to discussion of ownership and use of property by the members³². The capitulars commented at some length on the paragraph of the rule to which had been added in 1749 the declaration *in limine acceptationis*. In this context they formulated five points: the meaning of the ownership in question, disposition of property in favour of relatives, disposal in favour of the Congregation, the usufruct and finally the care of funds. More than anything else, the attention devoted by the chapter of Scifelli witnesses to the importance attached to poverty among the earliest Redemptorists. There is no trace of any novelty that could in any way justify the suspicions that were later to be voiced. The point dealing with the usufruct, for example, merely spells out what had been stated more tersely in the declaration of 1749. If the chapter was to be faulted at all, it certainly could not have been for its treatment of poverty, but rather for legislating to the extent it did in its new constitutions. At a time when the Congregation was divided that was surely most inopportune.

It seems at least probable that the Holy See took that view. After the chapter Father de Paola applied to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for confirmation of its proceedings. After a delay of twenty-one months the reply came bearing the date 14th September 1787. The Superior General was informed that « with regard to the modification of the rule and constitutions » His Holiness rejected the application, according to the vote of the Sacred Congregation³³.

During the time of division there occurred an event of the greatest significance in Redemptorist history. Two clerical students from Vienna, Clement Hofbauer and Thaddeus Hübl, were received into the Congregation. The two began their novitiate in the house of San Giuliano in Rome in 1784, were professed and ordained in the following year, and while the chapter was in session in Scifelli were on their way to establish the institute north of the Alps. With the foundation in Warsaw in 1787 St. Clement inaugurated that wide expansion of the Congregation that has won him the title of *insignis propagator*. Since the original contact had been made with the Re-

³¹ *ibid.*, 264-265.

³² Cf. *Acta integra*, 69-70.

³³ *ibid.*, 80-81; *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 256.

demptorists of the Papal States, it was from that source that the pioneers derived their knowledge of their religious life. In this way when they were joined by their first recruits they offered as guide the decisions and constitutions of the chapter of Scifelli together with a Latin version slightly modified of the Pontifical Rule³⁴.

The Chapter of Reunion, 1793

The breach brought about by the *regolamento* was healed when the bureaucracy of the kingdom became so entangled in its own intricacies that it found itself reluctantly agreeing that Redemptorists might lawfully live by the Pontifical Rule. This surrender, made with whatever bad grace, removed the greatest obstacle to unity in the Congregation. By that time there were three regimes, as the houses in Sicily under Father Pietro Paolo Blasucci had managed to avoid living by the *regolamento*. After a delay owing to the death of Father Andrea Villani, Rector Major of the Neapolitan houses after the death of St. Alphonsus in 1787, a general chapter with representatives of the three sections assembled in Pagani in March of 1793.

One of the first duties of the capitulars was to elect a Rector Major to have authority over all three parts of the Congregation. This was, apparently, a simple choice, as Father Blasucci gained the required two thirds majority in the third scrutiny. A much more demanding task was a thorough review of the constitutions of 1764. No doubt developments in the Papal States under Father de Paola had made the revision opportune. Unhappily, this reform of the constitutions was unknown to the growing community in Warsaw, which had little information about developments in Italy.

One day during the chapter was devoted to what was described as the « difficulties and doubts » about the passage in the rule of Benedict XIV on the use of one's property³⁵. The passage referred to and quoted in a paraphrased form was the one concerning which the declaration had been made in 1749. As the Acts put it, « the chapter, knowing that these words of the rule are somewhat obscure, so as not to leave it to each individual to judge as seems best to himself », agreed to a statement which would be submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for confirmation. The

³⁴ Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 254.

³⁵ *Acta integra*, 101-102.

proposed formula is in six points, rather clearer and more concise than the similar statement made in 1785. The submission to the Holy See added three further points concerned with the venerable observance of the *perfecta vita comune*³⁶.

The first two points provide what appears to be a new element. In an attempt to prevent accumulation of capital by the members the chapter requires that one dispose of income immediately in favour of one's relatives. The second point makes an exception. It is permitted to accumulate income from one's property, if by so doing one should be able to provide better for one's relatives. The meaning of the capitulars is made clear by examples, namely to provide patrimony for one to become a priest or religious or to provide the means for a relative to improve his social standing. In such cases, however, the funds may not be retained by the individual subject but must be kept with the funds of the house or, with the superior's knowledge, *penes tertium*, « a trusted secular person ».

