

Viva Memoria n. 35

The Redemptoristine's Theological Journal



April 2014



Editorial

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Dear Sisters, Dear Readers,

We, your editors, are certain that you consider it a great privilege to have the reflections of Rev. Sabatino Majorano on Venerable Mother Maria Celeste's sixteen "Grades of Prayer." Frequently, Mother Celeste uses the form of a 'dialogue' in her writings on the Grades: "The bride, or the privileged soul, speaks to her Beloved, the Lord Man-God." With Father Majorano's conferences we enter into the dialogue of Mother Celeste and our Redeemer. In past numbers of the Viva Memoria we have published Father's reflections from the First Grade to the Tenth. In this Number 35 Father's conferences on the Grades will be concluded with the publishing of #11 to #16, inclusive. When you receive this Viva Memoria #35, you will have a complete study of this great work of Mother Maria Celeste, by a renowned theologian, who is also an expert on her Spirituality. We thank Father Majorano and the Redemptoristine community of Bielsko, Poland, where these conferences on the "Grades" were first presented in Italian.

Now we give you a presentation on our 'spiritual father' – St. Alphonsus. Sister Anna Maria Ceneri, O.Ss.R., originally of the Redemptoristines of Scala but who is presently at the Monastery founded from Scala in 1766 by St. Alphonsus at Sant'Agata dei Goti. Sister Anna Maria prepared this article and presented it on June 22, 2012, the 250th anniversary of the Episcopal Ordination of Saint Alphonsus, to a large gathering of the devotees of St. Alphonsus, especially to the "Missionaries of the Redemptorists of the Naples' Province." Sister Anna Maria writes that "whatever St. Alphonsus wanted, he obtained permission from Rome." This would be a tribute to his sanctity and saintly reputation, thus he wanted a monastery of Redemptoristines and he got it – "The Monastery of Sant'Agata Dei Goti" is still prayerfully present where St. Alphonsus planted it in 1766. (Read on, you will find this an interesting article.)

We are publishing in this issue of Viva Memoria an article written by Sister Hildegard Magdalen Pleva of Esopus. This article was written for a Redemptorist publication. It has been published by the General Secretariat for Redemptorist Spirituality under the title: "Lexicon of Redemptorist Spirituality." Sister Hildegard has aptly shown how our Mother Maria Celeste's inspiration of "Viva Memoria" has found many echoes in some of the original founding texts of the Redemptorists' primitive rule and other related documents. Sister has shown how the "Viva Memoria" was given a firm emphasis in defining the purpose of the C.Ss.R. Institute: "...it is that of the closest imitation of the most holy life of our Saviour Jesus Christ and of his most

adorable virtues” – text of 1747. The “imitation of Jesus and the living of his virtues,” are important aspects in being the Lord’s “living memory.” We know this article will be a good reminder of how Mother Maria Celeste’s charism has value beyond our own Order and lives on today. We are publishing Sister’s article under the title of ‘VIVA MEMORIA.’

Sister Gabrielle Fox, O.Ss.R. of our Monastery of Dublin and member of the Service Board has given us an article which perhaps will challenge us to rethink and maybe revise some of our concepts and practices concerning authority and religious obedience. We quote an example here: “Authority is *Service ...!*” Sister’s article is well-documented with quotes from: “Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life” (2008). Sister concludes her article with an appropriate quote: “*Religious life is one of the organs through which the Church perfects her own life.*” How blessed we are to have such a privileged place in the Church! We endeavour to embrace our religious vows with all their “on-going challenges.”

Happy reading! As you know, Sisters, our Viva Memoria – Theological Journal is published in six different languages. To have the articles translated from their original language requires the good and willing services of many translators. For all who help us in the translations we are very, very grateful and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for them. (The names of the translators will be below.)

Your editors:

Sr. Joan Calver, Sr. Ewa Dobrzelecka, Sr. Gabrielle Fox,

Sr. Magdalena Schumann, Sr. Imma Di Stefano

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Conferences on “Grades of Prayer” by M. Celeste Crostarosa

Fr. Sabatino Majorano, CSsR,

*(Conferences held in Bielsko-Biala,
2008/2009- Con't.)*

Grade 11

The Holy Father describes the experiences of prisoners, (Spe Salve 37) speaks about a Vietnamese man who described his imprisonment, and writes that what he was forced to suffer was not so much the persecutors who made him suffer, but the hell that the prisoners mutually made for each other. And then he continues, that Christ descended into this hell and then this hell opened up to hope, to highlight how the kenosis of the Christ who is here, is a radical one, and truly shares in our incapacity to love. And so He opens Himself to the prospect, to the prospect of the new possibility of loving.. All this, however, this suffering, is accompanied by joy. Sr. Maria Celeste in sentences 7 and 8 makes a special point of this understanding of the cross, but she understands the cross as salvation, and takes up the cross, yes, but taking up the cross with joy.

B. 7. His most sacred humanity, having a most lofty understanding, is always on the cross, alive, but likewise His most sacred soul is always on the cross, yet always in glory through her participation in His joy and union with the Word of God. 8. And this was the greatest miracle that the Divine Omnipotence worked in the God made man as wayfarer, uniting supreme pain and supreme glory at one and the same time: a supreme and most perfect love for His Father, in the act of accomplishing His divine will.

Note how the terms are developed by Sr. Maria Celeste: always on the cross, and living always on the cross, but always in glory. And this is the greatest miracle of God: comprehending this mystery of the cross, or rather Christ, who has Himself crucified for us. All this, the gift of this great Grade, becomes a body of evidence which is granted to the soul in particularly powerful moments. And all this, while what makes her suffer makes her love, and also makes her act.

C. 9. ... and all at once she is full of the joy of a most intense love and completely surrounded by pain and sorrows, like that Similitude that is concentrated and stamped in her soul like a seal in soft wax.

And then what I think is important is that everything is full of joy, of love, and all surrounded by love ... All of this happens in particularly powerful moments as she points out: 14. *We must therefore know that this most bright and beautiful spectacle gives the soul a sight of itself, and then she is left in joy and as if transfixed by the greatest sorrows, and burns like this in the martyrdom of love; and then from time to time this sight is repeated, but differently.*

We have this great experience which expresses this suffering and joyful love, which is then renewed from time to time in different ways. Perhaps it is a good idea to read sentence 15, because there she points out the theme which you stress a great deal in your spirituality – that of Christ the Wayfarer:

15. *And she feels certain intense and divine acts produced that cannot be explained in any manner; but this does not result in the glorification of she who receives them, but in the glorification of the God made man as wayfarer: that is, she is made a participant in that union because, being a wayfarer, the soul is united to the Word of God made man*

and her soul feels those most lively effects in herself like the God made man as wayfarer to whom she is united by love.

We live as Christ the Wayfarer, we live with the suffering and joy of Christ the Wayfarer. Naturally we are speaking of particular gifts which, however, would affect the manner in which we look at everything. Later on I shall return to this in the conclusion, because I wish to continue for a moment to go on glancing over this Grade. Sr. Maria Celeste adds that this and other supernatural gifts often happen in Communion, so that there can be some development of what the effects of this gift are. I shall sum up the fundamental effect of them with an word from St. Alphonsus this time, and this is detachment.

18. *The first effect that is felt in the soul, and which is brought here by the Lord, is an intimate union with the God made man, lit up by love, which makes her separate from every joy and consolation both visible and perceptible, even though it is just or licit or holy, with a separation of herself from her self, so that she makes a renunciation by a passive act, because she does it without being aware of doing it, and so she is separated from every object, from every happy experience or pleasure whatever it is; and this separation has such power that at times it seems that the soul is separated from the body by as much sorrow as joy together.*

Note the beginning of this paragraph: an union so intimate with Christ the Wayfarer that it brings us to detach ourselves from whatever is not Him. And the final part, the conclusive part: *it seems that the soul is separated from the body by as much sorrow as joy together*, because of this detachment. And out of this comes the other consequence: a certain difficulty which we encounter in matters of every day life. And also a certain lack of understanding which comes from others around us, and above all, another effect, which is a hunger for pain:

J. 23. This now produces a hunger for pain so great, and a burning desire to suffer, that, with a continuous act - without performing any one act, or rather it can be called a connatural act of love, - the soul renounces every sort of joy or pleasure to her God.

25. In fact she always sees herself in her Christ on the cross, or rather she sees herself nailed in her Christ; and this vision is not a joyful one. 26. But so pure is the love that this soul has that she wants nothing else than this naked suffering with her Christ.

And this is also in regard to spiritual reality, because she speaks of aridity, abandonment by friends, by family members, by friends, persecution, and illness, yet everything lives in order to continue the life of Christ.

K. 27. And many times it happens that the Lord, when He gives the soul this kind of prayer, also gives her a very real aridity, abandonment by those closest to her, persecution, infirmity and slander, added to which is fierce temptation by the devil, melancholy and other afflictions; but these pains are all felt in the lower part, while the upper part of the soul is always in Christ. 28. And she can say with St. Paul: "And I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me".

And then she concludes by remembering her own spiritual experiences, because she says that this suffering happens especially when she is deprived of esteem on the part of persons who are close to her.

The love of the cross... is the love which transforms the cross into the resurrection.

Let us now see how this works out in our daily lives. I think that we need to remember that Christ makes us heirs to His crucifixion and resurrection. But He does not make us just heirs to His crucifixion alone or His resurrection alone, but to the synthesis of His cross and resurrection which is continued in our own lives. This is how we must continue our own participation in the mystery of the cross and the resurrection. In other words, we are deceiving ourselves if we say we want only the cross or only the resurrection, because these two things are always together in Christ. The second thing that I think is important is that it is not God who prepares the cross for us, but it is we who have constructed it in history. God asks us to carry the cross and gives us the strength to do so, in order to transform it into a resurrection for everyone. And I believe that a red light must start flashing in our minds if we start saying that God wants us to suffer. No, the will of God is for you and He to become capable of bearing the suffering that history sends us. In other words, it is an act of faith in God which permits us to transform the cross into the resurrection. It is not God who is the cause of suffering. God asks us to transform into resurrection all the suffering that there is in history around us in our lives and in our reality. It is language which (like the language of Medjugorje) at times connects with people in difficulty.

