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SOME THOUGHTS ON REDEMPTORISTS AND THE LAITY

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CONCLUSION

One sometimes hears it said that the Church discovered the laity only in the twentieth century. There is some truth in the statement, oversimplifying as it is. It could hardly be questioned that a self conscious and officially recognised Catholic laity emerged under Pius XI. from his first encyclical, *Ubi arcano Dei*, he so frequently returned to the theme that he came to be called the Pope of Catholic Action. Since that time, the twenties, awareness of the laity and its significance for the Church's mission has known a very gradual development. It took about half a century to achieve some measure of maturity.

Since the Second Vatican Council perhaps the protracted debate about the laity, *On the Apostolate of the Laity*, reveals an eagerness of the Fathers to make it clear that they really appreciated the laity and its role in Church life<sup>1</sup>.

Awareness of the laity by the Redemptorists, our present concern, has been similarly slow in evolving. A strong emphasis on the popular missions tended to make a clear distinction between the preacher and these who listened to him and were guided by him in the ways of Christian living. Maybe it is exaggerated to put it so bluntly, but it must be admitted that the missions lent themselves to a certain clericalism that

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walter M. ABBOTT, *The Documents of Vatican II*, London–Dublin 1966, 489.

too easily became paternalistic. In more recent years, especially since World War II, there has been an increasing trend to encourage lay people to collaborate in the missions. This has been evident particularly in certain European initiatives, such as the Regional 2 Missions and the General Missions. This sort of thing was naturally tentative in the beginning. What was needed among other things was a more general and authoritative statement of principles<sup>2</sup>.

A new direction was indicated by the general chapter of revision in 1967/1969. Treating the missionary work of the Congregation, under the subheading, *The People to be Evangelised*, it stated:

“Let the members teach the laity that their special vocation in the Church is to live in the spirit of the Gospel, and so cooperate in sanctifying the world, acting on it from within after the manner of a leaven”<sup>3</sup>.

Subsequent chapters, following at six years intervals, continued to show the same awareness. At length, in 1991, capitulars gave juridic status to these who shared the Redemptorist inspiration and work<sup>4</sup>. The category of Lay Missionary of the Most Holy Redeemer was created, and it was urged that lay people be invited to a greater share in the life, work and spirituality of the communities.

The introduction of the Lay Missionaries was obviously an important innovation. They form a sort of Third Order of the Redemptorists. The Superior General and his council were charged with formulating norms for the new associates. This duty was completed and the results promulgated in September 1995<sup>5</sup>. In some 25 paragraphs the identity of the Lay Missionaries was clarified together with the terms of their collaboration, and provision was made for their spiritual and pastoral formation.

The Lay Missionaries are the fruit of a rapid development of a couple of decades. To attempt to see association with the laity in the more distant Redemptorist past must look very much like special pleading, but

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<sup>2</sup> Information on post-World War II mission practice has been very helpfully collected by John J. RUEF, *Redemptorist Parish Missions, 1945 – 1976*, Rome s. d.

<sup>3</sup> *Constitutions and Statutes, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, Rome 1988, stat. 014(c).

<sup>4</sup> *XXI General Chapter, Final Document*, Rome 1991, no. 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Communicanda* 4, Rome, 8th September 1995.

among the memories of its history cherished in the Institute there is bound to be some inspiration for the present strong bonds being forged between the members and their lay friends and helpers. Two centuries and a half devoted mainly to the popular missions must surely be rich in examples of a warm closeness between the people and their missionaries, a bond both of generous friendship and ready assistance. No doubt, many an ageing preacher can recall with gratitude, still fresh, times when a parishioner, man or woman, proved most helpful to his labours. Possibly it would serve some purpose to gather some account of that sort of individual co-operation over the years; but the investigation would certainly prove tedious to the researcher and to the reader as well. What we prefer to do at present is to look at the lives of St. Alphonsus and St. Clement for such examples. Their lives and works have been well documented, so that it is possible to discover and consider pertinent material. The founder and the distinguished propagator of the Congregation have always been models for Redemptorist life. The present thoughts are offered in the hope that they will provide a little help and even guidance for those who are honestly trying to draw lay friends into closer association with the communities.

#### I. ST. ALPHONSUS AND THE LAITY

Considering St. Alphonsus and the laity it is necessary to keep in mind that his age did not lend itself to the sort of appreciation expressed by Vatican II. During the Middle Ages the distinction between the spiritual and temporal spheres had become quite blurred. What resulted was that there was left to the laity "the duty of being obedient to the Church, that is to the clergy"<sup>6</sup>. The relation of sheep to shepherd almost too literally described the pastoral care current long after medieval times. There was no lack of pastoral literature after St. Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, but it was aimed at teaching the clergy how to teach their people, how to turn them from sin and train them in virtue.

After the Reformation and the Council of Trent there came into the Church a discernible note of caution. There was not only alarm at the

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<sup>6</sup> Yves CONGAR, *Lay people in the Church*, E.T. D. ATTWATER, London 1965, 359.

Protestant challenge, but also disgust at the moral decline that had so much been prominent in the Councils debates. Pastoral care was now aimed at protecting the faithful from these two evils. There was considerable apologetic activity; and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sodalities brought people together for exercises of piety and mutual edification<sup>7</sup>. There was much, obviously, that benefited later generations; but it is also clear that the laity were still very much dependent on a strong clerical element. And that was the age of Alphonsus.

