

LETTER TO CARDINAL VILLOT*

Like shining stars, the Church's Doctors shed light upon her. By the holiness of their lives, by their zeal to preserve the true faith untarnished, by the wealth of their teaching, to which their writings especially bear witness, they have advanced the cause of the Catholic Church. Among them, and the nearest to our times, stands St. Alphonsus de Ligouri. He was the founder, the father and lawgiver of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, of which you are at present the Rector Major.

Just a hundred years ago, this remarkable man was honored by the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, with the title of Doctor of the Church. It is fitting that his religious family is preparing to hold a solemn celebration of the centennial.

As the Holy Father reflects upon the spiritual greatness of your Founder, he acknowledges that he shares in the joy that fills the religious family of Alphonsus and prays for the success of these solemn celebrations.

St. Alphonsus is indeed to be esteemed for those gifts of soul and these merits which as said above are characteristic of the Church's Doctors, but the spotlight must be focused on the apostolic zeal with which he was inflamed in his teaching. A master of all the sacred sciences, he devoted himself especially to moral theology. In everything it was solely the interests of Christ that he sought; he exerted every effort to banish the darkness of error and to make Catholic truth thoroughly penetrate the minds of men. The soundness of his teaching deserves special recognition; while, most of all, praise must be given him for clinging with unwavering loyalty to the authority of the Church.

It is well known, besides, how diligently St. Alphonsus, with his burning pastoral charity, strove to arouse the Christian people to holiness of life, to make them fervent and on all sides to promote true holiness. Hence he made a big contribution to that "renewal" of which the Church "always has need, in

* This letter is addressed to the Most Reverend Father Amaral, Rector of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

so far as she is an institution of men here on earth" (Vatican Council II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6). While admittedly some forms of piety and some pious expressions he used do not appeal to the ears of men of today, still, the substance of what he so diligently taught is immune to the changes of fleeting time. In this connection, it is a pleasure to recall that he proclaimed the supreme importance of close friendship with Christ our Saviour, and that he insisted on the necessity of prayer — he summed it up in his own clear simple way: "He who prays is saved, he who does not pray is lost."

Again, everybody knows with what burning love St. Alphonsus honored the Virgin Mother of God. But his Marian devotion is such that through Mary we come to Jesus; that is to say, its effect is that "while the Mother is honored, the Son... is rightly known, loved, and glorified and His commandments are kept" (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 66).

Because of these many merits it has rightly come about that St. Alphonsus is well known to the People of God. During this solemn celebration, however, it seems that his attention is fixed especially on his own sons. It is for you as it were to perpetuate his spirit and to continue his work. The Supreme Pontiff earnestly desires that you do so. In a spirit of fatherly affection, he reminds you of the respect which as already mentioned, St. Alphonsus invariably showed for the Magisterium of the Church. So the members of his Congregation will not depart from this rule of their father, but will wholeheartedly put into practice the directive of the Second Vatican Council: "Religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*" (Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 25).

St. Alphonsus can be called "the master of prayer." He urges you then to keep always in mind, in the midst of the many labors you undertake the importance and the necessity of prayer. For all priests, the General Council gave this wholesome advice: "In many ways, in particular through the approved practice of mental prayer and by the various vocal prayers which they freely choose, priests seek and earnestly beg of God that spirit of true adoration whereby they themselves, along with the people entrusted to them, may unite themselves intimately with Christ the Mediator of the New Testament" (*Decr. Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 18). If this advice is meant for all priests, much more will the sons of St. Alphonsus — the Master of prayer — take

it to heart and so strive to make their apostolate really fruitful. In this way certainly they will ward off the danger that threatens the religious life today, a danger expressed in St. Paul's words of warning: "Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you" (Rom. 12:2); and so they will continue to be of great service to the Church.

The Holy Father therefore earnestly prays that the celebrations to honor the centennial of the naming of St. Alphonsus as a Doctor of the Church may bring to his Congregation much spiritual profit. On you and on all the religious entrusted to your care the Holy Father lovingly bestows his Apostolic Blessing.

In virtue of my office I convey this message to you, and I declare myself most devotedly yours in the Lord.

THE PASTORAL CHARITY OF ST. ALPHONSUS*

The Holy Father addressed a Letter to the General Chapter of the Redemptorists meeting in Rome in 1967. In his letter, Pope Paul referred to the pastoral charity of St. Alphonsus. He asserted that it was pastoral charity "which more than anything else moved your Father and Lawgiver to found your Congregation .

"St. Alphonsus, indeed, more than any other Doctor of the Church, may be said to belong to our times, because of his marvelous activities, because of the forms of the sacred apostolate which he introduced, and especially because of his splendid writings, which are still to be found in the hands of the faithful to their great spiritual profit. In these writings the personality of this Saint in heaven still lives as it were and breathes, and his voice like that of one inspired from on high still resounds, sweetly attracting, as it did while he was here on earth, those who hear it and powerfully inflaming their hearts with love for God, and at the same time teaching us how the word of God is to be preached.

"Though possessed of great learning, far from flaunting it in an ostentatious display of erudition, he loved rather the simplicity of the language of the Gospel. His one and only concern

*This is a letter of the Pope to the General chapter of the Redemptorists.