The will of God is to transform the cross into the resurrection, and this is why we have to take on this burden, why we have to do it all for others, in solidarity, in order to transform it into the resurrection. This is why the love of the cross which we live for is the love for the cross which becomes the resurrection, or it is the love which

transforms the cross into the resurrection. If I just say to people who are suffering: “You must do the will of God”, but I do not bear the cross with them, and do not bear at least a little of their cross, so that it can give up its meaning to them, I am not giving them their word of salvation. So the cross which the Lord is asking us to bear is the cross of those who are there beside us. The cross which is in history through so many wrong choices, is also our own body because we are part of this history. We must take it up in order to transform it into resurrection. This is the approach which must develop in order to say that we love the cross.

The third thing which I think is important is the idea of detachment which we must develop in our lives. Sr. Maria Celeste invites us to think about meaning of the parable of the merchant and precious pearl. We have found something so precious that everything else becomes relative. We have something which is precious, or rather in the language of the Synoptic Gospels, we have found a treasure beyond price. This treasure for us is continuing to be Christ crucified and resurrected. It comes to us as a consequence of looking at everything in the light of what has become the treasure or the precious pearl in our lives. In other words, we do not despise things, we do not say that we have no need of them, or that they are not necessary. No, we recognize their values, but we live with them in the light of the value of the most important wealth or treasure that we have ever met. In this manner, we can live out our own poverty as an act of sharing and not as despising possessions. This is one of the aspects which must claim a major slice of our attention. It is the ultimate step which gives us our liberty from those people and those things which surround us. This is something I find in Sr. Maria Celeste’s writing, to which she returns often, and I find a parallel here with her insistence that it is petty gossip which destroys the community, and as if sets off a chain reaction from something trivial that ends up as a mountain.

Grade 12



The new gift which Sr. Maria Celeste presents in the twelfth Grade is understanding what God does in the soul who loves Him. We call it wisdom, but it is wisdom which expresses itself in a loquacious manner. And this Grade is found almost literally in the Meditations in the part relating to the commentary on Genesis. So you can see that Sr. Maria Celeste has considered it important to include it here not just as a meditation, but also as a gift that the Spirit gives us. If we had more time, we could make the comparison. On the one hand there is the Meditation, and on the other hand the gift, and then we can understand the direction of her thoughts. It is all about understanding creation – the mystic creation that God works in us. And this is a gift, but one that we cannot really understand. It is our point of departure. Then Sr. Maria Celeste follows the six days of creation step by step, making the comparison between what Genesis records and what God does in the soul with His sanctifying action. Keep

in mind this manner of proceeding – the parallelism between Genesis and mystic creation in us. I shall deal only with the last day, the sixth:

F. 14. On the sixth day God created the beasts of the earth and in the soul He created her passions which to her are just like the beasts of the earth that must be dominated and subjected to His obedience.

Note how harsh the language is which she expresses herself. God has created the passions which must be made subject to the will. However, on the sixth day, God also created man in His own image and likeness. And this, I think, is a very lovely passage in which she points out the dignity of this image of God in Christ made human whom God creates in us.

16. And then in the soul, after all these creations in her interior world, He created the true similitude of His Son made human; and this is what He intended by those words that He said when He created man in His own image, so that we would all live in that original divine image, and so He is pleased with the just man.

In the history of spirituality there is a distinction between the image and the similitude, the likeness. In the Fathers generally, the image is what God does in creation, and the likeness is the effect of redemption, when we return to being the primitive image, and not only return to what the primitive image was, but in addition to this we have the divinization. For Sr. Maria Celeste the new image she speaks about, the dignity of man, is what she says of the Son, the similitude to the Son made human, because we are about living as the similitude of Christ. Remember how in the Rules she speaks of the inspired portrait, the memorial, the fact that each one of us must let ourselves be transformed into the image and similitude of Christ. It is a bit like what she says in these words: “*He created man in His own image, so that we would all live according to the original*”. And after that there is God’s reply, which is finding God as our repose and our delight.

H. 17. Adam, when he was created, rested and slept and the Lord rested on the seventh day. 18. And created man took his rest in the divinity, and the divinity rested in Adam. 19. Having created man as His rest and tabernacle in the original of His Son, He was delighted and rested; and so our souls have God for their rest and delight when they are created anew in primeval innocence. Then there is this repose – God reposes in His Son and we repose in God made in the image of His Son.

I. 20. After all the above-mentioned creations proceeded, she was given the likeness of the Son of God and was placed in the first innocence and divine simplicity, just like man was created in the beginning, then God rests in her and she sleeps and rests in the Beloved of God, because the Lord created the world for man, and man for Himself.

This is how the story of this gift of wisdom finishes – by understanding what happens in that mystic life, when God recreates in us the likeness of His Son. What are the consequences of finding this dignity in ourselves, this similitude of ourselves with

Christ? It is this reposing in God which is so significant in Sr. Maria Celeste's eyes, and above all depending totally on God.

J. 22. Three effects proceed from this dream of the soul: the first is being supported only by God, for then we depend totally on God and the second effect is that we lose our other worries, so that other things are never important enough to disturb us from depending totally on God, who is simplicity above all.

24. Then the third effect of simplicity follows, and this is a wonderful thing in the soul through the loving union of the Holy Spirit, who can be nothing else than a single substance in God. Simplicity is the loving union with the Spirit which makes us a single substance with God. Today, simplicity has to be an attitude which must be developed and lived, as we have been too much manipulated to have simple relations with others. This is something we must work at in our lives. All this naturally has a Trinitarian value, and Sr. Maria Celeste develops this text with the clothing of Adam.

*the Divine Father
...loving in a finite
creature His divine
and eternal Son.*

K. 25. Regarding the things worked by Him, that is, works of power, works of wisdom and works of goodness, everything is ignored by the divine Spirit who holds her absorbed in the fullness of love and repose. 26. The divine Father gives the soul support; the divine Word despoils her intellect with oblivion; and because of the supernatural light capable of the infinite it stops, halted in its working; and the Holy Spirit gives it the simplicity of love in its will.

Note that everything is the work of the omnipotence of the Father and the Word, who despoils us of ourselves in order to clothe us with Himself, and the Spirit gives us that simplicity of love in the will. And at this point God can rest. *L. 27. And God rests in the soul because He has made His similitude in His creature: the divine Father remains there, loving in a finite creature His divine and eternal Son, and the Son loves the Father, together with the Holy Spirit. 28. And this divine operation is as sweet to the soul who receives it as if it was God, as is this union of love while ever it lasts.*

This emphasis on the repose (or rest) of God needs to be read as the repose which we spoke about in the preceding Grades. What struck me in this passage is that the Father loves His Son in the creature and we give back to the Father the love that He gives us in the Son and the Spirit. Two other simple references: In concluding this discourse on the parallelism with creation, Sr. Maria Celeste cannot avoid discussing the problem of the tree. You will remember that in Patristics the parallel is between the tree in the garden of Eden and the tree of the cross, with that trap, as it is expressed, which was set for the devil. Sr. Maria Celeste draws that parallel between the tree of life, the fruit of life and the Eucharistic bread. When eaten from the tree of life, Adam dies. When eaten as the Eucharistic bread, we are transformed into Christ, but we need to eat it in a worthy manner. And here we get a sort of mini-sermon which Sr. Maria Celeste speaks against those who despise the Eucharistic Bread.

The final affirmation is in regard to the necessity of obtaining from this gift the capacity for enduring everything. There is a certain suffering, the fruit of this important experience, but also the capacity for relating everything to the love of God which unifies everything. I shall add two reflections which can help us. First of all, we must place the greatest value on the image of God and likeness to God which we have, and also on our fraternal relationships, always arriving at that dignity of the image and the likeness of God. I think that we must be truly respectful of the fact that the other person is the living similitude of God, the similitude of Christ, and naturally always. The second thing I think is the invitation to have eyes that can see beyond what appears at first sight. True wisdom never stops at appearances. We can also see this at the social level today. A wise and intelligent person never accepts the news as the truth, but knows that we arrive at the truth by means of the information. And this explains the need we have of living at the level of an even more radical faith. In my own life, and in the lives of others, and in history we need to arrive at our God who is bringing about in me, in us, in history, the likeness of the Word Incarnate. These are the eyes of wisdom that we must grow and which can sustain us even in the most complex situations.



Grade 13

I shall try to simplify what the message of these two Grades is. Sr. Maria Celeste gives the pure and luminous air as her sign of the gift of this Grade. In other words, breathing with full lungs, or to speak in the language of St. Gerard – growing in God. God makes us grow in Him. The image that Sr. Maria Celeste uses is one that we have already found in the preceding Grades, breathing in God. In this gift, besides the dimension of breathing in God, of taking our breath from God and giving it back to Him, as we have already said, there is this sense of greatness and immensity in which we are included, when we immerse ourselves in God. And she describes this image very well at the beginning of this Grade:

A. 2. The pure and luminous air that the soul now enjoys is God, invisible but intelligible, who presides in the centre of her heart - beyond every sense and beyond every created image. She holds Him inside her through pure love; like the sweet air, He enters into all her parts, giving her a new and divine life, which no human tongue can explain or understand.