Even in that timorous age, however, the laity was not entirely ignored. St. Francis de Sales was at pains to insist that the cloister was not the only environment of the devout life. With more emphasis than was his customary gentle style he declared, "It is not only erroneous but a heresy to hold that life in the army, the workshop, the court or home is incompatible with devotion"<sup>8</sup>. This was a thought that found an echo in Alphonsus, whose spiritual doctrine has so much in common with the great Bishop of Geneva. The universal call to sanctity is basic to his spiritual teaching; and this he proclaimed with the vigour of his anti-Jansenist polemic<sup>9</sup>. His huge literary output was largely a spirituality of the people.

### 1. – *Early Pastoral Activity*

Ordained in 1726, Alphonsus was quickly to work with the *Apostolic Missions* of which he had been a member for the past two years<sup>10</sup>. The Congregation of Propaganda, popularly known as the Apostolic Missions, had been founded to serve the foreign missions, but circumstances dictated that much of its activity be nearer home. The members became known and respected as popular missionaries. Alphonsus was appointed to one of the bands early in 1727, a mere few months after his ordination. During the next five years he had a very busy schedule of apostolic

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Book I, ch. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Antoni BAZIELICH, *La spiritualità di Sant' Alfonso Maria de Liguori. Studio storico teologico*, in *SHCSR* 31(1983) 330-372 (366).

<sup>10</sup> The early priestly activity of St. Alphonsus is treated by Theodule REY-MERMET, *St. Alphonsus, Tireless worker for the Most Abandoned*, E.T. Brooklyn 1989, 163-183; Frederick M. JONES, *St. Alphonsus, the Saint of Bourbon Naples, 1696-1887*, Dublin 1992, 58-65.

labours, an excellent apprenticeship for what was to be his life's work. The parish missions, in which he became practised in the pulpit and the confessional, of necessity gave him an awareness of the people and their needs.

Even before his ordination he had been greatly concerned with the more unfortunate and neglected. As a member of the *Bianchi* he had been devoted to the care of prisoners condemned to death, and it was in the hospital of the incurables that he heard the voice from heaven that led him to the priesthood. Even as a busy missionary he found time to undertake other pastoral works. A contemporary admirer said of him that he wanted to convert the whole world at a single blow<sup>11</sup>. It was this impatient zeal that led him to the *lazzeroni*. The beggars who were to be found wherever one looked in Naples were viewed with suspicion and could not be ignored by one who was sympathetic to the outcasts of society.

The *lazzeroni* were not the only ones in the *Cappelle Serotine* with which the name of Alphonsus has become linked<sup>12</sup>. It is probably better to speak of the *cappelle* as a more or less spontaneous working class movement. Gatherings of poorer men and boys in various parts of the city aroused suspicion on the part of the police and even of the Inquisition. The meetings, however, that have been remembered were for the purpose of prayer and instruction for persons on the fringes of ordinary pastoral care. These were the ones who attracted the attention of Alphonsus and some of his like minded friends. Their contribution, which has led to Alphonsus' being seen as the founder, was to give to the *cappelle* a simple organisation<sup>13</sup>.

The groups were so numerous that it was impossible to provide chaplains for all of them. Alphonsus and his companions, in addition to directing meetings themselves, trained leaders to preside and instruct in prayer and catechism. It was a solidly established movement that survived well into the nineteenth century. Father Rey-Memet has compared the *cappelle* to such very modern organisations as Catholic Action, prayer

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<sup>11</sup> JONES, op. cit., 61.

<sup>12</sup> Giuseppe ORLANDI, *S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori e i laici. La fondazione delle "Cappelle Serotine" di Napoli*, in *SHCSR* 35 (1987) 395-414.

<sup>13</sup> JONES, op. cit., 62-63.

groups, charismatics and Basic Christian Communities<sup>14</sup>. The movement was significant enough to draw the attention of Benedetto Croce. It is most probably to his association with the *cappelle* that is due something that occurred in Alphonsus' retirement years. A visitor told him that Naples had so far improved that even the coachmen were holy. In delight the old man exclaimed, "Holy coachmen in Naples!". That has become part of Redemptorist folk lore.

## 2.—As a Redemptorist

The experiences of his early years remained with Alphonsus in his Redemptorist days. By the time the Congregation of the Most Holy Saviour was inaugurated in November 1732 he was clear as to the shape of the missions. Writing just a few months later to a prospective candidate, he was able to claim, "Our approach is different from that of other Congregations"<sup>15</sup>. At a surprisingly early date he was able to produce a *Regolamento per le sante missioni*, a detailed framework which served Redemptorists until well into the twentieth century<sup>16</sup>.

That mission programme represents his principal contribution to the new Institute in its earliest days. The Bishop of Castellammare, Thomas Falcoia, held the position of Director, in effect Major Superior. As he worked interminably on the organisation of the community at Scala he frequently consulted Alphonsus. His correspondence shows him seeking advice on matters other than the missions, such as schools and an order of the day for the tiny community. The local superior after the schism, the amiable but uninspired Canon Pietro Romano, was also forever consulting Alphonsus, who must have found his situation almost unbearably frustrating.

With the establishment of a second foundation at *Villa degli Schiavi* in 1734 Alphonsus was able to exercise some initiative. Under his lead as superior the short-lived community showed remarkable activity<sup>17</sup>. A vig-

<sup>14</sup> REY-MERMET, op. cit., 182.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>16</sup> The text of the *Regolamento* may be read in *Analecta* 1 (1922) 172-178. A slightly different text is in *Analecta* 8 (1929) 242-249.

