

## REDEMPTORIST FAMILY

Besides the enclosed and contemplative Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptoristines), since the 19th century a number of apostolically active Congregations have shared the Redemptorist charism. They are linked to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in various ways, and together with this Congregation and the Redemptoristines, form the Redemptorist Family (*Perfectae Caritatis* 22). Many lay associations are also linked to this family.

### History and Development

The first beginnings were made by St Clement Mary Hofbauer, who founded an Oblate institute for which he obtained papal approval in 1804. At the Generalate in Rome, he familiarised himself with the rule of the Redemptoristines and wished to found an institute of women for the education of girls in Warsaw. The document known as the 'Warsaw Rule' included an appendix dealing with the 'Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer' who were to undertake, in a special way, the care of poor and abandoned girls. However, this institute was never founded because St Benno's closed.

Still Clement realized that the multiple demands arising from the difficulties of the time could be met only by working together. Some 20 years after his death, the first foundation of an apostolically active community of women was made, an event attributed to the influence of the sermons of the Redemptorists. It is noteworthy that this foundation was made in Vienna, the city in which Hofbauer had worked in his last days and where he died. Since then, 36 communities of women, with a membership today of 11,000, and five communities of men with about 300 members have come into being (2003 report). Geographically, these communities are located in North and South America as well as in Europe, which are the places where most of these communities were founded. They are present in some countries in Asia and Africa. All told, they are represented in some 60 countries worldwide. One Congregation has a branch within the Eastern rite. Some communities are blooming; for others the future is questionable. The number of members ranges from four to 2,000. The most recent foundation was made in 1997 (Report 2003). Besides religious institutes there are also secular institutes and associations with episcopal approval.

### Relationship to the Redemptorists

Their relationships to the Redemptorists are of various kinds: some are affiliated with the Redemptorists, some owe their origin to them, and in some cases there is a closeness of spirituality or general agreement on outlook. Many communities were founded by Redemptorists or received spiritual guidance from them, at least in their early years. The Rule of some of these communities conforms closely to the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes. They seek to cooperate in the work of Redemptorists and share with them certain fundamental spiritual convictions, for example the centrality of the mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion/Resurrection and Eucharist. There are formal agreements between the Redemptorist Congregation and some communities; others maintain looser contacts. Not a few have St Alphonsus Liguori as their patron, others invoke Bl Gennaro Sarnelli or St Gerard as patron. Others feel themselves bound together by devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

The stimulus for a foundation was often a concrete problem to which people wished to find a solution based on faith in the redemption. Often women asked directly to share in the Redemptorist charism and mission, or Redemptorists saw the necessity to recruit women for the apostolate. Former candidates for the Redemptorists felt the call to found their own communities. The field for apostolic work is wide: for example care for women, children, orphans; education (especially of women); work with and for migrants; evangelization, popular missions and catechesis, media ministry, and the

option for local marginalized groups. In the choice of such work, the motive of engagement for the abandoned is almost always central.

### Significance for the Present

The great variety of these institutes demonstrates the fruitfulness of the charism of St Alphonse, who again and again attracts and inspires new followers to creative expressions of that charism. Just as in the days of St Clement, so too today can the challenges of the time be met only by working together. The cooperation of women and men in pastoral ministry is not only a matter of a practical division of labour, but a sign of a crucial commitment of the whole Church. The many gifts of women for the preaching of the 'superabundant redemption' are thus made fruitful. Besides this, the mutual engagement of communities dedicated to spiritual and charitable works shows clearly that redemption includes humankind in all its dimensions, bodily, spiritual and religious. The different ways of living the Redemptorist charism can enrich and expand particular perspectives. In this way the Redemptorist family can respond to the call of the Church to religious Orders and Congregations to live a spirituality of communion (cf. *Vita Consecrata* 52: Starting Afresh From Christ, 29).

To promote this, however, there is need for a growing consciousness of the mutual bonds that provide the motive for concrete working together and for spiritual exchange. There is a great variety of contacts with the Congregation of the Redemptorists. But what is lacking is exchange between the various institutes so that they can present themselves as a family of Congregations and understand themselves as such.

### Present Manifestations

Good examples of this are the meetings of various communities of women concerned with Redemptorist spirituality in the area of South America, as well as community study days for the formators of Redemptorists and Redemptoristines and an apostolically active community on a regional basis. In each sexennium a member of the wider Redemptorist family works with the Secretariat for Spirituality.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

Redemptorist Family: *Famille Redemptoriste. Famile Redentorista. Rodzina Redemptorystowska*. Eds. Secretariat for C.Ss. R. Spirituality, Roma 2003.

Weiß, Otto: *Begegnungen mit Klemens Maria Hofbauer (1751-1820)*, Regensburg, 2009.

Owczarski, Adam: *Redemptoryści-Benonici w Warszawie, 1787-1808*, Homo Dei, Kraków, 2000.

'De officiis sororum monialium Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris', in Hosp, Eduard: *Geschichte der Redemptoristen-Regel in Österreich (1819-1848)*. Dokumente mit rechtsgeschichtlicher Einführung, Wien 1939, pp208-210..

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Which communities of the Redemptorist Family are known to me? With whom can I, can we, make contact?
2. Where do I hear a cry for redemption that can be answered only through the collaboration of various vocations in the working together of women and men, lay and religious?
3. What does it mean for our understanding of redemption that the communities of the Redemptorist Family adopt different emphases?
4. Which mission is entrusted to us as a Redemptorist Family in the Church?

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