It was this latter provision, so laudably humane as it appears, that was to alarm the northern confrères. Father Smetana in his *Dissertatio historica* shows himself familiar with the Acts of the chapter³⁷. In this context he raises the matter of the propositions of Father Villani on the occasion of the 1764 chapter and suggests that the deterioration in the observance of poverty revealed in 1793 was due principally to the fact that after the death of St. Alphonsus « under the weak regime of Father Villani observance and discipline began to break down ». What troubled him was that deposit of funds mentioned in the second point. That he sees as in some way scandalous as providing money for the personal use of the subject. In the context of the chapter, however, and in the terms of the actual submission to the Holy See this deposit was clearly and reasonably defined. For Father Smetana, none the less, these *Deposita*, spelt now with a capital, became indeed sinister.

The constitutions formulated by the chapter very considerably condensed those of 1764. In treating poverty, naturally, they repeated the provisions already made in the discussions and to be submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars³⁸. They were duly forwarded to the Holy See together with the other decisions of the chapter. Pius VI on 6th September 1793 ratified the election

³⁶ *ibid.*, 178-179.

³⁷ Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 41-47.

³⁸ *Acta integra*. 131-138.

of the Rector Major and his curia, but referred the other matters to the Sacred Congregation³⁹. The final decision came four years later, 1st September 1797. With regard to the observance of the vow of poverty the constitutions approved by Benedict XIV were to be maintained⁴⁰. That reply could hardly have been found satisfactory, since the chapter's submission had been occasioned by obscurity in the Pontifical Rule. On the other hand, it could not be seriously claimed that the Holy See had rejected out of hand the chapter's decisions on poverty. In any case, the following chapter, held nine years later, found no difficulty in repeating what had been decided in 1793.

The Chapter of 1802

The chapter that met in 1802 was convoked by the Rector Major, Father Blasucci, in accordance with the Pontifical Rule. The capitulars on this occasion occupied themselves solely with a review of existing legislation. And once more poverty drew a lot of attention.

Apparently there was some dissatisfaction with the rescript of 1797 requiring that the constitutions of Benedict XIV be maintained. It had been precisely because of obscurity that the previous chapter had requested approval for its explanation of an important passage. And now the new capitulars found themselves preparing a similar statement about the same paragraph on patrimony and the income deriving from it⁴¹.

The chapter of 1802 reformulated the earlier decision and submission to the Holy See. Comparing the two one is compelled to find that the one of 1793 was decidedly the better. The capitulars in 1802 were more verbose and rather less clear, which led to unhappy consequences. The trouble was over explaining the *cassa del deposito*. The matter was treated in two distinct paragraphs, of which one was omitted in the final authentic copy of the Acts⁴². It is to be regretted that the paragraph that was retained was found to be seriously ambiguous. Since this passage, no. 14 of the chapter's *Declaration on Poverty and the Perfectly Common Life*, was later to give rise to suspicions, it is well to see it in translation:

³⁹ *ibid.*, 185-186.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 186.

⁴¹ The section dealing with poverty is in *Acta integra*, 195-198.

⁴² *ibid.*, 196.

« It is not permitted that a subject have in his possession any deposit of money; but if he keeps it in the common cash box (*cassa*), which in each house is to have three keys held by the superior and the two consultors of the house, the rector may not allow the subject to use it at his own discretion. And in the same way the rector may not use the money so deposited without the subject's permission; and should he do so without permission, the chapter wishes that he be deprived *ipso facto* of passive voice »⁴³.

This treatment of the deposit of the individual member is too far removed from the context of accumulated revenue from patrimony for the advantage of relatives. It had been much clearer in the decision of 1793. In the text of 1802 the accumulation of revenue for the benefit of one's relatives was treated in no. 2 of the *Declaration*, twelve paragraphs earlier. As it stood without explanatory context, no. 14 could easily lend itself to the interpretation that with the superior's permission the subject might use his deposit for all sorts of purposes, even for his own advantage.

Father Smetana for one certainly did interpret the passage in this way⁴⁴. Where in 1793, he sadly reflected, personal Deposits had been condoned under certain limitations, in 1802 these restrictions were removed and the Deposits were now sanctioned for arbitrary use, provided only the superior should be agreeable⁴⁵. His use of the capital in writing about the iniquitous *Deposita* seemed to him amply justified.

Father Hugues, always moderate and balanced in his judgements, interpreted the passage in the same way. « It is only *arbitrary* use by the subject which is forbidden; for which reason it was argued that the superior could allow the subject *any use of the funds approved by himself*, so that a subject might with the superior's permission buy books for himself »⁴⁶. This, he explained, was an accepted practice in many institutes of simple vows, while in Orders of solemn vows it was not uncommon for religious to be provided with what he called « a monthly salary ». There is sound evidence that Father Hugues was justified in his unflattering comment on the practice of religious poverty at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Sacred Congregation for the Reform of Religious, which existed be-

⁴³ *ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁴ Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 47-51.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁶ M.A. HUGUES, *Additamenta*, 197. The emphasis is Father Hugues' own.

tween 1814 and 1818, commented on the unsatisfactory state of religious observance after the troubled state of European society about the turn of the century, remarking in particular that common life had suffered a serious decline and that the abuses of allowing personal incomes were too frequent⁴⁷.