<sup>17</sup> JONES, op. cit, 146-151; REY-MERMET, op. cit., 315-317.

orous mission campaign led by himself did not exhaust his inspiration. At the cost of persistent argument with the Director he was able to build extensions to the little residence to provide for young candidates - something like a minor seminary - and for retreatants. Falcoia raised objections against the latter project, but once he saw its success he became a warm advocate. Retreats for laymen as well clerics became an important work of the early Redemptorists<sup>18</sup>. Enclosed retreats, in fact, continued to figure prominently among the works of the Congregation until recent times<sup>19</sup>.

The real beginning of the movement came with the foundation of *Ciorani* in 1735. After that date it was taken for granted, at least during Alphonsus' lifetime that future foundations make ample provision for enclosed retreats<sup>20</sup>. *Ciorani* set a pattern for future communities. Each year the numbers of retreatants were counted in three figures. They were largely clergy, priests and seminarians, but there were also significant numbers of *galantuomini*. To our eyes the attention given to the gentlemen might appear more than a little snobbish, and in the present climate of thought even discriminating against women. Retreats to *galantuomini* were included in the regular mission programme. Alphonsus explained his emphasis on the distinguished members of the parish in terms of their influence on the locality<sup>21</sup>. That rather emphasised the accepted attitude of his times. The laity were the ones to whom the clergy preached.

In the neighbourhood of the community residence there developed a collaboration with the laity that comes closer to twentieth century practice. On coming to the devotional little church of *Ave Gratia Plena* at Villa, Alphonsus found there a languishing Confraternity of the Rosary. He lost no time in accomplishing a renewal or rather infusing a new spirit. The members now undertook study of doctrine and prayer for the purpose of serving their fellow villagers. The new life brought by Alphonsus was extraordinarily vigorous. After the Fathers left Villa after far too

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>19</sup> Development of the enclosed retreat movement among Redemptorists is treated in *Analecta* 12 (1933) 84-95.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> It was in these terms that retreats for gentlemen were treated by the General Chapter of 1964. See *Codex regularum*, 60.

short a stay the members of the once ailing Confraternity numbered 200. Father Rey-Mermet justifiably sees this activity as reflecting the *Cappelle Serotine*. The members, he declared "had become missionaries"<sup>22</sup>. Such instances seem to indicate that Alphonsus had a vision of the apostolate of the laity far in advance of his times. The indications are scanty enough, it must be admitted. In his extraordinarily full life Alphonsus had little time to develop an insight, which for us must remain no more than a passing glimpse.

### 3. —*The Friends of the Redemptorists*

On a more personal and intimate level there is clear evidence that these first communities cherished warm and close bonds with their friends and benefactors. That was, in fact, the burden of an accusation made by Francesco Maffei in his quarrel with the community in *Deliceto*. The basis for the charge was described by Tannoia, the biographer of Alphonsus. "In order to satisfy the devotion of our benefactors, the superiors of our houses were in the habit of granting them a share in our good works"<sup>23</sup>. That seemed to imply that the Congregation was a true religious order introduced without royal approbation. In order to strengthen his accusation Maffei sent his men to gather further information in the other houses of the Institute.

The charge was a dangerous one in the excessively sensitive atmosphere of Bourbon Naples. The Redemptorists were in conflict with the Sarnelli family of Ciorani as well as the Maffei over property claims, and both adversaries were trying to show that the Congregation was an illegal association. The practice of showing appreciation of benefactors by offering a share in the spiritual fruits of the good works of the order was a well know practice among religious. Tannoia, however, hastened to point out that the saint did not regard it as no more than a courteous gesture<sup>24</sup>. He saw it as a real affiliation. What that implied can be gathered from the documents of affiliation that have survived.

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<sup>22</sup> REY-MERMET, op. cit., 517.

<sup>23</sup> ANTONIO M. TANNOIA, *Della vita ed istituto del veñ. servo di Dio*, trad. F.W. FABER, vol III, London 1849, 361.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

The earliest of them is signed by Alphonsus and dated 1758<sup>25</sup>. It is addressed to a man whose name is unfortunately illegible in the original in the general archives of the Congregation in Rome. After spelling out in detail which seems to omit nothing of the good works that are to reward the benefactor, it concludes:

“Moreover, we wish to direct that in whatever community you should visit you are to be received as though it were one of our subjects who had come in person and that you are to be warmly welcomed and treated”.

This acceptance of the friend is even more explicitly expressed in the second of the documents in the archives. This one is dated 1761 and is addressed to Don Michele di Ruggiero Casalisalbori<sup>26</sup>. Don Michele, it is said, is to be accepted and numbered “among our confreres”, and it is said further, “and your family, too, we count among these who share in the spiritual benefits of our Institute”. In conclusion again the benefactor and his family are assured of being received “most lovingly, just as if we ourselves should have come”.

The third surviving document of affiliation is dated 1777 and is addressed to a distinguished curialist, Guglielmo Pallotta, who was created cardinal by Pius VI just a month after he was honoured by Alphonsus. The document is in the possession of descendants of the Pallotta<sup>27</sup>. There seems to be a more personal tone in this case, which perhaps suggests that the affiliation was given in gratitude for kindnesses shown to Alphonsus himself when he was Bishop of Sant’Agata.

The three cases of which we have evidence are not to be regarded as Oblates in the same sense in which that term is now used by Redemptorists<sup>28</sup>. Nor do they in any way foreshadow the sort of lay participation

<sup>25</sup> It was published in *Analecta* 21(1949)157.