To properly understand this image we must go to the popular language used by Sr. Maria Celeste. Taking the air for a person from Naples means not just going out

for a breath of fresh air, but having a grand and spacious horizon before us. It is not just that sense of well-being when we breathe in the pure air, but also this grand view which is not limited, but spacious. And Sr. Maria Celeste makes a point of talking about all this being brought to life because we breathe in God, in the passage we have just heard, especially in those incisive words: *“like the sweet air, He enters into all her parts, giving her a new and divine life”*, but then she adds straight afterwards that this pure and luminous air becomes a new view of all reality:

B. 3. Then the soul understands without understanding anything distinct or particular, that she falls under the senses and under images, or created forms; but lives from three lights in a single uncreated and eternal light. C. 4. There she has everything in a unity of affects: she understands intelligible things with no intelligence, she fathoms everything and enters into everything in perfect joy but she is beyond all created things and is full of light and sees nothing of created splendours.

So now we are immersed in God, and in God we find all reality and unity, and this is joy and light. We must not forget that Sr. Maria Celeste’s spirituality places great emphasis on the dimension of light and beauty. There is a difference between this spirituality and the mysticism of Renan. In the spirituality of Sr. Maria Celeste, light and beauty play an important role, something which we do not find in Renan’s mysticism. I am not saying that it is absent, but it is not so clearly visible as happens in Mediterranean mysticism. Then God becomes this new life for us and this new light with which we look at everything. This is the fundamental fact of this gift. Sr. Maria Celeste then speaks of effects and fruit, in other words, this gift has an effect on us and from this gift we obtain something. The first effect is luminosity: *“E. 7. The first effect is pure air without a trace of fog: that is, an immensity without beginning or end, which is like air surrounding her within and outside herself, without the impediment of her limited being”*.

Then in this luminous opening up to the immensity of God, something takes place in us which the Psalmist speaks of in very striking words *“for Him a thousand years are like the yesterday which has passed”*. Then we open up to everything in this immensity of God, in this grandeur of God, and thus we have the light that we have. And we must accept that it is God who has communicated to us this different means He has of reasoning. This is when we leave our own limitations behind and accept the immensity of God, and then we can truly live according to Christ.

To speak in practical terms, if I look at others like God looks at them, can I be the prisoner any longer of prejudices, discrimination and preferences? Or can I even let myself be held back by something negative which I have done, when I look at things the same way that God looks in His mercy? From this immensity comes the light in which I can see everything as it really is, and this is what Sr. Maria Celeste states is the second effect:

F. 8. The second is a light that obscures the entire natural capacity and rationality of the limited reasoning power of the creature and takes away her ability; and she is above and beyond herself, looking with the infinite eyes of God Himself; and her

soul feels that she is no longer there in time, nor in finite things, but sees herself as infinite, impenetrable and immense in that inaccessible light in which her life is experienced, and it is her true life, God, the one light that exceeds every light, in the immensity of God who becomes the light with which we look at everything. But we must have the courage to leave behind our pretensions of imposing our own manner of seeing things on God. This is because we will always reason like that workman who was the first one hired in the parable of the workmen who were hired at the different hours of the day. Then the owner said: “*Are you jealous because I am good?*” And here we must always give credit to God’s manner of acting, which is a manner unlike our own, according to the logic of mercy, according to God’s logic which does not wish for the death of the sinner, but wants him to be converted and live. The third effect of this gift is reawakening ardour in us, the fire I spoke of previously and the description which Sr. Maria Celeste gives of it is a very beautiful one: “*G. 9. The third effect is the powerful ardour that this light generates and produces, which is nothing else than the burning and most sweet flame of love. 10. And this ardour is so welcome that it remains there, burning, and the longer it is there the more purely it burns*”. What is important is that affirmation: *burning, and the longer it is there the more purely it burns*. In other words, it is this experience of being abandoned in God, but precisely because we are abandoned and repose in God, we feel love being constantly awakened in us.

These are the effects that Sr. Maria Celeste also calls fruit, but are like many different varieties of them. The first fruit she calls clarity in matters of faith:

14. The first is clarity in matters of faith which is so good for the soul, especially as God is in all things, not being something arising from a form or created images: it is a light of truth for making a judgement about all the things that happen to her in her present life; it is also a great respect for God, whom alone in her ignorance she always adores in the depths of her soul.

Remember that the characteristic which she points out is the light of truth in making a judgement of all the things that happened to her in her present life and the other affirmation: “*a great respect for God, whom alone in her ignorance she always adores*” and this knowledge which she experiences as ignorance and the ignorance which she experiences as adoration, respect and acceptance by God.



The second fruit is confidence in God: I. 16. “*and a filial love so simple and so established that no words can describe in any way how it is: it can only be described as supported lovingly, most secure in all her things*”. The word that Sr. Maria Celeste uses is “*filiality*” (filial love), and it does not exist in Italian. It is a term that we expect to hear uttered by a child who trusts because she feels she has been properly heard. I think that from your childhood you still have some images that remain in your memory. For example, I still remember that sense of peace I had from the warmth in the folds of the cloak that my father had, the extreme feeling of security it gave me, when it was winter and when it was cold, and I am from the Italian mountains where it

often gets very cold. It is this sense of trust, security and protection which makes you trust others. So it is quite right for Sr. Maria Celeste to conclude her description of this abandonment by concluding that everything leads to love: I. 17. *“it reduces simply into love: the soul seeks it with love, melts with love, yearns with love, but without the least desire, because in fact all she can do is melt with love”*. the concluding phrase is the right one, because here we can do nothing else than melt with love, and everything beforehand leads to it.

The third fruit is the fullness of every consolation, as Sr. Maria Celeste says, and it is important for our prayers that this should be so. J. 19. *“She can ask nothing more of God because she can see that everything has been given to her and her God has become concerned for her well-being and with a more than ordinary care He comes forewarned, and so she burns for Him and plunges herself into Him. 20. God has now taken care of her soul totally and now the soul only lives to love and does everything in the simplicity of love”*.

This feeling that we are being properly guided and brought along by the hand of God who takes care of us, cannot but enlarge our horizons because: J. 20 *“she lives in all creatures in such a manner that she sees herself having life with all the souls that live; and so, just as God lives in all things, so she lives as God in everything that has life, because at that time the created intellect has ceased in her soul and then she experiences what the faith teaches us, that God is the life of everything and the essence of all things”*. Note that she experiences that God is the life of everything. Naturally this state, because everything is reduced to love, creates a certain unease in the intelligence, as if it wishes to rebel, wishes to understand, wishes to theorize, in other words, wishes to return to being what it was before this simple trusting in God. And the last part of this Grade makes it very clear how the tempter hides in this desire to understand, so as to inhibit our simple giving of self to God. And Sr. Maria Celeste tells us that we must not be surprised at this. What we must do is to ignore this misuse of our intelligence, and ignore all the other solicitations that can come from our other faculties with the prompting of the tempter.

And now I shall sum up this Grade in three points which may be helpful. Firstly, letting God open up our horizons, because when He opens up our horizons it is a sign that He is deifying us and then we can see things with His eyes, in other words, that growing in God, to use St. Gerard’s image. In other words we must not suppress our desires, but must open them up even more. God does not come as someone who limits us, but as someone who increases us. This is the first element.

The second element is vigilance, so that when we use the eyes of God we can bring everything back to unity with Him, and therefore we never cease to see things with the eyes of God, in such a manner than even when the eyes of God seem paradoxical or excessive to us, we continue to look with them.

And the third attitude is that simple and trusting abandonment, that “filiality” as Sr. Maria Celeste would say. I think that if you want to have a clear idea of that “filiality”, then go back with your thoughts to how it is described in Chapter 8 of the

Letter to the Romans. We can only interpret the heart of this chapter when we begin at the beginning, and this is only right because it follows on from Chapter 7, and yet the meat of it is in verse 15, which is the explanation of being children, when it speaks of that “*summatureo*” (σύμμάτῳ) of the Spirit in us, in other words, from the witness of the Spirit and our own conscience that we are children flows that trustful manner, with which we look at the future, and also look at the present, the events around us, our weakness, when we speak of weakness in prayer, until we arrive at that conclusive part, that certainty that nothing can take away that love the Father brings us in Christ. But bear in mind, however, that we are not speaking of the love that we bring to Christ, as some traditions have it, but of the love that the Father gives us in Christ, which no-one can ever take away from us.

Grade 14

This next Grade is also very beautiful, but I shall deal only with the essentials. Sr. Maria Celeste puts many things into the title and speaks: 1. “*Of the divine similitude, the pure delight of simplicity: the dwelling-place of the soul in the heart of Jesus through love*”.

I think that the crucial point of everything is making room in our heart for Christ or receiving the heart of Christ as our own heart.

I think that the crucial point of everything is making room in our heart for Christ or receiving the heart of Christ as our own heart. This is a theme that we also find in other writings by Sr. Maria Celeste. For example there is this very beautiful page when she speaks of the Word as the Heart of the Trinity, and then when she speaks of “receiving the heart” which was a particularly powerful experience for her. When we did medical examinations of Sr. Maria Celeste, the doctor who did all these examinations pointed out to me that on her left side there were some signs of enlargement, as if her heart had forced her bone structure to expand. This does not signify proof of that mystical experience which she has narrated, but it is something which has left me wondering, as also when it was pointed out to me, when these studies were done, that the age of Sr. Maria Celeste’s brain was much younger than what her age in time was. This can be compared with the fact that gradually as we get older, the brain also ages as well... This is simply an indication. More than two centuries have passed since her death. We have tried to study her bones, and we have done whatever can be done. I shall now move on from these facts.

