

**SAINT
ALPHONSUS
AND TODAY'S
PRIEST**

**ALBINO CARDINAL LUCIANI
(Pope John Paul I)**

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Patriarch of Venice
(Pope John Paul I)

One hundred years ago...1873
ST. ALPHONSUS was declared a
DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH...

A Letter
To the Priests of Venice
Holy Thursday, 1972

**Translated from the Italian by William Nayden,
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(For Private Circulation)

Introduction by Cardinal Luciani

... Before composing this letter I reread some of the shorter works of St. Alphonsus and consulted several authors. These latter I shall not cite by name. On the other hand, I would call the reader's attention to Oreste Gregorio's "Monsignore si diverte" (The Bishop had a sense of humor), Ediz. Paoline, 1962. This lively monograph was written by an Alphonsian expert. I have drawn from it continually. However, to avoid overburdening the text I have again omitted explicit citations. My lapse will, I hope, be a fortunate one if this brief work of mine should induce the reader to procure Gregorio's study for himself and so to come to know much better a Saint so much in tune with his own time and with ours.

A.L.

Editor's note: *while the text make reference to priests, to whom the letter was originally addressed and the use at times of non-inclusive language, the applications can be made for all of our Redemptorist Family.*



I. ALPHONSUS ... AN UNFLAPPABLE SAINT!

1. A mini-bibliography

My dear brother priests:

A saint's life is a living translation of the Gospel, and so I shall be explaining the Gospel when I speak of St. Alphonsus. We are celebrating the centenary of his being declared a Doctor of the Church. He is a unique Doctor... in fact, alone of the thirty-odd Doctors of the Church, Alphonsus is "the most zealous Doctor." Today of course we would regard him as a "pastoral Doctor"!

I assume you are familiar with his life. It was a long one...almost 91 years...and can readily be divided into five periods.

1. The first 27 years reveal a young Neapolitan patrician, unusually gifted... I might say, an intellectual prodigy. At the age of twelve he passed the examination in Rhetoric under G. B. Vico and matriculated at the University. At sixteen he was awarded the doctorate in civil and canon law. By the time he was twenty Alphonsus was one of the stars of the courts...a noble, a lawyer and an ambassador! In the meanwhile, he had studied philosophy, literature and mathematics, he learned to play the piano and to compose music. He also developed a talent for painting, sculpture and poetry.

2. From the age of 27 to 31. Giving up the practice of law after losing that famous case, Alphonsus decided to embrace the priesthood and so began the study of theology. This was his first "conversion". He became a priest at 30 and there followed the ministry of teaching the rudiments of the faith to the urchins and peasant folk, of preaching to the fishermen and fishmongers, the laborers, porters and hack drivers...all more or less unemployed...and the so-called drifters and prostitutes who were rarely unemployed! The young preacher Alphonsus was remarkably popular...the target of nigh universal greeting in the streets of Naples, and of genuine popular reverence even in the most wretched quarters of the city.

3. His second "conversion" occurred when he was 36. At Scala, just above and inland from Amalfi, he came upon the goatherds and shepherds in the hills...utterly benighted folk with whom no one ... indeed, no one... bothered. What could be done for these poor folk? The beggars and drifters of Naples, if they wanted to, at least had access to priests and churches. But these goatherds? "You do something for them", prompted his friend Falcoia, the Bishop of Castellamare.

Alphonsus' response was to found the Congregation of mission preachers, the Redemptorists.

4. For nearly 30 years then he preached missions until he was appointed Bishop of St. Agatha of the Goths, a tiny diocese near Naples. He lived there for 13 years. During his seventh year as Bishop, Alphonsus was afflicted with both cervical and lumbar arthrosis...a degenerative disease that attacks the cartilage surrounding the bone joints. It rendered the bishop's legs nearly useless and bent his head forward until his chin touched his chest! He sent his resignation to Pope Clement XIII, who declined to accept it. He tried again with Clement XIV with the same response. Finally, Pius VI accepted it.

5. Alphonsus spent his last 13 years in Pagani. He was almost entirely deaf and blind. His head curved forcibly into his chest. Withal he remained most active until the very end, writing books, receiving visitors and praying.

2. HE COULD SMILE MAGNIFICENTLY...because he was a SAINT!

6. There were more than sixty priests anxious to fill the vacant see of St. Agatha of the Goths in 1762. No one even dreamed it would be given to Alphonsus who was already over sixty-five. It was Cardinal Spinelli, the Archbishop of Naples who suggested Alphonsus' name to Clement XIII. "He is a new face," explained Spinelli, "and a man of Extraordinary merit." On March 9, 1762 the Nuncio at Naples dispatched a messenger to Pagani with the appointment. While the Redemptorists were elated, Alphonsus was simply stunned. Someone, to console him, said: "You can always decline it". Alphonsus barely heard the suggestion when he decided to act upon it. He went to his desk and sat down, pondered briefly over the wording, then wrote out and gave his regrets to the messenger, along with a handsome tip. Quite pleased with himself he confided a bit later to a friend, "It cost me an hour's time and four ducats, but I wouldn't trade the Congregation for all the gold in China!"

However, the Holy Father insisted and so Alphonsus' only course was to obey. Now begins the tale of the Bishop-elect's new robes and gear...the which was anything but simple at that time. His wealthy brother suggested he acquire an apartment in Naples.

"I'm supposed to live in my diocese," replied Alphonsus... "if I go to Naples all I'll need is a few wicker chairs."

Others mentioned coaches and livery for the drivers. He answered, "Do you expect me to run around Naples like some flashy pimp?"

All sorts of congratulations and compliments came his way. Alphonsus handled them in characteristic fashion: "You don't realize what being a bishop involves...or what it means to have to account to God for the souls of others."

He was consecrated in Rome. First there was the formal canonical examination in the presence of the Pope. Someone had explained to Alphonsus that on this occasion it was the custom for the bishop-elect to deliver a speech of gratitude to the Holy Father. He managed that with his usual incisiveness: "Most Holy Father, since You have deigned to make me a bishop, pray now that I may not lose my soul!"

It was suggested that Alphonsus request permission to wear his zucchetto even during Mass. "Great!" he replied, "now you want me to pay for the privilege of being discourteous to the Lord!"

He made his solemn entry into the diocese to the accompaniment of huge throngs and rounds of mortar fire. During the procession from the episcopal residence to the cathedral, Alphonsus walked bareheaded. One of the canons demurred: "That is not allowed! You're supposed to wear your red hat with the green tassels." "I don't have one," said Alphonsus, "but if it means so much to you, I'll wear my predecessor's." The latter's hat still lay on the prelate's tomb...layered with dust! With obvious reluctance, the master of ceremonies fetched the dusty hat. Alphonsus, without further ado...and with typical indifference regarding his personal "image," clamped the hat on his head and proceeded splendidly into the cathedral.