<sup>26</sup> It is published in *SHCSR* 15 (1965) 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> The three documents have been discussed by André SAMPERS, *Institutum Oblatorum in Congregatione SS. Redemptoris, Rectore Majore N. Mauron, 1855-1893*, in *SHCSR* 26 (1978) 75-142. Under Father Mauron a *Liber Oblatorum* was established. The name Oblate referred to the institution of St. Clement Hofbauer, of which there will be word later.

in pastoral activity visualised by Vatican II. They show, rather, a very human appreciation of well-wishers, which makes them accepted with gratitude and affection, not only by superiors but by entire communities. And that, surely, is an admirable model for all associations of laity and Redemptorists.

Generally speaking, it has to be said that the relation of the earliest Redemptorists with the laity had very little in common with what is seen as desirable in the twentieth century. Their pastoral care stemmed from the compassion of Alphonsus for the *lazzeroni* of Naples and the goatherds of Scala. Their labours for the most abandoned achieved excellent results as they provided instruction and spiritual guidance for these who were otherwise neglected. Fully and so profitably occupied as they were in the missions, they were to be commended for their insight into the needs of the people, an insight first revealed in the *Cappelle\_Serotine* and the Rosary Confraternity in *Villa degli Schiavi*.

#### 4. -*The Sarnelli Apostolate*

Any consideration of the early Redemptorists and their attitude to the laity cannot ignore the figure of Blessed Gennaro Sarnelli. At first glance he must appear as most untypical. That was certainly the view of Falcoia, the Director. In his early letters to Alphonsus he showed a rather patronising attitude whenever he had occasion to speak of Sarnelli. He is represented as a well meaning poor fellow who is to be pitied and helped<sup>29</sup>. Later on, when he had discovered his zeal and the excellent results he achieved, the Director modified his views enough to praise him in a circular letter urging everyone to lend him support<sup>30</sup>.

It has to be said, indeed, that in many respects Sarnelli was not a typical Redemptorist. His constant ill health and the demands of his many commitments in Naples kept him very much apart from the community, even in his native Ciorani. He did participate, however, in the missions in addition to his many other activities crowded into his short life. He has certainly been done justice by Alphonsus, who knew him better than

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<sup>29</sup> REY-MERMET, op. cit., 322.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

anyone else<sup>31</sup>. In addition to a literary work which would have sufficed for most ordinary men, he devoted himself to the waifs and strays of Naples, to the old men who used to beg for alms at the shrine of St. Januarius and to the prostitutes, who were said to number as many as 40,000 in the city. For the protection of these who turned to prostitution in order to live, he succeeded in winning a decree of the State, surely a piece of social legislation remarkable for his times.

Sarnelli was very much like Alphonsus, his friend and companion in the *Apostolic Missions*. The two shared a compassion which made them sensitive to the needs of the people. The quality of compassion, which would nowadays probably be called pastoral charity, may be taken as summarising the attitude of the first Redemptorists to the laity. The organisation of the missions and the demanding programme of spiritual exercises in their churches showed an admirable understanding of the poor people among whom they lived and whose condition they shared. Even if they lacked the developed consciousness of the vocation of the laity that appeared in later generations, they lived in close contact with the people. In addition they showed a quality that deserves to be imitated. That was the warmth of friendship showed in the practice of affiliation. It could well be that theories about developing awareness of the lay vocation have much to learn from that tradition of warmth and compassion.

## II. ST. CLEMENT HOFBAUER AND THE LAITY

Clement Hofbauer lived in times very different from those of Alphonsus. As the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth the Church was struggling to assert itself after a prolonged conflict. The extraordinarily pervasive and malign influence of the Jansenists together with the secularism of the Enlightenment posed a grave threat to religion. The French Revolution had adopted a missionary zeal of an extremely aggressive spirit to carry its principles throughout Europe. The greatest propagator of these principles of '89 was Napoleon, and he was to show

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<sup>31</sup> ST. ALPHONSUS, *Notes on the Life of Father Januarius Maria Sarnelli in The Complete Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori* (The Centenary Edition) ed. E. GRIMM, New York, 1890, 251-277. The *Compendio della vita* was published in Naples in 1752 (reprint 1996).

himself "the greatest adversary" of St. Clement, as Father Hofer has said<sup>32</sup>.

The Church's response was largely in the form of vigorous apologetic writing in the hands of authors whose ability commanded respect. It was the age of Chateaubriand and Le Maistre, the age of an emerging laity. The spirit of this beginning of the Catholic Revival was expressed with characteristic eloquence by Lacordaire, who had himself begun his defence of Catholicism before he became a Dominican.

"The layman has a mission to fulfil; he has to supply whatever may be lacking to the diocesan clergy and the religious orders, for their resources and their many means of action. Men of faith must join their efforts to defend truth against the ceaseless influence of evil teaching; their charity must work in common to repair the breaches in the Church and the social order"<sup>33</sup>.

### 1. - *Clement the Man*

Clement Hofbauer was the man for the times. He was very much what was claimed at a meeting in Berlin in 1932. The occasion was the Second International Christ the King Day. A speaker from Austria devoted ten minutes of his address to St. Clement, whom he hailed as the source of Catholic Action in Austria. The president of the assembly in thanking the speaker suggested that St. Clement Hofbauer be proclaimed the patron of Catholic Action<sup>34</sup>. The same thought was mentioned by a bishop in far off Australia. A respected historian in his country, he remarked to a Redemptorist that Clement Hofbauer was the ideal patron of Catholic Action.