What is important is that the Lord offers us His heart as the place where we are at home – as the texts of St. John tell us. That remaining there (note the power of this word) is then a reciprocal one: I remain in you and you remain in me. And so we must think along these lines that this gift of His heart that Christ gives us is intended as our dwelling place. And this time Sr. Maria Celeste does not describe the gift, but speaks immediately of the effects



of this gift. She just announces it and then speaks of its effects. And the first effect is simplicity, a simplicity in which we see ourselves despoiled of everything which is not Christ and in which we are re-clothed with the virtues of Christ:

A. 2. As the first effect of this kind of prayer, the soul experiences a pure simplicity in God, born of the sighs of her affection only for God. Here she is, already despoiled of everything, and burning with the virtues of the God made man, from which she has received her every blessing: and then she experiences the value derived from the sacred humanity of the God made man: she learns His obedience, His uniformity with the Father, and His ardent charity to His neighbours; she experiences a hunger for suffering and all the effects of heroic perfection that are there in Christ.

And then she announces that all this is not just something experienced, but is something with which she is clothed. In our spirituality the virtues are not our own virtues, but they are the virtues of Christ communicated to us by the Spirit. And here I can see one of the causes of the tension or incomprehension between Sr. Maria Celeste and Falcoia, because in Falcoia's view, the virtues are something generic and moral, of which Christ gives us examples, while for Sr. Maria Celeste, Christ is virtue, and His virtues are His beauties irradiated through us by the Spirit. We are invited to clothe ourselves in Christ, in the Pauline sense of the term, and the virtues are the traits of the life of Christ. I see them as the consequence. Rather than making a profession of vows, we make the profession of Christ poor and obedient. We become a proclamation, a witness of what He has become amongst us. This is one of the most essential points of our spirituality, for both the Redemptorists and the Redemptoristines. Then the first effect is this simplicity which despoils us in order to re-clothe us with Christ. The second effect of this prayer is dying in Christ in order to rise with Him. Before reading anything, remember when she wrote that she had the intuition of your Rule, and how does she record it? Dying in order to make Christ rise in many souls.

This term returns continually, and this dimension must be greatly valued because the 18th century has little to say about resurrection. The spirituality of the 18th century is about the incarnation and passion. The resurrection is certainly affirmed, but it does not determine the development of what she proposed. We shall see how Sr .Maria Celeste tries to describe this:

She no longer looks for herself being in the blessings of God; she lives dying on the cross, without wishing to see her own crosses, or notice her own sufferings.

4. And she is reduced to the simplicity of love: she no longer looks for herself being in the blessings of God; she lives dying on the cross, without wishing to see her own crosses, or notice her own sufferings; in her joy she despoils herself of her every act, although they are most spiritual ones; she lives giving herself to death, and there is now not even a moment of her life that she does not die.

This is about dying, and at every moment. Then she says that from time to time she leans and reclines upon the cross of her Beloved, but immediately afterwards: B. 5. *“she learns what a blessing the death of her Beloved was for her.*

C. 6. Nor does she remain in her humanity alone but passes to the centre of the divinity where the heart of her Beloved is. 7. Then she is received into the eternal repose of the living God and sees herself resurrected into eternal life.

In eternal repose she sees herself resurrected, and at the moment of her death, she has the experience of resurrection. Then she tries to explain everything that emerges from this reality, but at first she summarizes it: D. 8. *“Then there are three wonderful works of God in her soul by means of the God made man: the first one is clothing her with Himself, that is, with His own virtues; the second one, the death of her own self; the third one, the mystic resurrection with her Jesus, just as her spiritual death happened with Him”.*

Then straight afterwards she states: *“Then she finds the Paradise of the terrestrial soul”*, and this permits her to pass on to the Holy Spirit, because while the earthly Paradise is guarded by the Cherubim, to this Paradise of the resurrection the one who has the key is the Holy Spirit. It is He who keeps it sealed and closed, but opens it to those who are open to His actions. This is a reference to Mary and to the action of the Spirit at the moment of her virginal conception, so she concludes:

E. 11. “Not only is there the Cherubim to guard the door of this earthly Paradise, but the key is well shut and sealed by the Holy Spirit who is its guardian. 12. This same Spirit who sealed the work of the Incarnation of the divine Word, and enclosed Him in Mary’s womb, is the same one who seals the loving soul and keeps the keys to her. 13. This same Spirit, who is the love between the Father and the Word, alone is the love of the soul”.

So we must note that His love is the love of the Father and the Word, and for this reason His life is the same as the Word made man, and the place of the divinity: E. 13 *“His life is the same as the life of the Word made man and is the seat of God’s divinity”.* Remember that in the Prologue the Spirit divinizes. She associates all this wealth with the heart of Christ: E. 15-16 *“15. The soul that lives in Christ God lives in the heart of God and in the heart of Jesus she lives too: she loves God with the heart of Jesus. 16. Then she receives the wound of pure love that generates an infinite ardour; she always burns profoundly with the sorrow of love, that so subtly awakens the soul”.*

Those “who live in Christ God live in the heart of God, in other words, in the heart of the living Jesus”, in such a manner that we love with the heart of Christ. The consequence of this experience of the heart brings about an ardour of charity which we cannot manage to contain. And Sr. Maria Celeste commands us not to suffocate this ardour, and not look for compensations. When God has opened our hearts to the heart of Christ, we must not try to undo what He has done, but must keep our hearts open. Perhaps, if we want to understand this properly, we need to recall St. Augustine’s *anxiety of heart*. Remember the dynamics of the *unquiet heart*. I think of

something good which I think will bring about my happiness, but as soon as I attain it, happiness escapes me, leaves me unquiet and I seek it elsewhere. This touches on the experience that when we love with the heart of Christ, we discover that we have been deprived of love, paradoxically, because the joy of that love becomes the desire to love even more. We feel we can never love enough, because we love invoking love, and this, however, with peace and torment together. And this precisely because that heart is pierced and resurrected. In this predicament, therefore, nothing can be attributed to ourselves, but our own hearts beat with the heart of Christ, and we also learn that when the love of God is great, great too are the excesses of those others who love Jesus. And she concludes:

I. 26. This is born in the soul from the inaccessible light that God reveals about the infinite love that God brought to man when God created man, and what //59v// the excesses were of that loving heart of Jesus, man and God; and what all the sacrifices of His life were, and what His internal works were for men and for God: and what love, while she is called to live with the heart of her God made man!

J. 27. Oh poor soul! She sees her life finish through sorrow that no one can ever know what this death is, and she feels deprived of that love that she seeks, so that she can die to live always”.

She is called to live with the heart of her God and Man, and we are called to live with that heart transplanted. With the conclusion: *J. 28. “And now she understands clearly that her Jesus died so as to live resurrected in His creatures, through similitude and the life of true life and true living, dying to the life of the senses and the animal life”.*

Jesus died “so as to live resurrected in His creatures”, giving back to us our likeness to God, which was what we found in the Chapter about the creation, in such a manner that we also have that “*similitude and the life of true life and true living*”.

The final part is dedicated to the fruit of that experience, and the total gift to us from the hands of God. *“L. 33. From what has been said, a total resignation and union of will is produced in the soul. 34. And then a complete conformity with her God comes to perfection in the soul, living united to the heart of the Word made man, and the soul does not know how to leave here”.*

This is expressed in practical terms in sentence 37, which has a Teresian flavour (and reminds us of St. John of the Cross – let nothing disturb you): *“N. 37. Now the works of her soul are only to love and let herself be led where it pleases her Beloved: she wants nothing and desires nothing, flees no cross, no adversity disturbs her, and feels neither crosses nor the joys of the senses, but receives everything willingly. 38. As for what happens to her in this world, be it prosperity or adversity, health or infirmity, she flees nothing, and asks or desires nothing except what is disposed for her by her God”.*

These are the fundamental statements of this Grade. I wish to draw your attention to two elements which also lead us to a practical expression. Christ wishes to give us His heart so that we may become the ones who bring His heart to others. It is

this gift of His heart that we must always develop with its sacramental dimension. All our love must be the love which Christ brings to His brothers and sisters. From it derives that total agreement of will, in such a manner that we make Him known as the One who wishes to live with us and in us, so that our purpose is to welcome the Christ who wishes to rise again, and wishes to live as crucified and risen in us, so that we may help Him become known as the one who is crucified and risen and can give hope to everyone. I am convinced that if we truly succeed in understanding this gift of sharing the heart that Christ gives us, then perhaps we can understand what the basic purpose is that we must witness to in the Church of today. They are the ideas that we have noted in our introduction.

This living in the heart of Christ is what Sr. Maria Celeste puts into her first rule, with the mystic profundity that she describes here in some special moments, and which later also became your rule. Because your Order has been born from a powerful experience that Sr. Maria Celeste had, then within what seems simply a norm, we find in the background that charismatic experience which impacted her life, and so we need to read those same words as words that describe the charismatic experience of each one of you, and how all this is experienced differently by each one of you who has that fundamental trait. The rules are not something that compel me from outside. The Constitutions mention the gift that has been given to you, and tell you how to make a practical expression of your fidelity to that gift. When we have this unitarian vision, then we no longer see a contrast between mysticism, fraternal life, community life and action, but we see everything as an expression of this vision. Since He has allowed us to share in His heart and has entrusted His heart to us as something that we must share with others, then there is this simplicity that comes with it, and then becomes our life.

Your Order has been born from a powerful experience that Sr. Maria Celeste had, then within what seems simply a norm, we find in the background that charismatic experience which impacted her life.

Grade 15



Grade 15 is one that we can summarize as being about the lights of eternity. It deals with the very brief moments, as Sr. Maria Celeste points out, in which we breathe in the eternity of God. She herself says it is really beyond her to describe this gift, and she says there is always this difficulty. What she specifies is what we find summarized at the beginning:

A. 2. From the past oration follows the beginning of the future eternity, that is, a certain glimpse that the soul has of the eternity that she awaits, but which she tastes of in some divine moments when she truly sees the beginning of the eternal life that she is to possess in God.

She speaks of brief moments when we have the sensation that time does not finish, and that we are headed into something that goes on forever. And this

experience, according to Sr. Maria Celeste, derives from the fact that we are in union with the divinity, and in this union we feel that this the Word Himself, reality as God feels it.

