



C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΛΕΙΒ (Εφ 4,4)

10 - RESTRUCTURING OURSELVES WITHIN

A geographical map or a map of the world can help to recall the frontiers of the mission. After a hymn and a greeting, the presider can start the reflection with a prayer taken from the liturgy, or possibly from the formulary 'for the evangelization of peoples'.

Giving a soul to the structures

"What do we mean by restructuring"?, asked Communicanda 1 in 2004. Perhaps we remember the reply: "we see restructuring as a process, as a dynamic of personal and communitarian transformation, which examines the actual reality, evaluates the structures we have, and undertakes to change them if necessary so that we may be faithful to our charism, at the service of the mission"(n. 31).

The same Communicanda recalled one fundamental fact: structures are at the service of the person and of his desire for life. Of themselves they have no meaning, unless they're animated by a climate of fraternity, or if they lack the dynamics of animation in the communities, at the service of the mission. There is therefore an internal restructuring – understood as something which concerns our spirit – at the basis of the restructuring which is formed by decisions and decrees. This internal restructuring is the most difficult to realize and the easiest to undervalue.



Let's look at the last decades. We're accustomed to call this type of restructuring 'conversion'. All of us, from the General Government down to the youngest confrere, have retained its basic elements. Without it we couldn't have gone anywhere. Our Chapters and Assemblies have spoken of conversion. We were concerned that the final documents of our meetings should speak of it, those same documents which are still today preserved in our archives, or accumulating dust in our libraries. Once the document was drawn up, we returned home thinking we had solved everything and forgetting that more was still to be done. With the passage of time a sense of resignation - something like the smog which corrodes certain monuments - has grown in us; we become resigned to the fact that our life will not change, nor will our mission change.

And yet in the depth of our souls there remains the desire for a new life. We're all aware of the need to rediscover simplicity and the essentials – and that in a world that goes in the opposite direction. We're aware of the fascination of proclaiming to the world tidings which are beautiful as well as ancient. We're aware today of the call which turned the life of Alphonsus Liguori upside down: to reach out to the abandoned wherever they are, in the places Pope Francis has accustomed us to call 'the peripheries'.

The first challenge is to admit that we can't do this on our own. Only the grace of God can 'restructure' us within. The beauty of the *kerygma* remains intact; in Jesus Christ human beings have joined in a wonderful way their fortune with that of God. We must make these good tidings credible: and we can do so if our life is reconciled with itself, with others and with God, if joy radiates from our

countenances, if we have a real experience of being loved by God, if our communities are receptive, if our existence is simple, if the bare necessities of life are sufficient for us.

Your word is a light to my path

After an alleluia, the passage **Matt. 9, 14-17** is read aloud. A silence may follow or a free sharing. Here we remember:

- **the abundance of the symbols** used by Jesus: wine, garment, food, fasting, wine-skins, patches. They are symbols as old as humanity; they recall the essential as well as the basic attitudes with which to face existence: joy or sadness. For the Christian, who sees in Christ the human so profoundly united to the divine, joy should be the constant thermometer of faithfulness to the Gospel.
- **The sacramental presence** of the Spouse makes for the exuberance of love and the refusal of compromise. Fear in the face of what is new and unpublished, or the calculation which leads us to “want to please everyone” at the expense of what is prophetic and just, these are always nothing else but “patches” which finish by tearing apart the baptismal robe; and ways of turning sour the wine of the gift of self.

From the Redemptorist tradition

Internal restructuring has a verb which more than any other regulates its activities: **decentering oneself**, in imitation of Christ who “though he was rich, make himself poor for your sake, so that through his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8,9)

In the Redemptorist vocabulary this attitude is what we call **detachment**. The heart and the spirit are called to **interior freedom**, called not to use other people, not to seek for honours and not to long for anything but the love of God, the source of all true service to the neighbour.

