

August 1, 2012
Solemnity of St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori

**TO REDEMPTORIST MISSIONARIES, LAY ASSOCIATES, SISTERS AND FRIENDS OF THE
CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER**

Dear Confreres, Brothers and Sisters,

THE ALPHONSIAN ACADEMY AND MORAL THEOLOGY

Greetings on this Solemnity of St. Alphonsus Maria Liguori! As we celebrate the feast of our founder and father, there are so many dimensions of his life, witness, spirituality and theology to remember with joy and to imitate with fidelity. Today, I would like to highlight his great legacy as a Moral Theologian and Pastor.

1. St. Alphonsus, Moral Theology and the Alphonsian Academy

St. Alphonsus claimed that he learned his moral theology primarily from hearing the confessions of poor, country people. It was his commitment to the abandoned, and especially the poor which formed and shaped his missionary spirit. This commitment urged him to continue to research, study and write on moral theology as bishop of Sant'Agata and even after his retirement to Pagani. His concern for a pastoral moral theology permeated his spiritual and doctrinal works, as well as his praxes for confessors, missionaries, bishops and pastors.

When Fr. Leonard Buijs founded the Alphonsian Academy on February 9, 1949, he implemented a decision of the 1947 General Chapter to continue this tradition so vital to the Charism of our Congregation – to research, study and reflect on moral theology in the context of a changing cultural and historical reality. For St. Alphonsus, the study and teaching of moral theology was a service to the Congregation, and especially to the whole Church. Not only did his work help prepare our confreres for the ministry of preaching, reconciliation and pastoral guidance of people – his research provided concrete assistance to bishops, pastors, confessors and seminarians. The Alphonsian Academy continues this tradition in our age.

2. The Academy as Congregational Priority: Decision of the XXIV General Chapter

The XXIV General Chapter (November 2009) reflected on the mission of the Alphonsian Academy today. The President, Fr. Martin McKeever, invited the Capitulars to face the challenges confronting the Academy and this ministry. His presentation provoked a reflection on the necessary and mutual relationship of the Congregation with the Academy, which involves the professors, the Redemptorist and other students, and the financial stability of the Academy.

The XXIV General Chapter subsequently declared that. **“The Alphonsian Academy is one of the common apostolates and priorities of the Congregation with which all Units must collaborate generously and effectively. This collaboration includes the choice and composition of the body of Professors and financial aid” (Decision 13)**

Over the next few months, each Conference of the Congregation will gather in the Mid-Sexennial Meetings to consider, among other matters, how we are effectively implementing the Decisions of the XXIV General Chapter. In this context, I am writing this letter to the whole Congregation. As we continue the process of restructuring the Congregation for the sake of the mission, I am convinced that the Alphonsian Academy has an important role to play – not only for the Congregation, but for the sake of the Universal Church.

3. The Bologna Process and the Strategic Plan for the Academy

At the present time, countries in Europe are engaged in a process of developing uniform standards for accreditation of academic institutions. This process has been accepted by Italy. It has also been affirmed by the Vatican for all pontifical universities and academies. Thus, it must be embraced by the Academy as well. Without going into the details of this complicated process, it is important to know that the Academy must prepare a Strategic Plan as part of its participation in this process. The appropriate authorities in the Academy will prepare the plan for the areas in which they have competence, involving the program, policies, etc.

At the same time, the Congregation together with the Academy must address the major challenges of ensuring financial stability and a qualified corps of Redemptorist professors. It will be impossible to address these challenges without the full support, collaboration and partnership of the Congregation. When the XXIV General Chapter decided that the Academy is a common apostolate and priority of the Congregation, it insisted on the responsibility of all the Units to collaborate in the mission of the Academy.

4. Collaboration of the Congregation and the Academy

Recognizing that the Alphonsian Academy exercises its mission and ministry in relationship to the Lateran University and the Congregation for Catholic Education, I am also aware that the care of the Academy has been entrusted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and in particular to the Superior General who assumes the responsibility of Moderator General of the Academy. Among my responsibilities is the task of promoting the relationship of the Academy and the Congregation, especially in relationship to the choice and composition of the body of Professors, as well as ensuring financial stability.

It is also important to strengthen this relationship between the Congregation and the Academy by recognizing and appreciating what the Academy offers to the Congregation, as well as to the Universal Church, such as:

- Regular courses leading to the Licence and Doctorate degrees.