4. And these not as past, present and future, but as they are in God, without a beginning or created end, according to the material and the form of things, but beyond form and beyond any human capacity, since in this state the capacity of the created and finite intellect has ceased. 5. And then she is given an infinite understanding by which she can receive a creature who is also a wayfarer.

What stands out for us is this infinite knowledge, but naturally only as far as it is possible for a creature. And then we see, and more than see, we feel that time no longer limits reality. Neither the present nor the future has passed away. So there are very brief experiences (which Sr. Maria Celeste points out), which are very full ones, and yet they leave in the soul the fruit of what has happened. And the first fruit is what she describes in sentences 6 and 7, and speaks of being increased in God and that we see all this in amazement.

C. 6. And these divine moments, although they are very brief, are so full of salvation for the soul that receives them that it is not possible to explain them with the tongue of flesh because they purge her marvellously of all visible things and things of the senses, in such a manner that, although they enter into her soul, they are totally of God and annihilate every single act of her own that is found in this soul because they not only console, slake and completely satiate the soul, and magnify her beyond every created being, but at the same time, so great is the wonder and the grandeur in which she sees herself infinitely distant from the things of here below, that at that time she feels she is then far and above them. 7. Nor has she anything more to do with this world because of a marvellous division that differentiates her from all these things for that time that it lasts, so that she no longer feels herself as a limited and finite being, but as an unlimited and infinite being who cannot be imprisoned or restricted in anything.

What strikes me is precisely this: no longer feeling the limitations of time, which is something that we could then try to bring about in our own lives. For example, how many times do we impose our own time on others, and how many times do we want to impose our own rhythms on others. And so I think that Sr. Maria Celeste, as the fruit of this experience, has this greatness of mind which knows that everything and everyone has its proper time. So then we must no longer be impatient, but must try to be patient like God and develop the patience of God. I think that the parables that explain all this are many. It must distinguish the witness that we give to Him. Together with this growth there is our wonder and our letting ourselves be amazed by God. God always invents something new. And so we must always keep ourselves open, not confine ourselves and take up fixed positions, but have this grandeur that comes to us from have experienced how things are in the grandeur of God. And we must also accept that we will constantly notice that what we have understood of God until now is nothing.

11. *Then she sees how everything that she had thought, said and understood about God until that time was not true and that she had imagined God according to her own littleness.* 12. *And she is left with a vision of her own ignorance about the things of God being such that she sees herself as being worse than a lowly beast of the earth in her life.*

The more we approach the truth, the more we discover that we are ignorant. Generally speaking, I have this attitude in my life. I always distrust those who know, and always trust those who begin by saying that they do not know, but can tell you something. And this ought to happen in our spiritual lives. The more we draw closer to God, the more we can say that we are starting to know Him, if we only notice that we do not know Him.

The mystics always emphasize this apophatic dimension of the spiritual life. We can say what God is not much more easily than we can say what He is. But I believe that this also happens in our daily lives. The more I know a person, the more I notice that I still do not know him or her. When God gives us a little glimpse of eternity, the more we realise that, as we have said, He is no small thing, and He is not nothing. And the same attitude is true not only about how much we know, but also about how much we love. No matter how much we experience being humbled and reduced only to loving, the one thing we can do is love.

15. *She destroys herself not now, but is in God destroyed, loving only; and she does not simply do this in both the spiritual and temporal things occurring in her life, but from this point onwards she does not even permit herself, - of all that has come to her of the above-mentioned grace, - to want to investigate anything of it with her created intellect and reasoning part, or either understand or grasp it, remaining there in a voluntary oblivion; since she has found out that she would in fact be rendered incapable of receiving it again if she wished to enter there with her limited nature.*

When we have truly had an experience that God is love, we cannot fail to feel in ourselves that the only possibility is to love. “*destroying ourselves in God loving only*”, but it is a self-destruction in order to find the truth in ourselves. Amongst the blessings that derive from this experience, Sr. Maria Celeste mentions justice first and foremost, given that we find ourselves filled with the virtues.

H. 16. *In my opinion, it is a grace that increases all those which the soul had received beforehand, through the blessings that it causes her, because it renders her full of true and solid virtues. The first is justice, by which she surrenders her own self entirely to God with a genuine renunciation of herself through the division that she experiences.*

Then this “giving ourselves totally back to God” is the attitude of justice. Since we are totally His gift, we must give ourselves totally back to Him. It is the expression that Sr. Maria Celeste uses; “*surrendering her own self entirely to God with a genuine renunciation of herself*”. The second blessing that derives from this gift is detachment.

18. *Secondly, it causes so genuine a detachment from any //63r// created thing in such a manner that she does not take pleasure in anything of this visible world, thus rendering her senses so stupid, foolish and arid that she can do nothing other than sustain a total fast from not only every human pleasure, but also a spiritual fast from everything that happens in her spirit, because her sense is not capable of that blessing, nor her intellect of understanding anything of it.*

Note that detachment is not solely in regard to things, it is also in regard to the same spiritual experiences that she has had. And when we bring this into our lives, for example, we are ready to detach ourselves from things, but we never manage to detach ourselves from our ideas. We forget that the only manner we have for getting others to accept something is when those other people perceive that in what we are proposing we are not seeking to gain anything for ourselves. When you do your community discernment, if you are not detached from your own way of seeing things, then it is impossible to have a community discernment. My responsibility only goes as far as proposing my own vision. It does not go as far as making others accept my vision. The consequence of this gift is what she has described in the preceding Grade, in other words, living in suffering and living dying.

I. 20. So she lives divided and suffers the pains of death living thus, because her lower portion cannot share in the blessing of lofty and divine things, because it cannot be capable of them in any way; and she suffers equally again because the upper part of her soul cannot always be in the eternal blessing that she has already experienced.

And the sequence is always one of life and death that occurs because we breathe in that immensity, that eternity of God, and we live the consequences of it in our daily lives. And Sr. Maria Celeste points out the manner of that complex attitude in which she sees herself: J. 26. *“And so she feels she is living in this visible world as if she was incarcerated and confined to a cage, because she has a clear view of that semblance of liberty that she enjoys in God eternal, where she dwells.*

This seeing of ourselves as a gift does not bring us to glorify ourselves, and seeing ourselves as something God has made takes away any desire to think that we are anything important, as we are but ants. But this does not mean no faith in ourselves, but simply a recognition that we are the work of God. In Sr. Maria Celeste’s reasoning, it is not annihilation that makes us aware of what we are, but the fact of seeing that we are God’s work. And so annihilation is faith, the courage of our own initiative, the capacity for new ideas, and it is not retreating into ourselves, hiding away and losing ourselves. We are the fire that was mentioned in the preceding Grade. And so in God we find that repose, that peace that she describes as this sense of perfection, and draws breath from her experience of God.

K. 27. Her own figure appears inferior to an ant in our eyes, with a total inability on her part for anything good, because she sees her own origin in the good that proceeds from another object. 28. And all creatures seem lowly to her and of no worth. 29. And so her solitude is certain and she is so alone and incapable of receiving comfort and solace from anything created; all she receives is a most subtle air breathed to her by her divine

lover, the eternal God, where, through that divine clarity, she experiences the happy eternity of her beloved Good, the unique and only good in anything, who can never end or ever be limited, or is subject to any event that can diminish the eternal good in her by which she enjoys all visible creatures in the eternal love.

She enjoys everything in God, all the creatures and all the events, and lives all things as they are in eternity in God. And then Sr. Maria Celeste adds a warning to be jealous in guarding this gift because there is the demon who tries to create problems.

N. 33. *We should warn that the demon attempts, when the soul is outside this great communication, to restore a certain esteem for herself in the soul and make her look upon herself and want to understand, at least in part, what is going on inside her.*
34. *But if the soul is very shrewd, she never consents to enter with her own capacity into what happens, because she will then lose this grace straight away.*

Note two things: esteem for self and the pretence of wanting to understand. In other words, attributing things to oneself in some manner and relating things to our own categories. Instead we must never forget that it is God who works. But we must always live in that faithful abandonment into the hands of God. And at this point Sr. Maria Celeste seems as if to conclude the Grades. It is indeed true that she concludes with “May God be praised”. My own hypothesis is that she had intended this, but then noticed that she had to add something and then added it. And so, as we shall see, in the final Grade she mentions other gifts.

We must always live in that faithful abandonment into the hands of God.

We are trying to specify what we can take from this gift for our own lives. The basic fact I think is that we must envisage everything in the eternity of God. This means that we must be people who live for the resurrection and for eternity. Our culture does not help us to open up our horizons. You must have noticed that in some proposals for Christian life, the resurrection of eternity are placed as if in parentheses. I find that the letter by the Pope, *Spe salvi*, is intended to reclaim precisely this ‘open dimension’ of our lives. When reading *Spe salvi* you will have noticed that he almost hardly speaks of the resurrection, but speaks of the life eternal. He has made this choice, but I think that the magisterial direction is clear: we must constantly reopen new horizons in our lives, because without this opening, our hopes are not authentic ones. This is something which in our daily lives must be a little more present, as we are pilgrims towards the resurrection, pilgrims towards the eternal life. We must constantly remind ourselves of this dimension. The second fact: learning to reason in God’s time, in other words, not being one of those people who impose their own manner of thinking in making things happen.

God has His own manner in looking at time. If for example we wanted to comment on the parable of the owner who hired the workmen at different hours, we would notice how diverse God’s time is. So we must not impose our own manner in thinking of making things happen, and therefore sometimes playing down

We must envisage everything in the eternity of God.

what has happened. My relationship with time must not be such that I only see things as they ought to be. We must work hard at everything with all our powers, but not exhaust ourselves for nothing. And this is because if I worry too much over things I will be incapable of changing the things that need to be changed at the moment when I meet up with others. This is what I have drawn from this line of reasoning.