St. Alphonsus had very many occasions to practice this exercise of the soul. For him “making of Naples a total sacrifice to Jesus Christ” (Tannoia) was detachment par excellence. But it wasn't enough. His first companions abandoned him at Scala, while at Naples his whole purpose was the object of criticism and mockery. Others joined him: but what trouble it was to see his project acknowledged by the Kingdom of Naples! Once the Rule was approved by the Pope, not without a certain distortion of its true purpose, Alphonsus became “the founder”. But it was enough for him to be appointed bishop to become aware that something changed with the new generations. And when he returned to Pagani in retirement from the episcopate, the greatest bitterness of his life awaited him: the one linked to the Regolamento, which led him to die outside the Congregation recognized by the Pope.

Every detachment is always lacerating: for Alphonsus it was a continuous exercise in **uniting his will to the will of God**. “The will of God in heaven, the will of God on earth. Paradise in heaven, paradise on earth”. This was one of his favourite slogans, though it was for all that painful.



Today we are invited to conjugate our challenges in terms of detachment. It's not too difficult to see restructuring as a kind of **self-emptying**, says Communicanda 2 on the Redemption (2006). And it goes on : “Reflection on this theme means a refusal to remain rooted in the glory of the past or to accept the limits of the present in a spirit of resignation. In reality, we are in search of new forms of solidarity, with the purpose of expressing the compassion of God for the abandoned poor”. Seeking these new ways and doing it together calls for a great interior freedom and an acute sense of the common good: the same capacity to **seek together** which characterized the generation of the year 1740. These were men already formed by their own culture and personality, often professionals; and

yet they were capable of sharing their intentions in common, in the service of that which they had at heart, the mission.;

If so desired, one can reflect together on what the word 'detachment' means for each of the participants.

The Constitutions today

“While always maintaining its own charism, the Congregation must adapt its structures and institutions to the needs of the apostolic ministry and to those proper to every mission”(Const. 96). This admonition should be read together with some of our other Constitutions which have the structures as their object: on the need to respond to the changing times (Const. 13); on the missionary dynamism (Const. 14); on new apostolic initiatives (Const. 15).

We know the risk that's endemic to structures: they tend spontaneously to be their **own justification**. In other words: let's do it like that, it was always done that way, we cannot do otherwise; we're in this position for decades and there is no sense in moving elsewhere.

Symptomatic in this connection is the topographical placing of a good number of our communities, as recorded in the documents on restructuring. Often they have their birth in a poor or peripheral area, but in a few decades they are to be found in an urban and upper middle class situation. What should we do? The first temptation is precisely the temptation to justify ourselves: there's no shortage of work here and anyway, with the human resources at our disposal, we cannot do otherwise....

Here then is the very nub of the question.. We must ask ourselves, with all possible interior freedom: have our structures made us to be **different** from that which St. Alphonsus had in mind for us? It's clear that not everyone can make radical or particularly innovative choices. There are the older confreres, and those confreres who will resist being called into question. But it's important to pose the question to ourselves. It's still more necessary to formulate a response, so that our mission may have the character of that **creative fidelity** (*Vita Consecrata* 37) demanded of the consecrated life in the post-Conciliar period.

Conclusion

This prayer, taken from the 'Practice of the love of Jesus Christ' by St. Alphonsus (Chapter 11) can conclude the meeting.

I love you, my dear Redeemer, I love you with all my soul, and I desire nothing else but to love you in this life and for all eternity.

My love, my hope, my strength and my consolation, give me the strength to be faithful to you. Give me light and make me know from what I should detach myself; and give me strength so that I may wish to obey you in everything.

Come my Jesus, take possession of me entirely.

I renounce every desire, every consolation and all created things; you alone are sufficient for me. Give me the grace not to think of anything but you, not to desire anything but you, not to seek anything but you, my beloved and my only good.

Mary, Mother of God, obtain for me holy perseverance.

The blessing and a hymn conclude the meeting.



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