There is much justice in the suggestion. Most of Clement's life as a Redemptorist was devoted to work with lay people. He depended on them for most of what he tried to achieve, and he encouraged initiatives among them that usually proved effective. Some of these who worked most zealously for the cause of religion in the Congress of Vienna in 1815

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<sup>32</sup> Johannes HOFER, *St. Clement Maria Hofbauer. A Biography*, E.T. J. B. HAAS, New York 1926, 84.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by CONGAR, *op. cit.*, 560.

<sup>34</sup> *Analecta* 11 (1932) 350-351.

were his disciples. Even in Warsaw, with a growing community about him he needed lay helpers for his various projects, and in Vienna, where he was on his own, it could only have been through his contacts that he could have done all he succeeded in achieving. His was the precious gift of being able to work with and through others, communicating to them his unwavering faith and a share in his restless zeal. As his disciple and admirer, Adam Müller, wrote in his obituary notice, "he still lives in the good and rich seed he has sown"<sup>35</sup>.

## 2. – The Warsaw Years

When circumstances led Clement Hofbauer's steps to Warsaw in 1787, he found a demoralised people. Thoroughly disheartened by the first division of their country, they sank ever deeper into gloom as successive partitions added to their wretchedness<sup>36</sup>. In his usual blunt fashion Clement described the collapse of public morality. "From the clergy down to the poorest beggar, society is rotten to the core"<sup>37</sup>. A population without hope was revealed in the insensitiveness to the desperate poverty of those who had lost home and livelihood, especially after the shocking bloodbath in the suburb of Praga in 1794. The children had suffered dreadfully, and little was being done to relieve their prevailing ignorance or care for the waifs and strays who abounded everywhere<sup>38</sup>.

Clement faced the challenge of the sorely needed renewal of Christian life with a courage and vigour that must always command admiration. He had no confidence in the local authorities, whether of Church or State. He called them the "the dregs of humanity"<sup>39</sup>. The perpetual mission in St. Benno's was a work he was able to maintain to excellent effect

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted by HOFER, op. cit., 542.

<sup>36</sup> The condition of Warsaw is well described by W. ROSTOCKI, *Social and political Situation in Warsaw at the turn of the Nineteenth Century*, in *SHCSR* 54 (1986) 283-295.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted by HOFER, op. cit., 100.

<sup>38</sup> See Léonard GROCHOWSKI, *L'œuvre d'éducation et de bienfaisance des Pères Rédemptoristes-Bennonites à Varsovie (1787- 1808)*, in *SHCSR* 34 (1986) 297-318.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Father Pietro Paolo Blasucci, Rector Major, 12th June 1800 in *MH* VIII, 70.

with the rich pastoral talent in his growing community that served the church<sup>40</sup>.

In addition to the prevailing moral evils that occasioned the perpetual mission there were also grave social problems, and for this the Redemptorists had to call on help. Even during the year or so before Clement and his two companions took up residence in St. Benno's they had come to grips with the care of children in need<sup>41</sup>. By 1788 when they came to their home they already had a school of 100 boys besides a score of orphans to house, feed and clothe. It was not only a commendable work of charity, but so prompt and efficacious a response to the children's plight was evidence of a social conscience very much in advance of the times. For the next twenty years the work continued and grew until the abrupt suppression of the community and its apostolate in 1808.

At St. Benno's the schools grew steadily, in time including even a trade school, an initiative that won some commendation (reluctant perhaps) from the occupying Prussians, and a school for girls. This latter was a project that was promoted especially by Clement himself, who saw it as training the girls to provide for themselves and so escape the need of depending on prostitution<sup>42</sup>. To some extent the Redemptorists themselves were able to contribute to the work in the schools<sup>43</sup>; but the extent of the work made it necessary to call on lay people. Help was needed especially, of course, for the girls school.

The girls' school with the associated provision of a refuge for the more destitute occasioned an interesting development unfortunately too short-lived. Among the generous young women who helped to care for the girls Clement formed a religious institute. The Sisters of St. Joseph were dedicated to the care of poor girls. Their rule provided for a noviciate and vows to be renewed each year. Closely associated by reason of their work with the community of St. Benno's, they eventually shared

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<sup>40</sup> See Adam OW CZARSKI, *Die seelsorgerliche Tätigkeit der Redemptoristen in der Kirche von St. Benno in Warschau (1788-1808)*, in SHCSR 43 (1995) 87-136.

<sup>41</sup> GROCHOWSKI, art. cit., 298-299.

<sup>42</sup> HOFER, op. cit., 106.

<sup>43</sup> The programme of studies and the Redemptorists active in teaching are contained in a detailed report prepared by Father Karl Jestershein for the French authorities in 1807. See GROCHOWSKI, art. cit., 314.

their fate. When St. Clement's great adversary, Napoleon, expelled the Redemptorists, the Sisters also were dissolved. They left behind them a flourishing sodality of girls formed to a devout life<sup>44</sup>.

Clement set great store on such sodalities. The boys who passed through his schools were also organised into a society. This was the sort of thing that became more familiar in the confraternities of a later age. It was different with the better known Congregation of the Oblates.

### 3. – *The Oblates*

As early as 1788 Clement had gathered at St. Benno's a body of lay folk whom he formed to a more fervent life and<sup>45</sup> activity in the cause of religion. The venture proved so successful that in 1804 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda approved the *Sodalitium oblatorum sive aggregatorum Congregationis SS Redemptoris* in Germany and Poland<sup>46</sup>. Clement as Vicar General had submitted a formal request for approbation, including the statutes and rite of admission to the *sodalitium*<sup>47</sup>.