The third thing that comes from all this is that at the fraternal level we must always give time the patience of God. Remember that God has revealed Himself to us by means of a process of *oikonomia*, a gradual growth, a process, in other words God has accepted man's time as His own time. In our fraternal relationships we must be faithful in accepting the other person's time. One of the things which I do that is always hard to get accepted by the priests is that statement by St. Alphonsus regarding the invincible ignorance which highlights this fact. In other words, if I find myself faced with a person who is making mistakes, but is not aware of being in the wrong, and is not responsible for this error, before pointing out the mistake, I must to see if it is the right moment to speak about it. What I say must be of use to my brother. The reply I receive every time is "no", but the truth always helps. And I reply with St. Alphonsus: "I must tell the truth, but only the truth that helps", and this assumes the other person's time.

And the other element is also that sense of the relativity of things, when we project them against this great horizon of eternity. Because when we have that perspective, then things acquire their right value, because when we get the perspective wrong, we no longer have things in proportion. If we do not place things in their right perspective, they either seem so great that we cannot overcome them, or so small that we have not seen them in the right proportion. This is what this penultimate Grade is all about.

Grade 16

The final Grade is a bit complex. Sr. Maria Celeste unites three experiences. The first one is the experience of participating in the flagellation of Jesus, in the flagellation in a particular manner, but in the Passion, and this is in an ecclesial perspective. The second experience is keeping company with the Saints, and the third is the prayer of petition. Note that at first glance they seem to be three different gifts, but we can find a common element in them, which is the ecclesial dimension of the spiritual journey. She participates in the Passion of Christ, and in a special manner in His flagellation, but she lives it again in those who are now Church. She lives the communion of Saints and lives reciprocal prayer, and therefore I think that this dimension, as in the *Dialogues*, is concluded with Sr. Maria Celeste's Eucharistic transformation. It is the same ecclesial perspective. In other words for Sr. Maria Celeste the mystic journey is not an individualistic journey, but a profoundly personal one, but always in an ecclesial setting. I think that this is typical of your own spirituality. Charity is the place where mysticism is for you, which means you must not be distant from others, but be in communion with them. You must never lose this emphasis. So it is in fraternal life where mysticism is. And this also safeguards those special vocations. Remember that Sr. Maria Celeste had also thought of rules for

hermits, and so she had respect for their specific gifts, but within this ecclesial journey. Let us now consider the first gift: the experience of the Passion, and the flagellation of Christ in particular.

B. 3. It should be noted that on certain days the soul is placed by the Lord in a battle that is like a squadron of demons who speak to her in a spiritual sense and tell her that there is no God, and the things of the holy faith are not true, and other things all of darkness and dreadful fears; and thus they persecute her with a terrible assault of injury against God, and the poor soul experiences a dense darkness. 4. And this battle becomes a very painful one for her, nor is there any assistance which helps her in such a terrible sadness, which is in the guise of a tempest, and so she is flagellated in all her intimate parts, because the Lord has permitted it, without her experiencing any help or light for the whole time that it lasts.

Note this: flagellation is doubt, the doubt that does not let us breathe easy. We must not allow our lives to be moments of doubt for us, and we must not be surprised when we find ourselves in this situation. This flagellation by doubt is resolved by Christ who reveals Himself to us like the sun. When the sun comes, light comes, just as Sr. Maria Celeste describes it:

C. 5. After this tempest she experiences a serenity as though that battle had never happened: she feels the sunshine of her God within her and in a marvellous way she discovers the life of Jesus in her own.

What is wonderful is to understand that the life of Jesus is in our own, from whom we too must expect to have that same Passion and flagellation that Jesus had, and this sadness of doubt is our burden in ecclesial life, because what makes us suffer is seeing Jesus when He is not loved, Jesus when He is rejected. Sr. Maria Celeste speaks about this dimension:

8. Then the soul understands that all the pains suffered by the elect of God, be they darkness, temptations, battles, fear and pain, are sent to the soul by the divine Father to unite her to His divine Son so that in this state of the merits of His Passion and His pains she might participate in a spiritual and divine way. 9. And in this understanding the soul offers to God the Father all the pains of the just who are in this state of travail in the person of Jesus Christ, where she sees herself as living and accepted in Him by God the Father by the wonderful grace of infinite merit acquired in the agony of suffering identically with her love Jesus.

...think of this profound suffering as a gift, this suffering with the Church in our lives.

Then we experience suffering, not just what Christ had to suffer, but what now lives in His mystic body. I think that at this moment, at the level of the Church when faced with certain realities, we must feel a profound suffering, for example what is coming to light in certain countries in regard to the conduct of certain priests, and the court cases about the abuse of minors which have made headlines. And there is another great suffering at the attempt at reconciliation with the SSPX that

the Pope has made and has had the response that we all know about. Here I have given only these examples, but they could be multiplied, because there are so many. And so we must think of this profound suffering as a gift, this suffering with the Church in our lives. We have two types of suffering: doubt, as I said before, and feeling the suffering of the mystic body. However, we must live with it, with this awareness that it is the other part of the gift, of understanding that this is how Jesus is living His life again in us, in such a manner that, using the term that Sr. Maria Celeste uses, the conclusion of all this is: *“the true resignation of Jesus in God”*. We turn to God in simplicity for the salvation of the world, and this gift is an important one for Sr. Maria Celeste, so much so that she repeats the discourse at the beginning and restates it once again before passing on to the second gift of this Grade:

F. 14. But God gives him this permission to exalt the soul and because He wants the just to be conformed to His divine Son in their exaltations and to make a true original of Him in the soul, in which His love can be happy to be, because then the soul is in the true exercise of the divine patience: and without any act by her, she is firmly in God with the patience of Jesus, abandoned and despised and destitute on the cross.

Note this “Make a true original of Jesus on the cross”, which is that inspired portrait that Sr. Maria Celeste points out as the criterion of life for us. And the conclusion of this first gift is: F. 16. *“And so I pray for such souls, that the Lord will make them worthy of such a blessing, and not complain or be displeased about the suffering, but throw themselves into the bosom of the Lord and let themselves be guided as is His good pleasure, so that they may arrive at a total internal resignation”*. What is important is very much the image – throw themselves into the bosom of the Lord and let themselves be guided by His will.



The second gift of this Grade is the company of the Saints. And in this I find a reference to popular piety. You know that in popular religiosity the Saints have a special role. For Sr. Maria Celeste it is not necessary to deny this reality, because this reality becomes a mystic experience for her, and this happens as the company of the Saints whose feasts we celebrate, or of the Virgin in her festivities. And it is a joyful

experience: G. 19. *“And it occurs as an internal invitation and generates rejoicing and spiritual happiness, giving birth in the soul to a purity so beautiful that it unites her to a divine light; and is of much profit for the purification that such company causes in her soul”*.

What is important is joy and purification together. Besides this company of the Saints she also speaks of the company of the angels, especially in communion. And she gives us a very beautiful reflection on the angels who honour the Lord who gives Himself to us.

And lastly, the final gift is that of the prayer of oration. In certain moments the Lord makes us experience an urgent desire to seek Him and this is in regard to our own needs or the needs of those who surround us. There are two ideas. The first one is the one that Sr. Maria Celeste classifies as oration: J. 25. *“This prayer (oration) is a charity that God infuses in the soul for the needs of the Church or the public or some sinner or the souls in Purgatory, as it pleases the Lord, or for the profit and perfection of good souls”*.

This prayer (oration) is a charity that God infuses in the soul for the needs of the Church or the public or some sinner or the souls in Purgatory, as it pleases the Lord, or for the profit and perfection of good souls”.

It is a spirit of charity which God infuses into us, and this charity, when it is specific, can be charity either towards ourselves, or towards those who surround us. Then your prayers are a form of charity that God gives you. The second idea is that you should not be surprised if, when you go to pray for something, you find it sort of goes out of your mind, or rather, you feel a

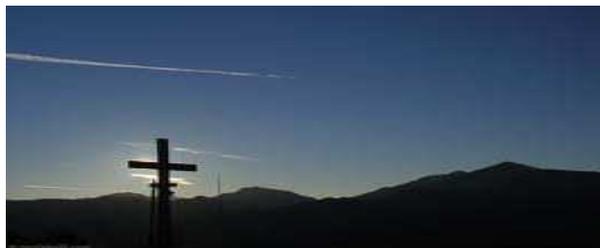
certain reluctance to pray. On this point Sr. Maria Celeste is a little strange, because she says that it is a sign that what we are asking is not according to God. I would be a little cautious about this statement because, when you pray for those who have done you harm, prayer does not come spontaneously, and yet we need to pray for them... But I believe that there is some truth in it, because at times we want to do something, but we feel that what we want to do is not right. It is a feeling that we have, and in this case, we must see this repugnance or forgetfulness in regard to this intention...

J. 28. On the other hand, when she wishes to pray for something and does what she should do, but feels a certain internal repulsion and it is an effort to pray to the Lord, it happens many times that, when she applies all her effort and goes to prayer with everything else she can recollect of what she had proposed to speak of and pray to her God, she then has a sign that the Lord is not pleased to grant her at that time what she desires, perhaps because there is then a greater benefit for souls and for His glory.

What I think is important is that prayer must not be something that we do in a forced manner, but we must be committed to it. We must indeed force ourselves to pray, but we must also be attentive as to how we pray and about what the Lord wants us to pray. After this Sr. Maria Celeste adds only that what she has been able to write is the least about what the Lord has done, because things so pure and substantial are not in the sphere of the intellect. Bearing in mind this richness of the gift, I would suggest that what emerges most from this journey is her vision of the spiritual journey.