Father Hugues had a considerable experience of the Roman curia by the time he made his comment on the chapter of 1802. But even though he was probably quite accurate in his terse description of the general decline in religious poverty, it does not follow that he was also correct in suggesting that the chapter had condoned a similar relaxation. In all fairness, rather, especially when the passage in question is compared with the similar statement of 1793, it seems more correct to say that where the chapter of 1802 was at fault was in its having expressed itself in a manner that was too ambiguous for sound legislation.

The Acts of the chapter were submitted to the Holy See. Once more there was a delay before the reply came. Dated 7th March 1804, it declared: « As regards the observance of the vow of poverty the Constitutions approved by Benedict XIV are to be observed according to the decree issued by this Sacred Congregation in a similar case on 1st September 1797 »⁴⁸. The well-intentioned attempt of the chapter of reunion to clarify an obscure passage in the Pontifical Rule had ended in 1802 by adding yet another obscurity.

It was not long before the legislation of 1802 aroused anxious questioning. In a letter dated from Warsaw 7th March 1807 Father Thaddeus Hübl, St. Clement Hofbauer's novitiate companion, wrote to Father Blasucci, the Rector Major. Having just received the constitutions of the last chapter, he said, the northern Redemptorists « read with horror of the provision to have deposits of money in the rector's keeping »⁴⁹. He declared that such an innovation was bound to prove most harmful and « like a savage blow would in time ruin the insti-

⁴⁷ Cf. Decree of 22nd. August 1814 in A. Bizzarri (ed.), *Collectanea in usum secretariae S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium*, Rome, 1885, 42-45. For a general description of the condition of religious in the nineteenth century cf. G. Martina, *La chiesa nell'età dell'assolutismo, del liberalismo, del totalitarismo*, III, Brescia, 1980, 69-71.

⁴⁸ *Acta integra*, 204. In the letter to Father Coffin already quoted Father Douglas erroneously says that the Holy See rejected the decisions of the chapter regarding poverty in 1806.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Acta integra*, 197. The much more extensive quotation in Rudolf von Smetana, *op. cit.*, 139-141 shows that Father Hübl was writing at some length about the increasing lack of understanding between the two widely separated parts of the Congregation.

tute, since it opened the door to countless abuses and disturbances of good order ». Father Hübl, speaking most probably for St. Clement as well as himself and for the other members of the Warsaw community, had put the most unfavourable interpretation on the unhappily phrased passage. What is most significant, however, about the letter is that it marks a serious worsening of relations between Redemptorists in Italy and those beyond the Alps. The fact that information about the chapter had taken almost five years to reach Warsaw of itself showed how hard it had become for the two sections to understand each other. And now there had appeared grounds for suspicion.

TRANSALPINES AND NEAPOLITANS

Father Hugues had occasion to see for himself the condition of the Congregation in Naples and Rome during a prolonged stay in 1846 and 1847. He had come at the request of the Vicar General Father Passerat, to present to the Rector Major and the newly elected Pope Pius IX copies of his own German translation of the works of St. Alphonsus⁵⁰. He readily took the opportunity to sound opinion about the northern confrères and in particular about the observance of poverty. Father Hugues was a sympathetic listener and a faithful reporter. He admired the simple piety of his hosts as well as their zeal and success in their missions. As regards poverty, the Neapolitans assured him that they saw no reason for considering the constitutions of 1802 unlawful and that they merely wished that they should not be disturbed by those who were unable to appreciate their views⁵¹.

One gathers from his narrative of his visit that he did not learn of any misgivings among the Neapolitans until he returned to Rome early in 1847. In the house of Santa Maria in Monterone he came to know and respect the Procurator General, Father Domenico Centore, « a great lover of prayer and highly esteemed by Pius IX »⁵². Father Centore is reported as having expressed his anxiety about the abuses to which the constitutions of 1802 could give rise; for which reason, he told Father Hugues, he had disposed of his revenues once

⁵⁰ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 52-53.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 54.

⁵² For biographical data concerning Father Centore cf. Francesco Minervino, *op. cit.*, 36.

and for all in favour of his relatives. There were, he thought, many among the « cisalpines » who thought as he did⁵³. By 1847 when this exchange of confidences occurred there had been incidents that had heavily underscored the differences in observances between the Neapolitan Redemptorists and those north of the Alps.