The Oblates were rather different from the sodalities and confraternities more familiar in recent times. Candidates committed themselves after a year's probation. The members used to meet regularly to hear an exhortation by the director, should they be so fortunate as to have one, and to share their experiences and insights regarding the purpose of the institute. The purpose of the Oblates had been stated by Clement in his petition to Propaganda. The members were to sanctify themselves and promote the glory of God and the good of the Church, to resist the harmful influences of the times, particularly the spread of bad reading. They were required to practice mental prayer and devout reading and they pledged themselves to promote god Christian living with emphasis on good reading and the practice of retreats.

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<sup>44</sup> HOFER, op. cit., 107.

<sup>45</sup> Claus SCHEDL, *Ein Heiliger steht auf*, Vienna, 1950, 34; Josef HEINZMANN, *Der "Homo Apostolicus" Klemens Hofbauer*, in *SHCSR* 34 (1986) 377.

<sup>46</sup> The decree, dated 29th July 1804, in *MH VIII*, 272-273. See SAMPERS, art. cit., 86.

<sup>47</sup> *MH II*, 51-61.

It was a comprehensive programme for which the members were to be prepared. In addition to daily mental prayer and spiritual reading they received the sacraments frequently. Those who followed such a programme must certainly have proved invaluable collaborators of the Bennonites. Nowadays they would probably be considered fervent lay apostles. :

Unfortunately, the uprooting of the Redemptorists in Warsaw in 1808 has occasioned the loss of much precious information about the works of the Oblates. The little evidence available shows that the members were both men and women of all sorts of backgrounds; they even counted among them some clergy. They were to be found not only in Poland but also in Germany, as was mentioned in the decree of approval. One is tempted to compare the Oblates with the Confraternity of the Rosary as Alphonsus reformed it in *Villa degli Schiavi*. There are similarities, but it would have been improbable that Clement knew so much about the founder he so genuinely venerated. Any similarities that may be noted are further examples of the resemblance of the two great Redemptorist leaders to one another. It has been suggested with more probability that the model of the Oblates was closer to hand in the Christian Friendship Society of the zealous ex-Jesuit, Joseph Albert Diessbach<sup>48</sup>. It was, however, only in 1795 that Clement made his acquaintance in Vienna<sup>49</sup>. He was impressed by the circle attracted to Diessbach and was probably influenced by their efforts to spread good reading; but in all fairness it seems that we should give credit to Clement's own far-sightedness as the real source of the Oblates.

#### 4. - *Apostolate in Vienna*

Clement Hofbauer's time in Vienna corresponded with the period of the greatest triumph of Napoleon, his adversary. It was a time when the Viennese passed from hope to despondency and back to delight according to the fluctuating fortunes of the French. They were a more sophisticated people than Clement had known in Warsaw. In Vienna he met at closer quarters with the Enlightenment, and at the same time with a Catholic

<sup>48</sup> HEINZMANN, art. cit., 377.

<sup>49</sup> HOFER, op. cit., 112-120.

Revival strongly tinged with Romanticism. It was a city which remained even after the death of Joseph II still tainted with his peculiar form of Erastianism. It is probable that interference of the Josephist police was his greatest source of annoyance in the twelve years before his death<sup>50</sup>.

In spite of the constant, and no doubt highly irritating, surveillance, it is in Vienna that Clement has left the most enduring examples of his genius. His achievements were mainly through others. He had a remarkable gift for friendship and he was able to share with others his own dedication to the cause of religion. It was this talent for discovering and encouraging the abilities of his friends among the laity that made him a leader of Catholic Revival in Germany as well as in Austria. That was the quality that won for him the praise of the Nuncio Leardi, who reported his death to Consalvi as the "removal of one who was so long a pillar of strength in the cause of truth and right"<sup>51</sup>.

#### 5. – *The Hofbauer Circle*

The Hofbauer Circle is a name that is not unfamiliar to historians other than Redemptorists<sup>52</sup>. It is well to be clear as to what is to be understood by the name. This point has been well made by Rudolf Till<sup>53</sup>. Even though the Josephist police sometimes spoke of Hofbauer as connected with some sort of club, there is no question of a body as identifiable as say Diessbach's Christian Friendship Society, or for that matter the Circle or salon of Princess Gallitzin in Münster. The name Hofbauer Circle covers a broad range of Clement's friendships and associations. Among them all his personality exercised an influence which they in turn extended outside Vienna and Austria, and even after his death. The Hofbauer Circle, in fact, reveals Clement as one of the foremost leaders of the Catholic Revival in Central Europe<sup>54</sup>.

There were frequent gatherings in the hospitable rooms occupied by Clement at the Ursulines. Young men of the working class met there in

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, MH XIII, 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by HOFER, *op. cit.*, 522.

<sup>52</sup> Rudolf TILL, *Hofbauer und sein Kreis*, Vienna 1951, is the best known example.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

an atmosphere in which they were able to relax and enjoy refreshments as well as instruction and an opportunity for spiritual guidance. Their genial host also showed an interest in students and lecturers in the University of Vienna. Among these latter there was a stirring of interest in Catholic doctrine and devotion during the time Clement was in the city. It is significant that some of the more outstanding personalities of the movement later became Redemptorists, men like Madlener, Springer, von Held and Veith. An extraordinary example of Clement's influence among the intellectuals is the case of Anton Günther<sup>55</sup>. Günther himself spoke of the impression made on him at his first meeting with Hofbauer<sup>56</sup>. The biographer of the saint tells how "that endless quibbler" was persuaded to study theology in spite of his obstinate doubts about revelation<sup>57</sup>.