- The journal *Studia Moralia* with articles for study and reflection. This journal is now available online as well.
- Moral Theology Congresses, which are open to the confreres.
- Short renewal courses for the confreres, such as “Moral Issues in Pastoral Ministry”, the two-week course in English offered in Thailand, June 17-30, 2012. Another course is being planned in Spanish for 2013.
- Individual professors from the Academy are always willing to offer talks, workshops, or short courses in different Units and Conferences.

4.1 Redemptorist Professors and Students

As a common apostolate and priority of the Congregation, it is important that the Academy is served by a body of Professors which includes a significant number of Redemptorists committed to its mission. When a Redemptorist Missionary is called to exercise his ministry as a Professor at the Academy, he does so for the sake of the mission of the world-wide Congregation. It is not a question of personal preference and choice. Confreres such as Fr. Capone and Vereecke, Häring and Hitz, as well as many others too numerous to mention, have formed part of this body of Professors committed to excellence in Moral Theology. This tradition of excellence has continued. However, as we look to the future, the Congregation must make important choices and decisions so that the next generation of Professors will be ready to respond to this call.

It is only be possible to assure that there will be Redemptorist Professors available for the Academy by ensuring that confreres are prepared now. I am convinced that we must encourage more Units to send Redemptorist confreres to study at the Academy and elsewhere not only to provide excellent professors for the initial formation of our students, but also to develop the pool of candidates available to teach and undertake research at Academy. I urge the Conferences and the individual Units to carefully consider how they can collaborate in this area.

4.2 Financial Stability

As you are aware, the whole Congregation has experienced the effects of the financial crisis of recent years. This crisis has also affected the Academy. Over the years, many Units have contributed financially to support this ministry which is a priority for the Congregation. Some of these Provinces are no longer able to contribute as generously as in the past. We are certainly grateful for the financial commitment they have carried out, which is a sign of real solidarity and a service to the whole Church. I am also aware that different ways of ensuring this solidarity must be found today in light of our changed situation.

The Commission for Economic Solidarity, the General Financial Secretariat, and the General Government are exploring more effective ways of ensuring the financial stability of the Alphonsian Academy. This will only be possible in solidarity with the Congregation on many levels. Long-term solutions to the financial challenges must be found. However, in the short-term, we must also find sources of new income to sustain the present quality of the Academy.

4.3 Promotion of the Academy in the Conferences and Units of the Congregation

The relationship between the Congregation and the Alphonsian Academy must go beyond providing a body of Professors and financial stability. Recognizing the Academy as a ‘common apostolate and priority’ of the Congregation requires a renewed vision of this relationship and collaboration. This vision and mind-set challenges the Congregation to promote the study of moral theology and the Academy within the Congregation. It also encourages us to promote the Academy in the local Church, both as an institute to prepare moral theologians – diocesan priests, religious and lay people – and as a resource for research in moral theology and ongoing formation. At the same time, it invites the Academy to continue its initiatives to assist the whole Congregation and the Universal Church in serious moral reflection through writing, workshops, and other programs.

5. Conclusion: The Academy, the Redemptorists and St. Alphonsus

Missionary and pastoral experience convinced St. Alphonsus of the importance of Moral Theology as an integral dimension of the Charism of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. He devoted time, study, and enormous effort to his *Theologia Moralis*. His spirituality is founded on a deep conviction that the Christian moral life is based on and shaped by the practice of love of Jesus Christ and uniformity with the Will of God. These lead to sanctity. For St. Alphonsus, moral theology is not merely an independent theological discipline, but a vital and integral praxis for the effective proclamation of the Good News of ‘Copiosa Redemptio’ in Jesus Christ – and this proclamation is directed to the most abandoned and the poor.

The XXIV General Chapter affirmed this fundamental conviction of St. Alphonsus, and identified the Alphonsian Academy as a concrete priority in order to realize it today. As part of the ongoing process of renewal and restructuring for the sake of the mission, the Congregation must also examine and renew the vision and role of the Academy as a means of proclaiming the Gospel ever anew.

May the wisdom and commitment of St. Alphonsus inspire us to continue his vision of study, research, teaching and writing on moral theology so that all who are called to redemption and holiness may find the inspiration and hope they need in order to do God’s will in all things.

As we celebrate his feast with joy and hope, let us follow the example of his life with confidence and fidelity. May our Mother of Perpetual Help always accompany us.

Your brother in the Redeemer,


Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

Superior General