From these few incidents one can readily discern in Alphonsus the man of humor and easy joy ...the sort of man who could compose, for example, "Tu scendi dalle stelle!"

7. As a rule real joy springs from genuine virtue...of which Alphonsus had plenty. Most of all he had his special love for God and souls. We might well regard the most devout and useful of his works, "The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ," as in fact his autobiography. It mirrors his own life perfectly especially in the affections and prayers that conclude each chapter. As a matter of fact, nearly all of Alphonsus' works begin with and are studded throughout with jewels of devout prayer. He exemplifies to the letter what Kirkegaard had to say: "He speaks about and to God on behalf of his fellowmen," referring to the true theologian. We might add, "He speaks...as Alphonsus speaks!" In all his books, from the brief "Eternal Maxims" to the massive, monumental "Moral Theology," he writes about and to God entirely for his fellowmen. You can sense this just from reading him. I'll mention but one example: "Dear reader, my intention in writing the 'Moral Theology' is not just to offer a treatise on human acts, replete with theoretical questions. It is focused entirely on the practical and I have in mind rather to promote the salvation of souls and therefore I have selected matters that are the most

useful and practical, which you need to know to be good confessors. (1) In a word, I am offering what is practical and helpful for confessors who are beset not by speculative questions but by souls!" He continues: "Were I to do otherwise, would not I be wasting my time writing of such matters and would not you be wasting yours, in reading them?" (2)

8. Alphonsus' love for God lent a lamblike meekness to his character in affairs of his own person. It also gave him the fortitude of the lion when there was a question of the glory of God or the well-being of souls.

There once was a priest who lost his temper and heaped reproaches on the Saint. When one of the Canons overheard the priest, he insisted that Alphonsus put the man in his place. The Saint replied: "My dear Canon, I've struggled for forty years to acquire a bit of patience and now you want me to throw it all away over a trifle!"

On another occasion the village "dentist" put Alphonsus through the tortures of the damned to extract his last tooth. When the time came to pay the bill, the Saint winked at the anxious fellow and said: "Sire, you've just wrenched your last fee from me!"

Alphonsus, however, did not hesitate to record some rather pungent reflections on the famous minister Tanucci...a regalist who followed in Naples the pattern and policy of his King in Austria, Joseph "The Sacristan." The Saint, in this vein, wrote on one occasion: "The Marquis Tanucci says that I am a saint and that my vicar general is a rogue. He has told two lies! I am not a saint nor is my vicar general a rogue."

Again, when confronted with a new abuse from the civil authorities, Alphonsus ordered his vicar general to draw up the papers of Excommunication. He was determined to see the matter through. "If necessary," he added, "I'll sell my miter to pay our court costs!"

9. Even in the practice of poverty, he imitated Christ to perfection as I suggested earlier. He who as a young nobleman had enjoyed the services of a lackey wherever he went, as a bishop exercised the virtue of poverty both as to interior detachment and to external appearances. When someone came upon him once garbed in his fancy robes, the startled man asked: "Are you going to pontificate, Bishop?" "No," Alphonsus replied, "they are mending my regular cassock." He did not even have a spare cassock! He used to say in fact: "An old cassock becomes an old bishop. I've got to think about getting clothes for the poor."

When someone suggested he get a fancier ring... one more suited to the episcopal dignity...Alphonsus glanced at the one on his finger and replied: "Don't you realize I smashed one of our better decanters to get this stone."

He arrived stone-poor in the diocese...and he left it even poorer... leaving it "in the state of grace and toting his few ragged belongings in a little hamper." He wrote at the time to his brother: "I hope to receive a small pension...enough to live on...from the Holy Father and from the College of Doctors in Naples. If not...I'll manage on my mass stipend to buy a bit of soup each day."

So Alphonsus accepted mass stipends! At the age of 72 he devoted an entire tract to the liceity of stipends and the various abuses that might arise in the matter. He also wrote about ecclesiastical benefices... nor even dreamed of disputing their propriety. On the contrary, he was a most conscientious administrator of his own episcopal benefice, constantly seeking ways of improving the yield of its farms and orchards. Thus, he tried to introduce agricultural methods he had learned in his studies as a youth. He planted olive groves, vineyards, elms and poplars. He planted mulberry bushes for the cultivation of silkworms. All of that he did not just for himself, to be sure. He once said: "I'm not quite like the sainted bishop, St. Thomas of Villanova who found his granary miraculously filled with wheat." Still, he would gladly have worked such miracles for the poor!

10. He did, however, work another sort of miracle that of devoting himself entirely to God and his fellowman for many long years. He vowed to give every moment of his time to God and souls. He slept very little. Whatever it cost him in effort or discomfort even in the hottest summer weather, or when he was ill, he continued to work and pray. In the last years of his life, he turned his very modest cot into a writing desk. Shortly after he became a bishop, he was asked whether he wanted the piano he occasionally played for relaxation and recreation brought to St. Agatha's. He said no. "A bishop's recreation is to give ear to all who call on him, especially the poor. He should pray rather than play!" Though often asked to play a tune he inevitably declined with gentle, smiling determination. The only indulgence he allowed himself was to scan the newspaper to keep abreast of developments in Italy and Europe...and an occasional pinch of snuff!

When his migraine headaches grew more painful than usual, he'd press to his throbbing head a damp cloth or a cold stone...but he kept on working. They spoke of him as "the Neapolitan who never wastes a moment!"

A GLANCE AT OUR OWN LIVES!!!

Let's look at ourselves now in this mirror of pleasant sanctity and face certain questions in regard to our own lives.

11. Can we say that we are also joyous and optimistic persons? "God loves a cheerful giver!" (3) That is God's Word and it is my belief that He is referring to a true interior joyfulness, not an occasional "on again - off again" sort of joy. What kind of advertisement do we priests project for our vocation if we appear as souls chronically freighted with impossible problems and crises? Why should we give the impression that we lack that gift of Fortitude...offered by the Spirit...when long before Christianity began, it was already a cliché to say that Romans were men of vigor and courage under stress?

12. You say you have problems with personnel? This has always been a thorn for bishops...finding the right man for the job and often enough, finding the right job for the man...with all kinds of conditions and circumstances to be weighed. Alphonsus settled his own personal problem through the practice of the virtue of faith: "The Pope wants me to be a bishop...then I'll be a bishop.

When He does not wish me to govern a diocese any more, I'll be glad to accept that too!" It was not entirely easy for him to say that, as he did, at a time when he had actually fallen from grace with the Holy Father.