The Hofbauer Circle as seen by Rudolf Till, however, is to be understood as the wide range of distinguished personalities Clement met in the houses where he was always a welcome guest. Of these undoubtedly the most significant was that of Friedrich and Dorothy Sehlegel. Philip Veit, Dorothy's son by her former marriage, speaks of Clement as a daily guest of the family<sup>58</sup>. In that congenial setting the daily guest seems to have been known as "old Hofbauer", a familiarity that has an almost English flavour.

With the Schlegels and other friends Clement made the acquaintance of other individuals who did much in the cause of religion. Especially worthy of mention are the devout and zealous Adam Müller and Friedrich von Klinkowström, who were diligent in promoting sound Catholic education.

Perhaps one can see some influence of Diessbach, whom Clement revered as long as he lived, in his eagerness to promote good reading<sup>59</sup>. He encouraged the Passy brothers Georg and Anton in their literary and

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<sup>55</sup> Günther has been the subject of a fine study by T.W SIMONS, *Vienna's first Catholic Political Movement, the Güntherians, 1848-1857*, in «The Catholic Historical Review» (Washington) 55 (1969-1970) 173-194; 377-393; 610-626.

<sup>56</sup> HOFER, op. cit, 416.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 468-473.

journalistic endeavours. They later became Redemptorists. Georg, the editor of *Die Oelzweige* (The Olive Branches) and zealous in the cause of the circulating library, became a Brother in "Maria am Gestade", where he died venerated by all who knew him. Among other publications encouraged by Clement must be mentioned those of Emanuel Veith and Friedrich von Klinkowström. Possibly what gave him most satisfaction was the fact that he had encouraged the spiritual writings of his confessor, Franz Schmid.

#### 6. – St. Clement and Women

Considering the rather amorphous character of the Hofbauer Circle, it would seem correct to include within its radius St. Clement's dealing with women, some of them prominent in Viennese society. It is good, indeed, to give the topic some emphasis: it would be a pity to give the impression of a misogynist saint. Perhaps he did say, that he thanked God he was not a woman and did not have a wife<sup>60</sup>, but that tells us more about his own bluff manner. He always showed a somewhat rustic way of speaking. Such a passing word is to be balanced against what is to be known about his usual way with women<sup>61</sup>. One can be sure that Sister Welschenau was not offended by his rough words of encouragement when she was a pale and sickly novice. He told her, "You will make your profession and outlive many of those with rosy cheeks now. You will become a real old bag<sup>62</sup>". Sister Thaddea Taxböck later gave testimony to the kindness and affability of the confessor at St. Ursula's.

Father Hofer has related how friendship with Dorothy Schlegel attracted to Hofbauer some women much admired in fashionable circles<sup>63</sup>. His dealings with women is well shown in the conversion of the sisters, Louise von Klinkowström and Elizabeth von Pilat. Coming on them at a time when they were disappointed after a service in their Protestant church, sensing their embarrassment, he said, "Ah, so you are taking off

<sup>60</sup> According to Father Pajalich, in MH XII, 165.

<sup>61</sup> The topic has been treated by Andreas SAMPERS, *Der hl. Klemens und die Frauen*, in SHCSR 7 (1959) 68-86.

<sup>62</sup> MH XI, 97. That seems a fair translation of *Schachtel*.

<sup>63</sup> HOFER, op. cit., 313-317.

the black stockings at last". The both agreed but spoke of their reluctance to face up to confession. He solved that problem for them. "It is not going to kill you", he said. "Just leave it to me"<sup>64</sup>.

Among those brought under the influence of Clement's charm in the home of the Schlegels especially worthy of mention are Friedrich and Sophie Schlosser. Coming to Vienna late in 1814 to represent Frankfurt in the Congress of Vienna, they came under his spell and before the year was out were received into the Church. Fifty years later Sophie wrote to Father Adam Pfab, postulator in the cause of Clement's beatification, "After Father Hofbauer received our profession of faith he treated us like his children, and I have never had happier hours than when after Mass and Communion we had breakfast with him"<sup>65</sup>. It was probably that same simple charm that attracted those who are numbered among the Hofbauer Circle.

#### 7. - *The Congress of Vienna*

Father Hofer has devoted a chapter to the Congress of Vienna<sup>66</sup>. Needless to say, Clement was not among the distinguished participants; but he was much occupied among the populace, swelled by 100,000. Among the visitors to his room near the Ursulines the most notable was Crown Prince Louis of Bavaria, whose evening visit on one occasion extended to 2 a.m. His chief concerns, however, were twofold: to thwart the move for a National Church and to persuade Roman authorities to take a better informed interest in the affairs of the Church in Germany. In both some good measure of success was achieved. It is to the point to note that the Nuncio Severoli gave much credit to Hofbauer, writing, "I take comfort that the letters of this most worthy religious have given the Holy See an exact survey of the present state of the Church in Germany"<sup>67</sup>.

The Hofbauer Circle is so broad in its reach that it is not even possible to list all who were affected by association with St. Clement. There

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>65</sup> SAMPERS, *Der hl. Klemens*, art. cit., 72-75.