The first element that I think emerges clearly from the Grades is the priority of the gift. All that we are is a gift that God gives us. We must always reason by beginning with what God does and not with what we do, and then the second attitude appears. Our whole journey is accepting all this with a grateful mind and an attitude of amazement which becomes a sense of responsibility. The gift becomes prayer (oration), the gift becomes life or the gift bears fruit. This is the language in which Sr. Maria Celeste tells us all this...

The second element is that in all the Grades there is a profound attitude of faith in the Spirit who is guiding us, even when we do not think we have faith, because our spiritual journey is an abandonment in simplicity to the guidance of the Spirit, and yet this is a faith journey, filled with hope, even when it is a cross. This note of faith in Sr. Maria Celeste, in spite of what her own experiences were, and in her proposal, are very clear. I say in spite of her own experiences, because her experience of not being understood had a marked effect on her, all the more so because it was a moment of closure to others, the closure that was later overcome at Pareti and Roccapiemonte when she met Father Bernardino Sommandico. The third thing that I think is important is that the objective of the whole of spiritual life is letting God make us participants in His immensity, His eternity, and His divinity, and letting God be able to bring us to communion with Him. So God wants us to share in Him, live with Him in communion, and bring us to His intimate and Trinitarian communion. And from this participation at times we receive inspirations and little tastes that are there to stimulate us to continue on our journey. So in the different Grades, Sr. Maria Celeste tells us about her various powerful experiences in this participation, and all this is the other element that I would like to point out. All this becomes real in Christ the Word Incarnate by means of Him and being configured to Him. In other words, it is Christ who brings us into communion with the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and the Spirit does nothing other than configure us, form us like Christ, and in Christ and the Father we are loved in Christ and through Christ, so that we may become His living portrait, His living image through participation, and this becomes the synthesis of the whole spiritual journey. The final element that I wish to point out is that, on this journey there is always this participation in the mystery of the cross through the resurrection. If we want to forget the cross, then we are in error. If we dwell only on the cross, we are likewise in error. The correct view is that Christ wishes to live resurrected in us and in all creatures. These I think are the most important elements that sum up this very complex journey that the *Grades* present us with.



VIVA MEMORIA¹

Sr. Hildegard Magdalen Pleva O.Ss.R.



The words ‘*viva memoria*’, commonly translated as ‘living memory’ or ‘living memorial’, are both the core and general theme of the charism or spiritual mission of the Redemptoristine Nuns (Order of the Most Holy Redeemer). These words are product of the mystical inspirations of the Venerable Maria Celeste Crostarosa. When Maria Celeste (1696-1755) and St Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) met in 1730, each was at a critical point in life and spiritual development. Alphonsus became a supporter of Maria Celeste and, in turn, her mystical inspirations influenced his effort to found the Redemptorist Congregation. Key elements of her inspired Rule were adapted and appear in various versions of the Redemptorist Rule.

The words ‘living memory’ first appeared in the rule for contemplative religious life revealed to Maria Celeste. Following her reception of the Eucharist on 25 April 1725, she ‘heard’ these words in her mystical prayer: ‘I have been pleased to choose this Institute to be a living memory and image of the works of salvation and love accomplished by my only-begotten Son during the thirty-three years he lived as man in this world.’ The dynamic concept of ‘living memory’ is a variation on the theme of imitation of Christ as a means of attaining holiness of life and union with God. However, ‘living memory’ moves beyond imitation into personal transformation in Christ. It is a constant and dynamic process by which one is changed interiorly, gradually stripped of the false self, so as to reveal the Christ dwelling within.

In accord with the intention of God the Father, this is the Jesus in whose life we were intended to participate by virtue of his Incarnation as a human being. Gradual revelation of the dynamic life of Jesus within the soul makes present in our world and time the person and works of Jesus Christ. According to Maria Celeste, the constant and dynamic personal spiritual process of transformation is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in an environment born of virtue and availability to God in times of silence and solitude.

For Maria Celeste, the realisation of the living memory of Christ in each nun would be accomplished through development of nine virtues: union of hearts and mutual charity, poverty, purity, obedience, humility and meekness of heart,

¹ *Lexicon of Redemptorist Spirituality*, Edited by Sean Wales C.Ss.R, and Dennis Billy C.Ss.R. Published by the General Secretariat for Redemptorist Spirituality, Rome 2011, pp. 289-292

mortification, recollection and silence, prayer, self-denial and love of the Cross (they were later increased to twelve by Bishop Falcoia, who added faith, hope and love of God).

Studies of the various early versions of the Rule for the Redemptorist Congregation indicate that key elements, especially personal pursuit of the twelve virtues as the means of spiritual transformation, were directly influenced by the original rule received by Maria Celeste. By this participation in the life of Jesus, the individual becomes a *living memory* of the Saviour, the active presence of Christ in the world. From an early rule formulation: 'All those called to this Institute are to esteem highly and rejoice in such a calling and are to strive as much as possible to make themselves *living copies* of that divine model, becoming like the life of the Saviour'(Complesso, 1732: Founding Texts p76). The first sentence of a later formulation of the Rule, 'The purpose of the new and least Institute... is none other than to imitate, *as much as possible with divine grace, this divine Master and model...*' (Compendio of Bovino, 1745: Founding Texts p156). The *Primitive Rule* of the Redemptorists begins: 'The purpose of the Institute is that of *the closest imitation of the most holy life of our Savior Jesus Christ and of his most adorable virtues*' (Text of Conza, 1747 Founding Texts p179). This is the first text of the Rule approved by the Congregation as a whole. All of these documents express two ends or purposes for the Congregation: to live as Jesus Christ and to be in missionary service of the poor and most abandoned.

Other evidence indicates the extent to which the inspiration of living memory influenced early Redemptorist spirituality. In 1741, Alphonsus wrote that Gioacchino Gaudiello, the first to die in the Congregation, 'manifested to all the life of Jesus Christ'. When Vito Curzio, the first brother in the Congregation died in 1745, Redemptorist Giovanni Mazzini eulogised him, saying he had 'achieved his objective to become a living copy of Jesus Christ'.

Nonetheless, as Alphonsus earnestly laboured to obtain approval in Rome for the Rule of his Congregation, texts clearly began to depart from early versions which retained so much of the flavour of the Rule of Maria Celeste as revised by Bishop Falcoia. In order to receive official approbation of the Rule concessions were made in terms of emphasis and format and primary influences were obscured.

Today, interpretation of 'living memory' is appropriating theological understandings of the Eucharist *memoria* or memorial of the Mass. In the words of consecration (the institution narrative or *anamnesis*) not only is the Body and Blood of Jesus made present under the appearance of bread and wine, Jesus Christ and all of the Paschal Mystery are also made present and active among us. We are not merely remembering Jesus' life and death or imitating the Last Supper with his disciples. Those events are rendered as living and actively working in their redemptive power for the world in our time. By our presence and expression of faith we too become gifts transformed. The level of participation penetrates even more deeply if the community offers itself along with the gifts of bread and wine, uniting itself with the words of the Eucharistic Prayer III: 'Father we bring you these gifts. We ask you to make them holy

by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The theologian Johannes Metz (b. 1928) wrote that consecrated religious fulfill an important role in the Church. 'They press for the uncompromising nature of the Gospel and of the imitation of Christ. In this sense they are the institutionalized form of a *dangerous memory* within the Church.' Proclamation of the memory can be dangerous as it may be threatening to the *status quo* in any institution and to the norms of the surrounding culture. The living memory spoken of here is the dangerous living reminder of God's redemptive love, of the desire of God to be incarnated in every human being, of a divine reality open for participation by all humanity.

For Redemptoristine and Redemptorist religious in our time, transformation into the life of Jesus Christ remains primary. The chief means to this end continues to be the ascetical practice of living the virtues of Jesus, living his Mission: Life, Death and Resurrection, the entire Paschal mystery, within the community. In this shared charism, community life, human relationship at every level, is the locus of those who would become *viva memoria*, living memories of the generous love of the Redeemer. The invitation of God, to participate in divine life and divine love in such a way as to become a living memory of Jesus Christ is the missionary message of everyone who promotes the Redemptorist/Redemptoristine charism.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is the imitation of Christ a conscious part of your spiritual practice?
2. How might the ideal of becoming a living memory of Christ be manifest in your own life?
3. How can the connection between living memory and the Eucharist made here enhance understanding of both the Liturgy and practice of the virtues?
4. How has your appreciation of the Redemptorist charism and mission been expanded?





Saint Alphonsus and the monastery of Saint Agatha dei Goti

*A Conference on the 250th Anniversary of
the Episcopal Ordination
of Saint Alphonsus M. De' Liguori*

Sr. Anna Maria Ceneri, O.Ss.R.

Let me first of all bring you greetings from the sisters of the monastery of the Most Holy Redeemer in our city. Thanks to all, and especially to the Missionaries of the Naples' Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, for the interesting and intense initiative in which we will participate this evening, for the intention expressed in the invitation - to read the pastoral work of Saint Alphonsus again, on the 250th anniversary of his Episcopal Ordination.

The pastoral commitment of Saint Alphonsus is very rich. I will try to extract his special and unique relationship with the Monastery of Saint Agatha dei Goti. Tannoia, the first biographer of Alphonsus describes our monastery as: "The most worthy and glorious work for Jesus Christ, unique, according to many, the most honorable for Monsignore /S. Alphonsus/ and most useful for this city".

Among the most assiduous concerns of Saint Alphonsus, was that of education or youth. While boys were educated at the Seminary, there was no school for girls in Saint Agatha, where they could learn moral and human virtues and receive some formation.

Fr. Tannoia continues referring to the City Saint Agatha dei Goti:

"Since there did not exist a monastery to educate daughters of the nobility or to consecrate them to God, the girls were forced to live with families at their inconvenience, or to pay double fee and to head to other places. This lack was regretted, but there was no one ever interested in resolving it. Alphonsus undertook to resolve this need which, he accomplished with great efficacy".