However, not even Alphonsus always succeeded in solving personnel problems when they concerned other people. Sometimes he had to simply refuse certain requests. Then too, some of his subjects often went over his head to the Pope or the King and then he found himself in the position of having to defend himself before higher authorities and even so, to bear the pain of having refused the requests. Is there some spiritual norm or principle to guide us here? "Our desires are our own worst enemies" (St. Teresa). "Why should we build castles in Spain when we are living in France? (Francis de Sales) Let me recall for you what St. Paul had to say in this regard: "Then indeed praise from the Lord shall come for each one of you." (4) I might add here that Paul at the time found himself in what we might call an impossible situation. Some of his long-time co-workers were preaching Christ in competition with Paul. This but intensified the duress of his imprisonment in Rome. In response, he wrote, with a rather admirable generosity: "Only one thing really matters. That in one way or another, in loyalty or disloyalty, Christ is being preached...and in that I rejoice, and I always shall!"(5)

13. Love for God and our fellowman is the heart and soul of our lives. Loving God we can muster the courage and strength" to be chaste, detached and obedient. Without that love holiness or our priestly life

becomes impossible. St. Alphonsus captioned his "Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ" with these words of St. Francis de Sales: "Some construe perfection as austerity in lifestyle; others as prayer or almsgiving; but they are wrong. Perfection means loving God with your whole heart!" (6)

14. You may say you have a problem combining Christlike meekness with vigorous, energetic zeal. Some try to handle this problem in just the opposite way from that of Alphonsus. They are quite aggressive in promoting their own affairs but rather casual and tolerant, even remiss if not simply "permissive" when it comes to pursuing God's business. That is wrong!

15. Concerning poverty and detachment...Madam Roland, just before losing her head to the guillotine, during the French Revolution, remarked: "Ah Liberty! How many crimes are wrought in your name!"

At present I am inclined towards the sort of priestly poverty proclaimed in the Gospel and in the Second Vatican Council, and I would say: "Ah blest Poverty! How much good and alas! How much faddish nonsense, how much sheer confusion is uttered in your name!"

On the other hand, the Council put it succinctly and well in two lines: "Even though they must attend to the needs of all men, priests have a special obligation towards the poor and the weak to whom the Lord himself felt particularly close and whose evangelization is regarded as a distinctive mark of the mission of the Messiah." (7)

16. What about our relaxation and recreation? You and I are not necessarily called to imitate Alphonsus' heroicity here...nor ever to avoid wasting a moment's time. We are expected, however, to use our time wisely and well...not to fritter it away in idle chit-chat or in recreation that well may be scandalous to the laity, or in superfluous travel. The old breviary lesson used to say of our St. Lawrence Justinian: "No matter what the hour, he was always available." Some of our modern clerics, however, seem to have adopted the motto of the Germans: "The only worthwhile life is to travel!" They are always off on some trip...may the Lord bless them somehow!

II. ALPHONSUS, SHEPHERD OF SOULS

1. Preacher of Christ's Gospel.

The recent Synod stressed that a priest's mission "must begin with the preaching of God's word" (8).

Few have understood or practiced this as Alphonsus did. He had a truly remarkable confidence in the efficacy of preaching and he preached in every way possible for him at the time... by word of mouth, by his writings. He constantly commended to others the practice of preaching. He himself organized and supervised his subjects' preaching. He insisted on the necessity of matching their preaching to the capacity of the audience, especially in the case of the simpler folk. He knew how to read the signs of his times while remaining ever faithful to the word of God.

Since most of his people could neither read nor write, Alphonsus the Bishop, shortly after taking possession of his See, composed a very simple, clear catechism for his flock. He had it printed and distributed to everyone of the churches in the diocese, with the precise order to put the catechism in a special place where it would be always readily available. It was to be read to the people after every feastday Mass.

He went even further: "It should be read with suitable pauses so that the people can follow it." On retiring from St. Agatha's thirteen years later Alphonsus wrote: "Once again I beg my priests to read and explain my little catechism to the people and let the pastors see to it that it is indeed read and read properly... and have the people repeat it after you."

18. When He was first ordained Alphonsus organized his famous "cappelle serotine" (literally, evening chapels ... groups formed in various parts of the city, meeting regularly at neighborhood churches of an evening for prayer and instruction.) What he had in mind was to restore to the neglected and downtrodden folk of the city a sense of their religious and personal dignity, by means of plain clear instruction. Within a few years there were over 300 such groups and more than 30,000 participants!

After founding the Redemptorists, he devoted over thirty years of his life to the preaching of popular missions and retreats for priests, seminarians and sisters. He labored without let-up under the severest difficulties. His preaching was thoroughly persuasive, utterly convincing... born of his own conviction. In a brief work he sent every Italian bishop... before he entered the ranks of the hierarchy himself... in which he said: "He who is not familiar with mission preaching and the sort of confessions made

during such missions can never grasp how efficacious and worthwhile they are. On the mission it is nigh impossible to escape conversion to God. One can fairly feel the band of God at work along with the missionary..." Regarding retreats "made in proper peace and tranquility," he said, "it is to this devout practice I owe my own conversion and resolution to leave the world".

19. In Alphonsus' time too, there were those who believed a bit of elegant jargon and fuzzy abstraction enhanced their preaching. Barette, writing in the Literary Whip, condemned such a style and warned: "Putting simple things simply is not a simple matter but rather among the most difficult to manage". Alphonsus sides with Barette. He does not care for "sermons of empty, rumbling rhetoric or preaching that consists of flashy display... like fireworks they make much noise but afterwards all you have is a bit of smoke and charred paper. " He then goes on to detailed prescriptions. "When you are dealing with simple folk," he advises, "you will find it is better to say 'give' rather than 'impart.' Do not say 'dwelling' but 'house', nor 'spine' but 'back', not 'enable' but 'help'. Choose those words most readily understandable to the whole audience. Remove all the fancy words from your sermon and use everyday, normal language". Alphonsus once reproved with unusual frankness a preacher who had just delivered himself of a bombastic panegyric: "You have managed to betray both Christ and the people." About himself, however, he could well say: "I may have to account to God for every other sort of sin, but not for improper preaching. For I always have preached in a way that everyone could understand me".