<sup>66</sup> HOFER, *op. cit.*, 546-571.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 550.

are, however, some names which will serve to indicate the sort of influence he exerted. The two reforming bishops, Zängerle of Graz-Seckau and Ziegler of Linz, are a fine example of the good effects by the saint through his disciples. Another prominent in public life was the Church historian and Court Chaplain, Vinzenz Darnaut. His representations to the emperor had some influence in bringing the Redemptorists to Maria am Gestade. Perhaps the most distinguished of Clement's following was Josef Othmar Ritter von Rauscher, whom he helped to the priesthood and who later became Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna. His tribute to his friend and guide admirably sums up what Clement had achieved through those who came under his spell. "Hofbauer can be credited with having aroused Church life in Vienna. He gave the times a better direction, and because of his activity we can speak again of a Catholic Vienna"<sup>68</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION

As with the rest of the Church the Redemptorists have been slow in coming to a recognition of the role the laity might have in their apostolate. It is only now as the twentieth century is ending that it has been possible to write into their legislation principles for working with as well as for God's people. While it is true that the two great teachers of Redemptorist life have engaged in activities of which one enlightened by a modern ecclesiology would have been proud, it would be unwise to imitate them in what they did. What they have to offer, which will always be relevant, is their inspiration. St. Alphonsus and St. Clement, eager to help those in need, used the means to hand; and both in their different circumstances called on lay people and achieved results that challenge their successors.

In promulgating its directives and norms for collaborating with the laity the General Council recalled "what Alphonsus accomplished through the 'evening chapels' in Naples"<sup>69</sup>. We are justified in adding the effect of his revitalising the Confraternity of the Rosary in *Villa degli Schiavi*. In both cases he was able to guide lay people to work for the spiritual de-

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<sup>68</sup> Eduard Hosp, *Der hl Klemens Maria Hofbauer*, in *SHCSR* 18 (1970) 224.

<sup>69</sup> *Communicanda* 4, Rome, 8th September 1995, no. 05.

velopment whether of the *lazzaroni* of Naples or of the peasants of Cajazzo.

What Alphonsus did through his lay helpers can be best understood as the fruit of his compassion, which was the source of all his pastoral activity. When he heard the voice from heaven telling him to leave the world and given himself to God, the moment of his conversion, as he said<sup>70</sup>, his immediate response was to become a priest and turn to the poor of Naples. That is the compassion that never ceased to inspire him in his writing as well as in his preaching. Compassion makes one alert to another's point of view, his aspirations as well as his needs. It was that sensitiveness that enabled Alphonsus to guide the "chapels" and the Rosary Confraternity in their work for their companions. It was this sort of sensitiveness, surely, that was inculcated by the XXI General Chapter in its final document, declaring,

"The dialogue with lay people, which is necessary before any collaboration, should be a sincere effort to listen to their aspirations and needs"<sup>71</sup>.

The Redemptorist of today, working more closely with the laity, could not do better than to come to them with the compassion and understanding of Alphonsus. Perhaps he will then see a twentieth century equivalent of the holy coachmen of Naples.

Clement Hofbauer has few rivals in his ability to channel the good will of the laity to the advantage of religion. Faced with challenges in Warsaw or in Germany or Vienna, he recruited helpers for what was beyond the reach even of his immense energy and zeal. The foundation of the Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer and the statutes he gave them show how well he understood that virtue, wherever it was to be found, could be directed to the Redemptorist goal, labour for those in need.

The Oblates and the other helpers of the community of St. Benno's had evident success in the case of the schools and the orphanages. What they did for the neglected children, the sorry flotsam and jetsam of Poland's collapse, bear witness to the man who guided them. Evidence is

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<sup>70</sup> See Hernán ARBOLEDA VALENCIA, *S. Alfonso Maria de Liguori racconta la storia della sua vocazione*, in *SHCSR* 59 (1991)252-267.

<sup>71</sup> *XXI General Chapter, Final Document*, no. 58 (e).

lacking for the work of the Oblates he established during his travels through Germany, but it could hardly be doubted that Clement was able to communicate to them that same apostolic spirit.

His ability to inspire the laity is evident especially in the Hofbauer Circle. He must have been an incongruous figure as he mingled with people like the Schlegels, Müller, Klinkowström, the Passy brothers and so many others of the Viennese intellectuals. What he had to offer was his down to earth faith, his "Catholic nose". Through them he was able to reach out to the wider German world, showing himself a leader of Catholic Revival.

Redemptorists of today certainly have much to learn from their greatest teachers. Perhaps it is best to leave the last word to Alphonsus offering affiliation to the friends of the Congregation. They were to be received in the communities with the warmth shown to the members themselves. It is hardly likely that the capitulars in 1961 had that admirable institution in mind; but their recommendations clearly echo the same spirit, urging the communities "to open themselves up to the laity, so that they may have a greater share in our experiences of life, work and spirituality"<sup>72</sup>.

#### Résumé

Les Chapitres Généraux des 30 dernières années ont promu l'apostolat des laïcs en collaboration avec la Congrégation. En cela, on ne faisait que reconnaître officiellement une vieille tradition rédemptoriste. Déjà saint Alphonse travaillait avec des missionnaires laïcs, d'abord dans les *chapelles du soir*, puis dans la confrérie du Rosaire à *Villa dei Schiavi*. Le bienheureux Gennaro M. Sarnelli l'a imité et saint Clément Hofbauer en fit autant. Celui-ci fonda le *Sodalitium oblatorum* de la Congrégation avec des membres en Pologne et en Allemagne. Les Rédemptoristes d'aujourd'hui peuvent en apprendre.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 60 (b).