After Father Hübl informed the Rector Major in 1807 of the scandalised reaction in Warsaw to the chapter of 1802 his companions were overwhelmed by troubles of a different kind. The house in Warsaw was suppressed in the following year by the government of Napoleon, and it was not to be until 1820 that the Congregation in the north was able to enjoy a more assured existence. By then both St. Clement and Father Hübl were dead; the Warsaw community was scattered; and Father Joseph Passerat had succeeded to the office and authority of Vicar General beyond the Alps.

The Constitutions of 1764 among the Transalpines

One of the first concerns of the new Vicar General was to establish an authentic Redemptorist observance among his subjects; and for that purpose he wished to have a copy of the constitutions of 1764. As early as 1820 he had asked Father Blasucci for a copy; but as time passed without producing any effect, he took more direct action. In 1823 he sent Father Francis Springer to Pagani to procure a copy of the constitutions and to observe the manner of living and giving missions in the residence of the Rector Major⁵⁴. From the time of his return in 1824 the constitutions he brought became for the northern Redemptorists almost sacred as « the constitutions of St. Alphonsus »⁵⁵. And that veneration led to a further significant development.

In 1832 a petition was presented to the Holy See requesting a special provision that would authorise the Redemptorists « in the Province of Germany (i.e. outside Italy) » to follow the constitutions of 1764 and not those of 1802 in the observance of poverty and one or two other matters of lesser importance. The response, dated 29th

⁵³ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 56-57.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 4 (1956) 387-393.

⁵⁵ That expression is used throughout the work of Father Smetana frequently quoted in this article. Cf. also E. Hosp, *Geschichte der Redemptoristen-Regel in Oesterreich, 1819-1848*, Vienna, 1939, 22-27.

June 1832, was quite definite. « We declare that in the German Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer one is bound to observe only the Rules approved by Benedict XIV and the decrees of the general chapter of 1764, but not to observe the chapter of 1802 »⁵⁶. This rescript of the Sacred Congregation was more extensive than had been requested. In effect it established two distinct observances in the one institute. Even that, however, was not as bad as appears at first sight, since there was really only one likely point of friction, the practice of poverty. It was not long, unfortunately, before the friction occurred.

During the thirties the Congregation under Father Passerat became quite widely propagated, even as far afield as the United States. In so many different countries and at such great distances they experienced difficulties with a regime controlling everything from the Kingdom of Naples. The Redemptorists of the north wanted to see provinces erected with a more efficient division of authority. The Rector Major, Father Camillo Ripoli, was not favourably inclined, but he did not object to Father Passerat's putting his case to the Holy See. This was done when the Vicar General and Father Frederick von Held were in Rome in 1839 for the canonisation of St. Alphonse. The formal petition was prepared by Father Rudolf von Smetana, who requested that the Rector Major be consulted before coming to a decision⁵⁷.

The Finale Incident

Before he could be consulted, Father Ripoli, by what can only be called an extremely ill-advised action, precipitated the Finale incident. A house had been established in Finale in 1836, one of two in the Duchy of Modena subject to the Vicar General in Vienna. Towards the end of 1839 the Rector Major sent some Neapolitan Fathers to Finale, and a few weeks later named one of them, Father Emmanuele Baldari superior⁵⁸. Immediately the two observances of poverty were brought into a most uncomfortable confron-

⁵⁶ The petition and the rescript are in *Acta integra*, 302.

⁵⁷ Cf. Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio actorum et factorum ad Congregationem SS. Redemptoris transalpinam spectantium ab anno 1839 usque ad annum 1853*, Rome, 1854, 4-6.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 6-7. A fuller and more dispassionate account of the Finale incident is to be found in *Spic. Hist.*, 18 (1970) 401-415.

tation, since Father Baldari, the new rector, brought with him what Father Smetana describes as « *pretiosam numismatum et idolorum collectionem*, which he had purchased with his patrimony ». No doubt Father Ripoli had expected some adverse reaction to his testing the strength of feeling among the transalpines, but he must surely have been startled by the uproar he provoked. Not only Father Francis Doll, the previous superior in Finale, and his community, but the Bishop of Modena and the pious Duke Francis IV made themselves heard in protest. The clamour made the differences among the Redemptorists unpleasantly public.