To make sure he would be understood by his listeners, Alphonsus made frequent use of simple, familiar metaphors... a pedagogical method as old as communication itself... and ever timely at that. He proved in fact to be a master of the apt image and illustration and his ascetical writings in particular abound in helpful imagery. I will just give you an example... from the first point of the second consideration in his Preparation for Death. There are two pages in which Alphonsus aims to reach his reader's heart and move his will with the following idea: "Death grips everybody. Alphonsus then adduces two texts from the Scriptures: Ezeckiel 7,2 (the end is coming) and James 4,5 (life is like a mist that lingers for but a brief while). He quotes St. Basil (contemplating a cemetery to try to determine who was a servant and who a master), then Seneca (we are born unequal but we die on an equal footing), Horace (death pairs the scepter with the hoe). In citing these masters however, Alphonsus includes three graphic illustrations of his own:

1. Thomas a' Kempis' brother was quite proud of the lovely house he had built. However, a friend pointed out an egregious defect. What is it? You put a door in the house. What's wrong with putting a door in a house? The friend replied: Someday through that door they will

carry you out...dead...and you will have to leave behind your wonderful house.

2. Saladin, ruler of vast Asian realms, as he lay dying gave the order that in his funeral procession a servant should precede his bier carrying his shirt aloft on a pole and crying out: this is all Saladin carries to his grave!

One day Alexander the Great watched Diogenes searching anxiously for something amidst a pile of skulls: "What are you looking for?", asked Alexander, his curiosity piqued? Diogenes replied, "I'm looking for your father's skull and I can't tell Philip's from any other. If you can find it, do let me know".

Let me comment on the above... in the words of Alphonsus himself: "In order that this work (Prep. for Death) might help the preaching of those priests who may not have all the books or time to read them, I have cited briefly the most suitable texts from Scripture and the Fathers... in the way they should be quoted in sermons. In this vein I have tried to identify the best contributions of many authors... those I regard as most apt to move your listeners". (9)

It should be clear to us that such a labor involved considerable research and organization of material.

In a letter dated June 2, 1757 Alphonsus mentions that "I have read hundreds of books to prepare this short treatise".

2. The Apostle of the Sacraments and pious devotion

The 1971 Synod of Bishops said: "The ministry of the Word, properly understood, moves the faithful to receive the Sacraments and to lead truly Christian lives."(10)

We do not expect to find Alphonsus liturgically in tune with Vatican II. Still his liturgical sense was rather profoundly developed. He intended his missions to culminate in genuine conversion... a conversion effected principally by a good confession. Before the advent of Alphonsus the latter was by no means a simple matter... in an age overcast with Jansenism and rigorism. He made the business of confession easier, as we shall indicate below, through his strenuous efforts to promote the moral system of equiprobabilism. Today some may view Alphonsus as a fairly strict moralist... in his time he seemed to many to be too lax and permissive and was so charged before the Pope. During his lifetime and after his death he was violently criticized by many theologians, protestant, old-catholic and orthodox. As a matter of fact, Alphonsus had the right idea about confession: it is the sacrament of God's mercy, the soul's life-preserver, the Red Cross aid for wounded souls. These, having turned from sin to God, are healed through this sacrament, strengthened in their faith and good resolutions. Confession is not a slot-

machine popping out forgiveness at the touch of a lever. Nor is it meant to lure the sinner to further sin.

Concerning the Eucharist, few have written with more affection than Alphonsus. For him, the Mass is the main thing. In his short tract "The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ," written in 1755, he anticipated our modern liturgical movement even though his theory of sacrifice is no longer fashionable. In the Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament, moreover, there frequently appears the idea of the presence of Christ in the tabernacle and our visits to the Sacrament as somehow a continuation of the morning Mass or an anticipation of the morrow's. In his little book "On Frequent Communion" written in 1762, Alphonsus responded to the gloomy, forbidding views of Jansen and paved the way for the broadening reforms of Pope Pius X.

22. We should remember too that in addition to the Mass and the Sacraments Alphonsus promoted other pious devotions. After all he was a Neapolitan! He understood..and rightly so...that a religion meant for the masses must appeal not only to the head but also to the senses and the heart. Besides, according to the Council (11), if our religious and liturgical activity is properly organized, pious devotions will have a rightful place therein. Alphonsus invariably sought the practical and the real; he always tried to avoid the outlandish and the fanciful. Should there be devotion to the Blessed Mother? Certainly! he replied, but he pointed out the signs of genuine devotion to Mary: a desire for conversion, frequent prayer of recourse to the Blessed Virgin and of homage to her, the imitation of her virtues, zeal to make her known and loved. Should we venerate her picture? Yes! But visit her especially when she is neglected by the crowd! He seemed to look askance at the merely tourist interest in Our Lady's shrines.

3. Alphonsus Director and Guide of the Community

Together with his preaching and writing Alphonsus gave his flock what the Synod referred to as "proper pastoral service"...rendered with a happy blend of firmness and gentleness.

Almost as soon as he took the reins of the diocese, he drew up very wise guidelines for the studies and discipline in the seminary. In his first year as bishop he had printed here in Venice a summary manual of his Moral Theology "to be used in the seminary of St. Agatha of the Goths" (1763). He introduced Gregorian chant and figured music. Everytime the seminarians sang in the cathedral he sent them a gift of those famous Neapolitan goodies...sfogliatelle: (an ethereal pastry shell filled with exquisitely creamy custard. TR.) On another occasion when an overwrought canon cuffed one of the seminarians, Alphonsus expressed

his chagrin: "That lad's parents gave him to my care...I have to be like a father to him!"

He was a true apostle of vocations. After one of his more impassioned sermons, fifteen youngsters asked to be admitted to God's service. Still Alphonsus was quite strict in his standards for selecting candidates for the priesthood. Another time some character ran on at great length trying to persuade the bishop to admit a certain stumblebum to the priesthood. When he had finished his pitch, Alphonsus asked if he had anything further to say: "No? Then you might as well realize you have been talking to a stone wall". There simply was no way to induce him to admit the man's unsuitable client to ordination.

24. With his priests too he showed a fortuitous blend of firmness and kindness. This meant that Alphonsus had his hands full showing them affection, helping them avoid the perils of idleness, ignorance and indifference. So, he communicated often with them. There was a brief tract written in 1760 even before he became bishop: "Careless Recitation of the Mass and the Office." In 1765, the year before his resignation from the diocese, he produced for his priests the "Translation of the Psalms"... a valuable help for the reading of the breviary. Another aid he provided them was The Selva, a collection of sermon suggestions and a useful guide for preaching. Along with his writings, he gave his priests lavishly of his time and interest and affection...his understanding and his unfailing inspiration.

Since it was unlawful to hold a diocesan synod, Alphonsus provided for his flock by letters to be read in all the churches. These offered directives concerning the reformation of morals, the reduction of alcoholism, the avoidance of blasphemy, etc. In those days government concern for daycare centers and elementary schools in the country-side was practically nonexistent. Alphonsus, however, supplied what he could in this area: he opened his own residence to the children of the working folk whose workday lasted from dawn to dusk. At his own expense he arranged for the children's care and sustenance. On one occasion, to relieve the famine that afflicted the area, he sold his ring, his pectoral cross, the silver table service and his coach. To someone who wanted to hold onto at least the coach, Alphonsus said; "I don't enjoy seeing those mules standing idly in the stall all year... not to mention the drivers in the tavern, while the poor cry out for help." Nor was this all he did...he served his flock with all he had, with his whole being, his time, his talent, his health. Like St. Paul, he would gladly spend himself and let himself be spent for their salvation. (12)

Let's look at our own lives again!

