

## DISTACCO/DETACHMENT

In the Alphonsian vision, *distacco* is an indispensable demand of authentic love: ‘Anyone who wishes to love Jesus Christ will need to drive from their heart everything which is dictated by self love, rather than by love of God. It means... not seeking ourselves but only what pleases God. This is what the Lord asks of us when he says; “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart”’ (Mt 22:37) (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, in CWS p. 151). True love, in fact, asks that we ‘not only conform but we should actually make ourselves one with whatever God ordains’ in the sense that ‘making the will of God and our will into one single will, as it were, so that we do not want anything but what he wills and so his will becomes ours’ (*Conformity to the Will of God*, in CWS p. 72).

According to Alphonsus, the fidelity to this Yes, said with a trusting love, is impossible without the *distacco*: ‘from inordinate affection’, ‘from the family (which often causes the loss of vocation)’, ‘from the praise of the world’ and ‘above all...from ourselves, our own will’. Thus we will be able ‘to love God as God wants, not as it pleases us. God wishes people to empty themselves of everything in order to be united to him and be filled with his divine love’ (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, CWS pp. 156-160). *Distacco* therefore does not mean contempt for created realities, but relates itself to reality as wished by the love of God for people ‘to draw them to his love’ (p. 112). Above all, it does not mean to put God and the neighbour in conflict, but rather to act in a way that the love of God is the foundation and authenticity of all our love towards others. It makes us avoid reducing love to a ‘thing’ to possess, to use and to consume selfishly.

In the more specific Redemptorist perspective, *distacco* is characterised by a clearly apostolic spirit, as a condition, and at the same time, expression of putting oneself radically at the service of evangelisation of the abandoned, which is the *raison d’être* of our community: ‘Whoever is called to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer’, wrote St Alphonsus, ‘will not be a true follower of Jesus Christ, nor will ever be a saint, if he does not fulfil the purpose of his vocation and he will not have the spirit of the Institute, which is to save souls and the souls most destitute of spiritual help, such as the poor people of the countryside. This was already the intention of the coming of the Redeemer...therefore everyone must nourish this zeal and this spirit so as to help souls’ (‘Exhortations to Religious’).

For the Redemptorist, *distacco* above all means apostolic freedom, indispensable to discern and respond to ever new urgencies of the abandoned. It is an expression of maintaining the radicalness and the readiness of the self-emptying mercy of Christ. Therefore it must mark not only the personal life of the confreres, but also the manner in which the community plans and lives its specific mission. The norms in our primitive Rules concerning the exclusion of certain apostolic works or concerning the refusal of ecclesiastical privileges which could damage our freedom can be explained by the importance given to *distacco* for the sake of the apostolate.

The present Constitutions, after having recalled that ‘the apostolic work of the Congregation is distinguished more by its missionary dynamism than by any particular forms of activity’ (Const. 14), adds that such a mission ‘demands of the members that they be free and unimpeded in their choice of the peoples to be evangelised and the means to be employed in the mission of salvation’. Therefore ‘they cannot allow themselves to settle down in surroundings and structures in which their work would no longer be missionary. On the contrary, they will diligently pioneer new ways of preaching the Gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15)’ (Const. 15).

In the light of our discernment concerning the most abandoned, and of our joy of ‘continuing’ for them their plentiful redemption, *distacco* finds full expression in the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. With this, in fact, the Redemptorists ‘are prepared to remain steadfast for life in their vocation. They renounce themselves with all they possess to become followers of Christ, and to be all things to all’ (cf. 1 Cor 9:22 and Const. 49).

A particularly urgent aspect of *distacco* today is the freedom from the lure of consumerism so as to foster a respectful use and sharing of goods. The constant emphasis on appearance, acceptance and approval, to the detriment of being, should lead to a greater attention to a *distacco* in its own right. It is also important that we must not allow ourselves to be imprisoned within our own vision and ideas, but we should feel the need to interact and dialogue. But above all, *distacco* must today translate into the task of avoiding every absolutism of freedom, knowing that it retains its character only in relationship with truth.

*Distacco* makes possible a trusting reliance on God’s plan for us and our history, enlightened by the certainty that it is dictated by the heart of a Father, who has placed our happiness in his own glory, as Alphonsus noted in his foreword to *The Wonderful Manifestations of Divine Providence*, the last of his wide-ranging writings and almost his testament.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

To understand the Alphonsian vision of *distacco*, it is good to integrate the reading of Ch 12 of *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* with the *Conformity to the Will of God* and the two pamphlets on religious life: *Exhortations to Religious* and *Considerations on religious vocation*.

Kotynski, M.: *Uniformità alla volontà di Dio come concetto-chiave della vita spirituale cristiana secondo Alfonso Maria de Liguori*, Roma 2004.

De Liguori, Alphonsus: *Selected Writings* (The Classics of Western Spirituality).

Jones, Frank (ed.): *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, translated by Brendan McConvery C.Ss.R. (pp106-161), *Conformity to the Will of God*, translated by Martin McKeever C.Ss.R. (pp69-93). New York: Paulist Press, 1999:

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. To remain faithful to the Alphonsian vision of *distacco*, it is necessary to deepen the relationship between *distacco* and the evangelisation of the abandoned, asking ourselves if indeed our personal and communitarian journey, is illuminated by being united with our ‘*vita apostolica*’. (cf. Const. 1).
2. It will be thus possible to question ourselves concerning the expressions of *distacco* in our contexts, and if they are always supported and directed to love.

*Sabatino Majorano C.Ss.R.*  
*0200 Naples*