In an attempt to achieve peace it was decided to discuss the issues in a meeting of delegates in Rome. The two parties came together towards the end of 1840. The transalpines were represented by Father Smetana ably supported by the more forthright Father von Held, while the case for the Neapolitans was put by Father Luigi Rispoli, Consultor General. From the beginning it was apparent that agreement was hardly possible, since both sides presented propositions already prepared and simply irreconcilable⁵⁹. Father Centore, who had been present in Monterone during the discussions, later told Father Hugues that he had reason to suspect Father Rispoli of « straying from the truth », as he put it, in the negotiations⁶⁰. On the other hand, the two transalpines were hardly conciliatory in requiring that « the Rector Major forbid all superiors under formal obedience ever to allow their subjects any use of revenues other than for their relatives or for Masses »⁶¹.

The discussions had been made the less likely to achieve concord by the fact that both parties engaged in intense lobbying with the Holy See. Father Rispoli discovered to his horror that in this manoeuvring he was badly beaten, as the two transalpines gained the support of Cardinal Patrizi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and even of Pius IX himself, who regarded the *Liguorini tedeschi* as the support of religion in Germany and Belgium. Whether or not it was due to such exalted patronage, the outcome favoured the transalpine position.

On 2nd July 1841 the Sacred Congregation issued an important decree⁶². The Redemptorists were divided into six provinces,

⁵⁹ For an account of the discussions cf. M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 36-42; *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 407-410.

⁶⁰ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 56.

⁶¹ Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 8.

⁶² The text of the decree is to be found in *Acta integra*, 301-303.

with three beyond the Alps and the houses in the Duchy of Modena immediately subject to the Vicar General; and a concise declaration was made on the observance of poverty. It is this latter, paragraph I of the decree, which is our immediate concern. It runs in translation:

« As regards the vow of poverty the Rules approved by Benedict XIV are to be retained. However, the priests and other members belonging to houses this side of the Alps and not joined to the transalpines may use the declarations of the general chapter of 1764 ».

This decision obviously had the effect of confirming the twofold observance in the Congregation. Father Ripoli, the Rector Major, was promptly informed by the Neapolitan court that it would not approve any change of regime for the houses of the kingdom, such as the erection of provinces⁶³. Looking back, one is inclined to say that, given the intransigence of the two parties among the Redemptorists and the more formidable intransigence of Neapolitan regalism, the decree of 1841 was bound to prove divisive.

THE DISPUTES AMONG THE TRANSALPINES

The Vienna Meeting

Father Joseph Passerat, the Vicar General, did what he could to give immediate effect to the decree. He named superiors of each of the three provinces of his jurisdiction and summoned them, each with a vocal of his province, to an assembly to be held on 30th August 1842 in Mautern⁶⁴. The principal task proposed to the meeting, which actually met in Vienna, was to study and accept the decree. The proceedings were quite lively. The two negotiators were taken to task by the delegates for having acted with too high a hand, slighting the Rector Major and influencing the Holy See to impose an interpretation of poverty which was merely representative of the views of a faction.

Recalling that stormy meeting, Father Smetana lists no fewer than four views of the practice of poverty, all more or less conflicting, that were given an airing⁶⁵. Considering the small size of the assembly,

⁶³ Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 18 (1970) 413.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 411. Smetana and Hugues, however, both speak of this important meeting as having taken place in Vienna, Smetana calling it the Council of Vienna. Cf. *Expositio*, 20.

⁶⁵ Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 20-21.

one can only say that it was anything but harmonious. It was not possible to reach agreement among the disputants, which did not really matter greatly, because all insisted that there were no perverse practices among the transalpines. The meeting dissolved after the delegates signed a common statement which skillfully avoided any mention of their differences and said that the decree in so far as it touched on poverty would be duly explained in the forthcoming general chapter⁶⁶. Mainly because of the disagreements that had come to the surface, it was decided that for the sake of peace the actual terms of the decree should not be communicated to the communities, even though its existence was known to them because of the nomination of the provincials⁶⁷.

The forties were not good years for the Redemptorists outside Italy, as Father Hugues recalls. Father Passerat's government was weakened both by its being too much restricted by the Josephist laws of Austria and by its own instability owing to the too frequent resignations of the consultors⁶⁸. In one section, however, there was no lack of vigour and quite considerable expansion. The Belgian province was growing from year to year in Holland and England and it even included the houses in the United States. Father Hugues is right in drawing attention to the exuberant vitality in the Belgian province at this stage, as it was to be there that most of the arguments about the observance of poverty were to originate.