25. Regarding catechetical instruction. I wonder whether in the new revision of the Code of Canon Law, the former penalty of excommunication will still hold for those who strike a priest? I suppose not. It might be better, I would think, if there were a penalty of the opposite sort: "He who strikes a priest who habitually neglects the catechetical apostolate will incur not excommunication but complete approval of his deed. Such blows will be regarded as inflicted under the inspiration not of Satan but of the Angels".

There is much talk these days about the form and content of catechetics ...and that may be all to the good. However, let us insist on the fundamentals. There should be updated methods, further studies, new areas explored etc., but let us not ever forget what is most important, the heart and soul of our catechetical instruction. Try to avoid speaking of "re-interpretation"... that is an ambiguous word. It seems to suggest that today we may interpret the substance of our teaching differently from yesterday. Updating is all right...but not at the cost of our being misunderstood. What if with all our updating we fail to move the youngsters' hearts? Needless to say, We can't inflame others unless we ourselves glow with the Lord's fire! "If you want to make me weep, you must first weep yourself. (Horace).

26. "Macbeth does murder sleep!" says Shakespeare's hero. For my part I wish I could say, regarding our retreats, that our priests have not murdered the silence.

With Thomas a Kempis I believe: "the devout soul grows in virtue in peace and silence". To me, recollection is a necessary element of "custody of the heart". When the followers of Aristotle declared "Man becomes wise through rest and ease," (*sedendo et quiescendo homo fit sapiens*), they were stretching things a bit today, however it would seem the exaggeration is in the opposite direction: "Wisdom comes with bustle and noise!" (*currendo et clamando homo fit sapiens*). The familiar abhorrence of a vacuum has become an abhorrence of silence. If matters continue as they are, we shall no longer be able to refer to our retreats as "withdrawals into solitude" as St. Alphonsus wished them to be. Rather they will be literally "parliaments" or perhaps assemblies of "flappers and flagellants"... what with all the tongue-flapping and snapping that goes on. Joking aside, I would like our retreats to mean in all truth a withdrawal from the tumult, a genuine rest for the spirit.

27. Alphonsus' writings extended and multiplied his preaching. Some of our current pamphlets and brochures that issue from the parish mimeographs are quite different...they more nearly resemble cardboard priests that find their way into the parishioners' homes. Occasionally on

reading them I can't help but exclaim "Right on! You can say that again! Other times I'm forced to say, no, that's not the way to put it. Saying that only serves to divide the people. It's a waste of time, talent and money."

28. Today a bishop would simply be labelled paternalistic were he to send dainty pastries to the altar- or choir-boys ...and possibly even worse. In some places they don't want goodies of that sort... they want to do away with the seminary entirely. They say a future priest should grow up and mature in the midst of a Christian community ... a "normal" human community such as the one from which he came. The seminary just uproots a young man, distorts his personality and at best gives him a merely intellectual, deceptively artificial education. It's the Christian community itself that should be led gradually to the level of virtue at which it can provide proper formation...without additional, special structures for candidates for the priesthood. Our present method of handling the recruitment and formation of vocations is actually an offense against the Holy Spirit in that it induces indifference...a hands-off attitude among the faithful. The latter shift what is indeed their proper responsibility to vocation directors and men in charge of formation, and so they lose direct contact with and interest in the young men's progress towards the priesthood. People who think in such a fashion seem at times to be smitten with acute anguish: "They want to make us a special caste here in the seminary! And here in the seminary there can be no proper experience of life as it is, with its day- to-day problems, etc." They reach a point at which they finish their studies and then cannot bring themselves to accept ordination: The seminary has not given us the proper formation. We need extra courses...outside...to save our vocation as priest!"

We can, to some degree, sympathize with this point of view...but it is not very reassuring. Before such a turn of affairs comes to pass in our diocese, I beg you priests to avoid encouraging in any way such a mentality, either in your discussions or your personal attitude.

I earnestly implore you to reflect seriously on this matter that we may not reap the harvest of imprudence and thoughtlessness.

Christ chose his apostles but He expected them to make a firm decision to follow Him in everything (13). He expected them to remain at His side for a long time. He kept them in touch with their world but removed from their own homes and normal occupations precisely so that they could bear witness to Him. (14) For His apostles He reserved a very special training. (15)

More than 2000 bishops gathered at the Council have declared that the Seminary, with suitable adaptations, is still a worthwhile instrument of priestly formation. To suggest the contrary...even in the name and spirit of the Council itself...requires a stout heart indeed!

Our present-day culture of conspicuous consumption is like a steamroller flattening out everyone and everything in its path. Shall we consign our future priests to such a fate?

One can't be a true priest unless he is a man of prayer and personally confident in his role of preaching Christ's message. It is precisely the seminary with its years of relative peace and quiet that enable a young man to develop the habit of prayer and a wholesome self-assurance regarding God's message.

What do we have to substitute for the seminary? Is it right to jettison proven institutions for experiments of dubious merit? The priest is human like everyone else...but he is also different. "He should grow up among the people!"...but he needs also to live with and in the light of other priests, and of their way of life.

27. Do we still believe in the service-role of authority in the Church? Do we actually regard ourselves as spiritual, moral guides of the faithful? I know today we are to be "brothers among the brethren"...but we should also be guides, so that we walk with them and among them, but we lead them to the Lord! Let me emphasize that we are meant to be true spiritual, moral guides. The faithful have more than enough political and economic guides. They need something else from us. It is true that the priest like any other citizen has a right to his political opinions. However, it is better for us to remain aloof from active participation in politics. Your political opinions publicly voiced can readily split the community apart. You can easily leave others under the impression that opinions differing from yours are wrong. Such a turn of affairs would serve but to renew the divisions within the clergy itself.

Let us by all means avoid that! There should be love and a gracious openness towards those who seem to follow paths other than ours... but let the love and graciousness reach first of all to our own flock! Let it not happen that the bishop and perhaps certain priests be the only ones denied a fellow priest's regard and affection because of political differences !

III. St. Alphonsus, the Theologian

1. A unique style of theology.

30. Alphonsus, the most zealous doctor, is the sort of theologian who deals with practical problems that require prompt solutions based on everyday experience. When he perceived that charity was beginning to revive in people's hearts, he set about writing a book on asceticism. When their faith and trust needed strengthening, he produced his works of dogma or moral.