The year of revolutions 1848 introduced important changes among the Redemptorists. Compelled to leave Vienna and in failing health, Father Passerat resigned his office of Vicar General. In the following year, owing to the incapacity of Father Ripoli, the Holy See named a Vicar General of the whole Congregation in the person of Father Vincenzo Trapanese. Since these circumstances seemed to favour a fresh start, the transalpine vicariate was abolished and Father Trapanese was given three consultors from beyond the Alps as well as three from among the Neapolitans. The experiment quickly proved a failure. Fathers Hugues, Michael Heilig and Victor Dechamps were soon convinced that there was no hope that a Rector Major govern a world-wide institute as long as he was under the eye of a jealous regalistic court. The Holy See agreed with them, and on 9th June 1850 restored the office of Vicar General beyond the Alps, this

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 23. The decree of 1841 called for a general chapter.

⁶⁷ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 49.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 49-51.

time immediately dependent on Rome. The new superior was Father Smetana.

The Meeting in Bischenberg

In October of 1850 the newly appointed Vicar General held a consultation with the transalpine provincials in Bischenberg⁶⁹. At the beginning Father Smetana required of those present that they « promise solemnly before God » to observe secrecy about the proceedings and after the meeting to refrain from any independent activity affecting matters that had been treated. The business of the meeting was concerned mainly with the means of working for a more satisfactory regime for the whole Congregation; but it was also decided that the Holy See be approached once more about the perennial uncertainties over poverty.

The man delegated by Father Smetana to present the meeting's petition in Rome was Father Victor Dechamps, the able Belgian provincial, who had been present at the Bischenberg consultation⁷⁰. There were two doubts proposed to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, of which the second depended on the first; and this put in plain terms the kernel of the disputes. In the rule « given by St. Alphonsus » did the expression property (*suoi beni*) include both patrimony and its revenues? The reply was *affirmative*⁷¹. This rescript was signed on 2nd June 1852, and as soon as he received it Father Smetana, knowing his confrères and their tendency to scrutinize official statements, asked if he might in promulgating the decision explain the limits within which one might dispose of property and its revenues. He was told categorically on 8th July that « the decision is to be promulgated without interpretation and without addition »⁷².

If the harassed Vicar General thought the talk about poverty and the regime would be silenced by the unequivocal terms of the rescript, he suffered an unpleasant awakening. In about March of 1853 while he was making the canonical visitation in the houses of

⁶⁹ The Acts of this meeting are quoted in Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 26-29. Bischenberg in Alsace is a venerable foundation in Redemptorist history. Founded in August 1820, it was the first permanent foundation outside Italy.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 70.

⁷¹ The rescript is to be found in *Acta integra*, 633-634.

⁷² Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 85.

the Duchy of Modena a pamphlet was circulated in the northern houses criticising him for his dealings with the Holy See about poverty and the relations of the transalpine vicariate with the Rector Major. The author was Father Dechamps, who had the *Memorandum* as he called it printed in Brussels⁷³. Father Smetana was stung by the fact that the attack should have come from the very man who had been his own appointed representative in the negotiations criticised.

Father Dechamps declared that he had been led to see clearly the issues in the disputes about poverty through the arguments of Father Pilat⁷⁴. Father Pilat, at that time superior of the house of St. Mary Magdalene in Brussels, had already proved to be one of those most active in the disputes, writing to a large number of correspondents, including Father Trapanese himself, now Rector Major, who as Father Hugues discovered showed himself unwisely sympathetic. Father Smetana reacted indignantly to Father Dechamps' acting on authority as eccentric as that of Father Pilat. He was able to enumerate no fewer than five *errores enormes* perpetrated by Father Pilat, including his extraordinary contention that the Acts of the chapter of 1764 were spurious and that the Congregation should be brought to accept those of Scifelli in 1785⁷⁵.

It is not unfair to see that sort of exchange as representing the nature of the disputes about poverty during the fifties and sixties. There was really very little solidity in them, but they were noisy as well as protracted beyond what was reasonable. And the fact that they continued to draw such disproportionate attention was certainly due to their having been espoused by so formidable a champion as Father Dechamps. Even Father Hugues, a lifelong friend and correspondent of Father Dechamps, has to admit sadly that the disagreement about poverty would not have been as troublesome as it proved had there not been an underlying animosity against Father Smetana. Father Dechamps had sharply disagreed with the Vicar General about relinquishing the second house in Brussels, that of St. Joseph's; he had vigorously and publicly criticised Father Smetana's views on poverty during the negotiations in 1852; and, finally, he tried to supplant

⁷³ *ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁴ Father John Baptist Pilat, a disciple of St. Clement Hofbauer, was regarded by many as a great leader, as Father Hugues attests in *Additamenta*, 120. He came to Rome while Father Dechamps was one of the consultors of Father Trapanese; and it was probably on this occasion that he exercised the most influence on the thinking of Father Dechamps. Cf. *ibid.*, 137-142.