To the fullest measure he marshalled the fruit of his studies, his apostolic experience so as to fashion works of extraordinary zeal and passion. He had acquired his knowledge of philosophy not only from aristotelian but from many other sources...whence his strong aversion to aimless speculation and over- subtle distinctions. His earlier study and practice of law had bred in him a wholesome respect for tradition and an insistence on clarification of complex issues. He had both the pulpit and the confessional to guide him concerning the urgent, immediate needs of souls at any given time. In a word, he was the right theologian at the right time!

In the official record of his Doctorate we find: "Others may have expatiated at greater length than he on the assigned arguments, but you will find none that has so thoroughly, clearly and vigorously disposed on the whole passel of contemporary errors." (16)

He had a special gift for synthesis. In fact, we quite frequently find in his works the phrases "let us sum up what we have written now...", "To answer the matter in a nutshell..", "in brief, we reply..", etc. Alphonsus was nigh obsessed with the need for clarity, for clear, plain expression. "In matters of this sort great clarity is needed," he wrote. "I have read many books on this subject but they are all vague and difficult to follow. Thus, I wished to write this book with special clarity in order to disabuse of their error those unfortunates who have been so deceived." (17)

"My intention is to describe and explain things so clearly that anyone will be able to understand them." (18)

Earlier I mentioned that Alphonsus was a thorough respecter of tradition. In his Moral Theology the opinions of 8,000 different theologians are discussed...over 34,000 quotations! Despite the careful documentation each of his works is a sort of living pulpit-in-print. Alphonsus marches forth from each book the prophets, the Apostles, the great Popes, the Doctors of the Church, the Martyrs, the more illustrious of the spiritual masters, especially St. Thomas, St. Francis de Sales and St. Teresa. They rather than Alphonsus do the talking. They...the greats of antiquity, of the Middle Ages and of modern times...in brief, Christian Tradition!

2. Dogmatic Theology.

I would like to single out among Alphonsus' dogmatic works, "The Truth of the Faith," written in 1767. There he offers an apologetic for Catholicism. He notes: "Catholicism is a revealed religion professed by individuals united within a special family called the Church. As a religion it is like other religions and is distinguished only from atheistic materialism. As a religion revealed by Christ, it is distinguished from others of non-Christian origin. As Catholic it is, finally, distinguished from the other Christian religions."

In that simple clear paragraph, Alphonsus offers a basic theology and a lucid resume of Catholic apologetics. I wish to mention one or the other detail.

In his time too there was rampant skepticism or what today we call "relativism." Alphonsus used to refer to it as "the sort of malaise with which one can't quite come to grips. How do you reason with people who reject reasons? What kind of rational folk are these who accept no rational explanations? We have got to avail ourselves of reason to establish the bases of our faith... the fact of revelation, the existence of God...so that man, created as a reasonable creature, simply cannot refuse to use his reason."(19)

We can see that Alphonsus regarded as indispensable fundamental theology. Earlier St. Thomas had written: "Man would not make the act of belief unless he first saw that he ought to believe." (20) For his part Alphonsus wrote: "It is as though Reason took man by the hand and led him to the sanctuary of Faith, where, remaining at the threshold, Reason points to the school of Religion and says to him: 'Listen now to a teacher more noble than I...accept whatever he says.' "(21)

Another telling point! Alphonsus' era was deeply scarred with anticurialism: regalists, gallicans, Febronius and Scippione de Ricci all extolled the authority of the bishops to the detriment of that of the Pope. Alphonsus devoted nearly a third of his book on the Faith to the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope... and this was a century before Vatican I!

In his day too people's faith was often weak and vacillating. Why? Alphonsus explains: "When the heart is sick, it makes the mind sick too."(22) "The eye sees but if I cover it with a blindfold, no matter how much light there may be, it will no longer see. The man who relinquishes vice finds belief easy but he who persists in living in sin can never really make an act of faith."(23)

3. Moral Theology.

The Church declares certain individuals Doctors for several reasons. Alphonsus was so acclaimed because of his moral system which wrought a veritable revolution in the field of moral science. He dealt a deathblow

to rigorism and fashioned a sensible middle way between fear of an unattainable salvation and delusive laxism.

We are well aware that this middle way is in fact the way of Christian prudence. Alphonsus' special merit was to perfect the extant formula of probabilism and to defend it with arguments so convincing that the system came to dominate the moral teaching of his time. All of us understand that sometimes law seems to conflict with the proper exercise of human liberty. On the one hand we have a statement of law...but the statement is not quite clear or certain, On the other hand we have a moral opinion affirming to be licit what the law seems to prohibit. Now how probable does such an opinion have to be warrant my following it and so disregarding the law? Alphonsus says: "I may disregard the law when ever there exists a true, serious, solid probability in favor of liberty... even though the obligation to observe the law may be more probable."

In later years as he pursued his studies Alphonsus modified that opinion somewhat, inclining finally to the system of equiprobabilism. Still, we should note clearly that he at any rate made a clean break from rigorism. This cost him dearly. He battled almost alone...but after his death the Church ascribed an authority to Alphonsus unique in the field of moral theology. She gave her official approval to his spirit of moderation.

In 1831 the Bishop of Besançon submitted two questions to the Sacred Penitentiary: 1°...May a professor of moral theology teach the opinions of St. Alphonsus with a safe conscience? The answer: Yes. 2°...Should a confessor who in hearing confessions use the opinions of St. Alphonsus without examining the arguments which support them, be reproached for so doing? The answer: No.

4. Ascetical Theology.

Alphonsus, the ascetical writer, was but a continuation and extension of Alphonsus the missionary. He had read many authors and steeped himself in their thought. Over the years he had preached, heard confessions and searched the souls of men. He had experienced their needs personally and directly. And so, he well knew which among the vast body of moral and ascetical principles would be most helpful and practical here and now.. and he knew how to get the knowledge down in black and white. He seemed to write rather in the same way that he preached...almost as if he had just finished preaching it. He shed light for searching minds but he also moved men's hearts with his pen, sometimes to fear, at others to sorrow, to hope, to desire and above all, to love...the last, especially so that they would resolve to choose and embrace the means he suggested for their welfare.

One can't help but marvel at the energy and zeal Alphonsus devoted to this missionary writing even when he was ill and far advanced in years. Fr. M. de Meulemeester, after thirty years of research, in 1933 published

a critical bibliography of St. Alphonsus' works. Let me point out one or two items: there are 111 books! These have seen 17,000 editions. Some have been translated into as many as 70 languages...from the slim volume of the "Eternal Maxims" to the massive 3-tome Moral Theology. There were 402 Italian editions even in Alphonsus' lifetime. After his death there were over 12,925 new printings...all that plus what has been printed since 1933!