⁷⁵ Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 88.

the Vicar General in seeking to establish a house in Rome ⁷⁶. This last matter was public enough to occasion serious embarrassment.

In fact, it seems best, as it is certainly least confusing, to reduce the arguments to a single issue, that which Father Hugues identifies simply as the Belgian opinion ⁷⁷. What was characteristic of this view was that in Belgium there was a tendency to find fault with the chapter of 1764. In an attempt to secure peace Father Smetana had asked Father Hugues to do his best to persuade Fathers Heilig and von Held that the constitutions of 1764 did not contradict the rule of 1749 ⁷⁸. As for Father Dechamps, he took a more extreme view, writing to Father Hugues of « the so-called constitutions of 1764 » which had been rejected by the Holy See. It is evident that the spokesmen for the flourishing Belgian province presented a formidable opposition: Fathers Heilig and von Held and the more extreme expression of Father Dechamps and Father Pilat with his *errores enormes*. If they could be refuted, Father Smetana wrote to Father Hugues, there would be no division among the transalpines ⁷⁹. The debate, however, was to rage a little longer, and the doubts they occasioned were to linger until beyond the end of the century.

THE SOLUTION

The affairs of the Redemptorists were claiming Rome's attention to a considerable extent by the fifties; and the Holy See took action in the hope of restoring peace. A *motu proprio* of Pius IX on 6th September 1853 separated the two branches of the Congregation; and in October of the same year the Vicar General was asked to establish a house in Rome to serve as a residence of a future Superior General and to convoke a general chapter. This important chapter duly opened in April 1855 in the newly acquired Sant'Alfonso on the Esquiline.

⁷⁶ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 155-158.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 62, 204-209. Father Hugues was well aware of the fact that Father Francis Bruchmann, not of the Belgian party, had put forward his own views in Vienna in 1842. In later discussions his name rarely if ever appears. The disturbances came mainly if not solely from the « Belgian opinion ».

⁷⁸ Father Michael Heilig, an outstanding theologian and missionary, had been provincial in Belgium before Father Dechamps.

⁷⁹ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 62.

The Chapter of 1855

Discussion of poverty claimed much of the capitulars' time and occasioned some animated exchanges. The debate was made all the more vigorous by reason of the procedure adopted, namely to comment on the constitutions of 1764 in the Latin edition published in Liège in 1849⁸⁰. The « Belgian opinion », as Father Hugues reports, was propounded in the extreme form favoured by Father Dechamps, namely that the constitutions represented a mitigation and had been « condemned by the Holy See »⁸¹. In the clash of two intransigent factions only one conclusion was found possible, to have recourse once more to the long-suffering Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The capitulars, realising that by the rescript of 1852 the Holy Father « had deigned to solve the doubts about the meaning of the rule with regard to poverty », still ventured to request a further assurance so that « all the members of the Congregation might have an explicit and distinct knowledge of their obligations »⁸². It had become evident in the long discussions before and during the chapter that to some, possibly most, the decree of 1841 with its formula of *standum regulæ* merely emphasised the obscurity of the Pontifical Rule. This, no doubt, was what Father Douglas meant when he said that the Holy See had responded: *standum in obscuris*⁸³.

The decision of the Holy See came bearing the date 6th June 1860⁸⁴. In the preamble it spoke of the continuing doubts among the Redemptorists, even after the careful reply of 1852 and of the harm that could ensue from the long continued state of uncertainty. The decisions were condensed into two concise paragraphs, which the Sacred Congregation surely hoped most fervently were at last plain. Ownership was said to include both the substance of the property and any revenues that come from it, the same revenues to be disposed of immediately. And it was declared that the members may not administer their own property. This is the reply which Father Douglas described to Father Coffin as a « clear and final decision ». This happy end to eighty years of doubt, he said, was « entirely owing to the untiring exertions of the Rector Major ».

⁸⁰ *Acta integra*, 310.

⁸¹ Father Hugues gives a description of the chapter in *Additamenta*, 193-195.

⁸² *Acta integra*, 518.

⁸³ Cf. note 3.

⁸⁴ *Acta integra*, 633-634.

To give all the credit to Father Nicholas Mauron was hardly fair to the chapter that had elected him Rector Major and had expended so much time and effort in preparing the terms of the submission to the Holy See; and in any case it became at once evident that the debate was continuing. Father Dechamps was proving hard to convince⁸⁵. Then at the beginning of the following century the same wish for a clarification of Redemptorist poverty was to trouble yet another general chapter.