In the age of Alphonsus there were ponderous tomes published on asceticism...but no one read them. The Saint chose to follow a different pattern: the slim, almost pocket-sized format. Some problem or question had barely surfaced when Alphonsus went to work and produced a practical, timely treatise on it. With a holy self-assurance that matched his zeal he supervised the printing and distribution of his works. Along with the editor he kept interested in their advertisement in the local newspaper...and in the reviews too! Tannoia mentions that Alphonsus' Preparation for Death had the same effect as a general mission in the Kingdom of Naples.

About his Great Means of Prayer St. Alphonsus himself wrote: "I would like to have printed enough copies so that every Christian in the world might have one," The Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin enjoyed and continue to enjoy colossal success due to the fact that apart from a few ingenuous illustrations, they constitute a magnificent series of conversations with Jesus Christ...conversations held by a man who knew how to talk earnestly and lovingly with Christ. Up until 1933 the Visits had had 2,009 editions...of which 265 were in Italian, 861 in French, 165 in Spanish, 54 in English, 324 in German, 184 in Dutch and 175 in various other languages.

Alphonsus called his Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ the most devout and useful work he had written. It ran through 516 editions down until 1933. It appeared, first in 1768, the year in which Alphonsus wrote the following to a friend: "It seems as though Jesus Christ is utterly unknown in Naples"... and he added: "I would like my Jesus to be known, especially in these times."

34. I shall not list anymore of his works. It may be said of all of them that the author searches the heart of his readers in order to move the will and lead them to make practical decisions for conversion. He invariably develops his themes from solid theological bases...as you would expect of a first-class theologian. At first glance one might not think the above is true of Alphonsus' aversion to scientific apparatus in his books. He was determined however to present truth in such a way that the truth itself would be sufficient attraction without calling particular attention to the author. As a matter of fact, he rarely makes an assertion unbolstered by cogent proof, but the proof is blended so naturally and smoothly into the text that it can be accepted without any strain.

What is the underlying principle of his ascetical writing? It is simply this: MAN IS THE OBJECT OF GOD'S IMMEASURABLE, UNFAILING LOVE! To correspond to that love gives happiness to man and glory to God. Our love for God will be enkindled and will grow if we keep in mind the gifts and graces He has bestowed on us, especially the mystery of the Redemption. That love of ours must reveal itself not only in our feelings but in our actions. These actions guided and determined by the will of God Who requires of us, in our own interest, the twofold effort of resisting our own sinful inclinations and fulfilling the commandments. That is not always easy to achieve.

Man in fact cannot do so without God's help. And such help is not forthcoming without frequent regular prayer. On the contrary it is invariably offered if we pray for it with humility and perseverance.

St. Alphonsus is the apostle of prayer. He claims that prayer is as necessary to the life of the soul, as breathing is to the life of the body. Someone has referred to a certain bipolarity in the life of Alphonsus: love and prayer...prayer to draw God within our hearts, love, that we might give ourselves to Him. I myself am more inclined to think of the Saint in terms of tripolarity: the third focal point of his life is the Blessed Mother... whom Alphonsus portrays throughout his writings as the lavish distributor of God's grace.

The above in brief is my notion of what forms the heart and soul of Alphonsus' life and work. I would like to flesh it out with an important, enlightening sketch Alphonsus himself provides in his Letter to a Religious on the Proper manner of preaching: "To preach properly, he says, one ought to:

I. Chose subject matter that will persuade the listener to detest sin and to love God:

1st the eternal truths...these make a deep impression and enable the faithful to resolve to live moral lives.

2nd Explain clearly the peace of soul that accrues to one who is in the state of grace;

3rd Fear is not an emotion that endures for long. It is better to stress Christ's love for us and the love we owe him. Rather than spin out theories on the excellence of God's love, show concretely how profoundly Christ loved us in His life, in His passion and in the Eucharist. Suggest some pious maxim or brief prayer to foster their love; (24)

4th Devotion to the Blessed Mother, our intercessor, in order to deepen their confidence.

II. Keep the sermons practical, especially in treating of the means of preserving God's grace, viz.:

- 1) Avoidance of the occasions of sin.
- 2) Mass and the Sacraments.
- 3) Mental prayer.
- 4) Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the B.V.M.
- 5) Acceptance of God's will.
- 6) Recourse to Jesus and Mary for grace of perseverance, esp. at times of temptation.
- 7) The great means of prayer.

III. Take all these elements...arrange and employ them according to the rules of truly popular eloquence...of the sort that engages the listeners' whole heart and soul. Use plain clear language...language that out of its own vitality gives life to the listeners...language that springs forth from a heart inflamed with love for God.

SOME REFLECTIONS FOR US !!!

36. When St. Alphonsus was declared a Doctor of the Church there was a certain amount of criticism and opposition. Dollinger was still living at the time and he vented his rage at the proclamation: "... this man, a Doctor who has taught a false moral system, a perverse Mariolatry, who has used careless, inaccurate language and all kinds of tricks !" (25) Others echoed such sentiments.

A false moral system? Dollinger is to Alphonsus what Pascal is to the Jesuit casuists in his Provinciali. However, Alphonsus' casuistry is sound. His work is a far cry from a simple reduction of moral theology to "this is a mortal sin - that is not! or "this is forbidden" and "that is allowed." St. Alphonsus' Moral Theology is closely wedded to a practical, vital asceticism and by no means is a mere list of sins and cases. It pre-supposes a knowledge of the Scriptures, Tradition and the Councils. It urges a study of even civil legislation, of local and particular law and privileges. It does not at all encourage ignorance and the facile solution of moral problems merely according to the light of "common sense".

It is true that St, Alphonsus' Moral must be updated...since his day scientific knowledge of man has made considerable progress and we must take that into account. Certain items in the Scriptures are better understood today. Men have become more aware of the demands of social and international morality. The concept of private property must be construed now in the context of industrialized society. The exercise of authority must necessarily be different from that Alphonsus treats of his short politico-religious work La Fedeltà dei Vassalli. There may well be other points which should be revised but such revisions hardly detract from the overall grandeur and worth of Alphonsus.

What of the accusation of Mariolatry? The Glories of Mary"...aside from the occasional ingenuous illustrations mentioned earlier...contains solid doctrine especially in the second part. This Marian doctrine is still of practical value today!

And the alleged tricks or inventions of the Saint's works? We have to acknowledge the fact that many of his quotations were made "on the run" so that there are indeed mistaken references. However, when one remembers that there are hundreds of thousands of such citations, plus the fact that Alphonsus worked without research assistants, etc., one can hardly be surprised to find occasional errors of this kind.

Concerning the "fairy tales" or legends that Alphonsus adduces at times... and which are the basis of the accusations of "Alphonsian inventiveness", it is true that he does include them in his works. However, they are included

not so much as proofs in the scientific sense as literary devices for illustrating and explaining his point.

37. My beloved fellow-priests, how do we stand with regard to our love for Tradition? Alphonsus effaced himself in an effort to lend prestige to authors from the past. Today we seem to tend to efface the past in an effort to promote ourselves and the latest fad...though the fads may indeed be dangerous and quite contrary to Tradition. Our times are labelled times of shift and change. Unfortunately, the word change engenders a certain apprehension or uneasiness when it is applied to Theology. You may recall Talete, the philosopher of Mileto. Monist that he was, he taught that the cosmos, in the final analysis can be reduced to mere water...the supreme, primordial element. One evening he decided to go for a walk...with his renowned nose raised aloft the better to gaze at the stars! At a certain point he had to make a turn but, his eyes on the walking rather than the road, he tumbled off into a ditch. Soaked through, he was dredged out and half carried home. When the townsmen saw his garments hung out to dry the next morn, they chortled with amusement: "It looks as if Talete found his water!" He could easily have avoided the mishap, not to mention the subsequent comments had he but watched where he was going... or if someone had just whispered in his ear: "You'd better turn here!"

In theological matters he who doesn't keep an eye on Tradition...not to mention the Scriptures...is quite unrealistic. At any rate, I would like to whisper a gentle warning to our priests and theologians who flirt with the avant-garde: "Watch out! You may miss the turn!"

38, It would appear that the study of Fundamental Theology and Apologetics is not overly popular among the clergy today. Some even scoff at the very notion of Apologetics, or the miracles of Christ, of the historicity of the Gospels. Evely has had the presumption to maintain that we need a "demythologized" gospel. However, if we pursue that path, we eventually erode the bases of our Faith. It is true that our Faith starts with a gift of God's grace. Still, in the words of Alphonsus: "One must reach the threshold of Faith by using his reason!" Man still enjoys the critical faculty; he needs to be convinced before he believes that he indeed truly and reasonably ought to believe. If it be a gamble to believe with genuine trust in God, it should be a sensible, "rational" gamble with a guarantee in advance of what we used to refer to as a judgment of credibility or credence. All this presupposes the historicity of the gospels and the miracles of Christ.

39. The probabilism Alphonsus promoted is geared to develop a proper conscience. Today it is the vogue to speak of "the free individual conscience." The idea seems to be to make conscience supreme in deference to the most sublime dignity of the human person. We can agree on the dignity of the person...and on conscience' being the moral norm we should use both regarding positive and negative commands. With a

proviso, however: that the conscience be formed and informed by an agency other than itself, i. e., by God and by the instruments He has chosen for the purpose. As a matter of fact, conscience is not meant to make the law but rather to inform itself as to what the law is in a given situation and then to judge whether our action fits with the law or not. Conscience is intended to control man, not obey him!

40. I would suppose you are all probabilists, either pure probabilists of the left or equiprobabilists or compensationists of the right. Fine! That is one thing...'tis quite another to see truth and law as generally doubtful while, in fact, the area of religious certitude is very broad. Be alert therefore concerning the sort of skepticism Alphonsus battled against. Truth is not some elusive bare where to keep chasing but never catch! Reason is still a most valid tool and we should have a wholesome confidence in it. Let us hold fast to what God has revealed and what the Magisterium proposes for our belief. Especially this: a certitude stressed by the Council, that we all need to try to make saints of ourselves, by keeping the commandments with God's help.

Beware of that psychotic tendency which sees juridicism under every bush. The law, even though difficult at times, is for us, not against us. That is not a correct attitude which leads one faced with a prescription of law to regard the latter as an obstacle to the development of one's personality and to cast about fretfully for some wisp or shred of doubt in order to escape the law...to find some crooked alley of miniprobability. It is much more helpful to embrace the spirit of the psalmist who declares: "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your commandments and I shall follow it until the end." (26) God's law is the safe highway...our efforts to slip out from under the law lead us only down wretched, crooked alleys!

NOTES

- (1) St. Alphonsus, Theologia Moralis, ed. Gaudé, t. II, p.689
- (2) Idem.
- (3) 2 Cor. 9,7.
- (4) 1 Cor 4,5
- (5) Ephes. I,18.
- (6) St. Alphonsus, Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, Chap. 1, n. 1.
- (7) PO. 6/1259. Cf. Mt. 25,34-45; Lk; 4,18.
- (8) *Il sacerdozio ministeriale*, Typ. Vat.1971, p.17.
- (9) Preface to the Preparation for Death.
- (10) Synod, ibid. p. 18.
- (11) SC.13.
- (12) 2 Cor.12,15.
- (13) Cf. Mt. 2,20; Mk.1,18
- (14) Cf. Acts, 1,6-8.
- (15) Cf. Mt.19,11; Mk. 4,11.
- (16) *Acta Doctoratus*, Rome 1870, p. 52.
- (17) Epistolario, vol. III, Letter to Remondini, p. 279.
- (18) Ibid., 281.
- (19) The Truth of the Faith, part I, Chap. VI, n. 10.
- (20) Summa Theol. 2ae. q. 1, a. 4, ad 2.
- (21) The Truth of the Faith, part I, Chap. I, n. 7.
- (22) Ibid., Part I, Chap. I, n. 8.
- {23} Ibid., Part III, Chap. XI, n. 7.
- (24) There is a veritable treasure of such maxims in The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, in the numbers 1-24 of the concluding summary.

I mention here those of n. 24: "Everything in this life comes to an end. The joy or pain of eternity shall never end. When one comes to die, what good are the grandeurs of this world? Whatever comes from the hand of God, whether favorable or adverse, all is for our good. We must forsake all

in order to gain all. Without God one can never find true peace. The only necessary things are to love God and save your soul. The only thing you have to fear is sin. If you lose God you lose everything. He who longs for nothing of this world is the master of the world. He who prays is saved, he who does not pray is lost. Accept your death as God's will and pleasure. However, much God may cost you, He is never too dear. One who has deserved hellfire finds any other punishment light. If you look at Christ on the cross, you cannot help but suffer. Whatever is not done for God becomes difficult. He who longs for God alone is indeed rich beyond compare. Happy the man who can say in truth: My Jesus, I wish to love thee alone and nothing more. He who loves God in all things shall find true pleasure; he who does not love God shall find pleasure in nothing at all.

(25) I. Dollinger, Lettres et déclarations au sujet des décrets du Vatican, tr. Paris, 1893, p. 208.

(26) Ps. 118,33.

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