The Final Solution

Anxiety about the understanding of poverty appeared once more on the floor of the chapter held in 1909. A very large majority decided that a further declaration was necessary « to remove certain ambiguities and erroneous interpretations »⁸⁶. So much for the « clear and final decision » of 1860. The response of the Holy See came more promptly on this occasion, bearing the date 31st August 1909⁸⁷. The decree begins with the fervent hope « in order to remove for the future all controversy about the condition of the vow of poverty ». It proceeds to give under ten points a detailed exposition of what had already been stated more than once. It then added what should certainly have been the last word:

« This declaration shall not merely have the force of perpetual statute or constitution, but also of an apostolic decree and mandate, and all power of mitigating or altering, totally or in part, the tenor of the same declaration is taken away from general chapters ».

Since that date this decree has been included in editions of Redemptorist rules and constitutions⁸⁸. After the publication of the Code of Canon Law some adjustment was made in a further decree dated 7th May 1918⁸⁹.

The decisions given under Pius X and Benedict XV ended disputes that were extraordinarily protracted and, one is strongly inclin-

⁸⁵ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 203-210.

⁸⁶ *Acta integra capituli generalis XI Congregationis SS. Redemptoris Romae celebrati anno MCMIX*, Rome, 1909. The treatment of poverty is on pp. 35-37.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 52-53.

⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. *Constitutions and Statutes, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, Rome, 1982, 66-67.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 68.

ed to say, altogether unnecessary. The disturbances were among the transalpines, and it is very probable that they would not have been raised, had the northerners not been confronted by the case of Father Baldari and his collection of coins. Father Smetana's meticulous account traces the divergent opinions from the views expressed in that meeting of the transalpines in 1842 occasioned by what had developed from the Finale incident. The Acts of that assembly show that there was no problem about getting all the members to agree to a common statement, leaving aside the matters in dispute⁹⁰.

Once started, however, the debates occasioned an altogether astonishing expenditure of time and energy. After all, it was for the most part merely a dispute about the meaning of words, mainly what was meant by ownership and administration of property. To make it even harder to comprehend, these arguments of northern Europeans were usually about the Italian expressions for the contentious ideas. Quite typical is the jubilation of Father Dechamps at having learned from Father Pilat the real meaning of the phrase *tutto ciò che si ritrae*⁹¹.

In all this interminable debate the very greatest importance was attached to the chapter of 1764 and its constitutions. In spite of the mistrust shown by the « Belgian opinion » the debate occasioned some extreme statements like that of Father Smetana. « I am not afraid of exaggerating when I call these constitutions the precious legacy of St. Alphonsus »⁹². In fact, one of the most frequent arguments in constant use by all contending parties was « the mind of St. Alphonsus », what he really meant or what he simply could not have intended. Father Smetana had no trouble in explaining « *iam a priori* » what must have been the mind of St. Alphonsus « when composing the first rules of his institute »⁹³. And his opponent, Father Dechamps, could argue just as confidently « Let it (the Congregation) return to the authority intended by St. Alphonsus and by his rule approved by Benedict XIV »⁹⁴. It was all so uninformed and gives occasion to suspect the understanding of the person and writings of St. Alphonsus so sincerely venerated among Redemptorists of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁰ Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 20-24.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 92.

⁹² *ibid.*, 74.

⁹³ Rudolf von Smetana, *Dissertatio*, 9.

⁹⁴ Rudolf von Smetana, *Expositio*, 91, quoting from Dechamps' pamphlet.

What is particularly to be regretted is that the names that recur so constantly in the disputes about poverty are those of men whose outstanding abilities could have been far better employed than in that never-ending probing into the meaning of Italian words and phrases. Father Smetana, the unhappy superior, gave far too much of his time to refuting, even in print, the views of his opponents. And the men of the Belgian province, Fathers von Held, Dechamps and Pilat were forever fanning the flames at the very time when their province was achieving such exciting success in Holland, England and the United States.

Father Hugues, who retains in his narrative of all these exchanges a calm and sound judgment that was all too rare at the time, has an interesting comment on one of the principal actors. Writing of the time when he with Fathers Dechamps and Heilig was consultant to Father Trapanese, he speaks of the surprise with which the three transalpines received the news that Father Pilat was soon to join them in Rome. He had, in fact, been summoned personally by Father Trapanese himself. For all his eccentricity, of which there was abundant evidence in the disputes about poverty, Father Pilat was a most plausible character. Immediately on his arrival he called on Cardinal Orioli, then Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The following day the cardinal came to Santa Maria in Monterone. When he learned that Father Pilat was not at home, he remarked to Father Centore: « That is the man who should be elected Vicar General »⁹⁵. Obviously, the troubles over poverty could have been worse.

⁹⁵ M.A. Hugues, *Additamenta*, 139.