A suitable building used as a place of worship in the city center gave him inspiration. In 1609 during a pastoral visit Bishop Ettore Diotallevi found it turned into a deposit for the storage of ladders and other agricultural tools. In 1610 the Family of Lords Mazzy undertook to complete the church, dedicated to S. Maria di Costantinopoli, since the construction had been initiated, but not completed. Only the outer walls and a rough cover existed. No saint was venerated in that church, so it was commonly called the church of Saint Null. After having erected an altar and decided about personal contribution - some income was derived from alms - the Primicerius

Don Tommaso established a Congregation there: the Confraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis, which in a short time, grew to 150 members. After the Congregation was dissolved around 1650, on October 10th that same year, the Conservatory of Santa Maria of Constantinople, was founded near the church. Its primary goal was to educate young girls under the guidance of Franciscan Sisters. The conservatory continued until 1702.

The sacred place was then abandoned and "*the house of the Virgin, became a den of animals*", where military men gathered.

Saint Alphonsus decided to reconstruct the Conservatory of S. Maria di Costantinopoli, intending to transform the place from "*a repository of vanity into a nest of doves*". His idea, however, was initially not well received. There was some opposition for different reasons. Above all, it was discussed whether the place should become a cloistered Conservatory. Saint Alphonsus asked those involved in the discussion: "*Explain yourself. What you have in mind? If you plan to form a convent of servants of God, I will gladly involve myself, but if you want a warehouse or a store of women, we would better not talk about it.*" They turned to him for the final decision. Perhaps they were aware that such a work of God was reserved to Saint Alphonsus: his zeal, his perseverance and his great concern were necessary to finish it.

Bishop De Liguori, confident in God's help, addressed for income to Pope Clement XIII, to the King of Naples (Ferdinand IV and to his board of regents), and the University (Town Hall) of Saint Agatha, from which he obtained the annuity of 50 ducats for 10 years. He managed to put together an annual pension of 764 ducats, together with some personal offerings, which was enough to maintain the Monastery.

Tradition states that the holy Bishop himself ordered and directed the works of adaptation of the corridors, cells, workrooms and he drew plans for flower beds in the cloister with his crutch. Our holy Bishop would stop to talk to the first Prioress in the center of the garden, in a small circular space, which still exists, sitting on stone seats in a place called "Delight". There was a small room in the monastery, which was demolished in the thirties to expand the street "Rome". Tradition says that Saint Alphonsus would stop there and sit to chat with the sisters.

In Saint Agatha everything was seen as a miracle. Whatever Alphonsus wanted, he obtained, especially from Rome. As the construction began, he visited the place every day and did not allow the workers to slacken. Aware of his precarious health, he wanted to do everything with his heart (soul), "*not with a hammer*".

His firm purpose was to see the Monastery open, as soon as possible, even though it was still incomplete. He said: "*all the foundations began incomplete; ... along the way things get completed.*" On July 25th, 1765 he obtained the decree of enclosure from the Pope. Three nuns from Scala, from the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, founded in 1731 by the Venerable Mother M. Celeste Crostarosa, with the assistance of Alphonsus himself, moved into the new monastery, under the title of S. Maria di Costantinopoli.

The corner stone of the foundation - as Tannoia calls her - and a great collaborator of Saint Alphonsus in the work of spiritual edification of the Monastery -

was Sister Maria Raffaella della Carità - Matilde De Vito, born in Naples on March 5th, 1699, and installed as prioress at the advice of Bishop Chiarelli, the ordinary of the monastery of Scala. She was joined at Saint Agatha by: Sister Maria Felice dei Santi Chiodi - Anna Maria Pandolfi, nominated Vicar, Sister Maria Celestinadel Divino Amore (of the Divine Love) - Mary Maddalena Romano, and a lay Sister M. Giuseppa di Gesù - Maria, who then withdrew and was replaced by Sr. M. Angelica.

Sister Celestina del Divino Amore testified at the Ordinary Process of Beatification of our Saint in the parlor of the monastery, in Saint Agata dei Goti, 1788, revealing many details about the sisters' arrival at Saint Agatha:

“After having left Scala, they stopped at Nocera dei Pagani, where two noblewomen from Saint Agatha - Donna Emilia Vinaccia and Donna Giovanna Rainone were waiting for them, accompanied by two Canons of the cathedral - Fr. Luke Albanese and Archdeacon Don Nicola Roberti. Also present was the Rector Major of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, Father Don Andrea Villani and Father Geronimo Ferrara, a Redemptorist. They arrived at Saint Agatha on June 29th, 1766, about five o'clock in the afternoon, triumphantly welcomed by jubilant people, with the sound of ringing bells, with mortars and gunfire shots and with the streets festooned in strings of myrtle, rosemary and flowers. Bishop Alphonsus wanted the Episcopal city to be beautifully adorned, so as to make the people aware of the sublime grace that was granted to them and to the whole diocese, on that day. Saint Alphonsus in his pontifical vestments together with the Chapter gathered around him, welcomed the foundresses at the entrance of the cathedral and handed a crucifix to the Prioress Maria Raffaella della Carità. Then the sisters were accompanied to the monastery and proceeded in procession with the Conventuals of St. Francis, the clergy, the cathedral Chapter and the Bishop. They entered the monastery accompanied with two young girls for service, blessing God”.

The Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the church and an Ambrosian and the *Te Deum* hymns were sung before a solemn blessing was imparted. The enclosure was established three days later, on Wednesday, July 2nd to give the possibility for the ladies of Saint Agatha to inquire about rules, customs and habits for their daughters. The monastery was provided with everything that was necessary, such as - furniture, linen, food, grain, wine and utensils. Saint Alphonsus send meals to the sisters for the eight following days and wanted to continue for a month, but the sisters themselves asked him to desist.

The Bishop did not omit anything what was necessary for the sustenance of the sisters and did not miss any opportunity to ensure that they had necessary spiritual support. In fact, on the third Sunday of July, he celebrated the titular feast of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer

with great splendor, in the monastery, preaching for three days before and giving the main sermon /panegyric/".

For the duration of his stay in Saint Agatha, Saint Alphonsus was helping the nuns financially, every year, and every eight days he used to send the main meal for the sisters. When he retired to Arienzo, he sent them gifts for feasts and at least once a month. Every year the Saint supplied oil for them, expressing his desire to maintain the Sisters of the Redeemer at his own expense as long as he was alive.

The fame of the monastery was growing ("because of the good odour (of sanctity) that the religious gave") as the bishop expressed it in a letter addressed to a citizen of Saint Agatha, Francesco Andrea Mustillo, the agent of the Duke of Maddaloni Cossa:

"Your daughters will be happier in it and will spare having to spend those two hundred or three hundred ducats of annuity which would have to be paid to the nuns of Saint Clare and Donnaregina in Naples".

In a short time, in fact, the Monastery was filled with girls seeking education. The best families of Saint Agatha entrusted their daughters, still children, to the monastery, as the Constitutions allowed them to accept girls who were only seven years old. There is a document saying that a fortnight after the enclosure, eight girls from a "renowned family" were accepted, after having made application to the Bishop. After a few months of education, four of them asked to be admitted to the novitiate and the Saint himself carried out holy exercises for them. Nevertheless one of them, Lucrezia Vinaccia, was tempted to leave and began to cry at the end of the corridor ... (according to the older nuns, it was at the side by the Carmine square), which overlooked the windows of the palace of the girl's aunt. After lunch, she was heard crying and she was expelled from the monastery. The holy Bishop called her to the "comunichino", spoke to her in a fatherly way, made her kiss his pectoral cross and at the end said: "Lucretia, do not weep any more". And so it was, she became a good religious named Sr. M. Giacinta di Gesù.

His zeal in guiding the nuns along the paths of holiness was inexpressible. In order to make them observe the rules precisely, he composed some leaflets containing "*Direct Records for the religious of the Most Holy Redeemer living in the monastery of Saint Agatha*" and had them printed.

There are forty-four "records" which he recommended to his sisters, loved as daughters, asking them to have them read at least once a year, during the exercises. The last recommendation written by pen that was already falling out of his hand, seems to be the central point of this will. It talked about "poor sinners who live far away from God". I believe that the whole of Saint Alphonsus' life and work are contained in this recommendation - to be "Redemptorists", "Redemptoristines" -means in itself much more than just a name-it means continuing the life of the Redeemer.

In a letter addressed to the Prioress of the Monastery of Saint Agatha, Mother Angelica del SS. Sacramento, dated June 5th, 1778, written after the Saint had retired to Paganì, he recommended the practice of record number 41, in which he appealed to pray for sinners, unbelievers and those who live separated from the Church.

There are some tangible signs of Saint Alphonsus' love and presence in the monastery: a beautiful crib, his gift to the girls receiving education /educante/. On Christmas Eve, they used to wrap the Infant Jesus in diapers and put the figure (which was also his gift) in the crib.

Saint Alphonsus had two pictures painted by Paolo De Maio, who lived with him in the bishop's house at Saint Agatha: a picture of the Most Holy Redeemer and the Divine Shepherdess, which he donated to the monastery.

In addition, according to the tradition, other donations from Saint Alphonsus are: the eighteenth-century organ kept in the monastery, located in the choir, harpsichord from 1714 and an armchair, reduced to a frame, because the nuns have been making relics of the Saint from it.

Saint Alphonsus wrote a song entitled "*Where am I, a blessed cell*" for his religious and taught them to sing it. Its subject was the spousal love between God and the soul, as in the Song of Songs. What is interesting, according to the documents of eighty years later, the nuns did not possess the musical score but sang it by ear. Therefore, a master of music was asked to write the music score and to send it to the Superior General of the Redemptorists, which he did, but no copy was left for the monastery, not even on that occasion.

Saint Alphonsus composed a sonnet for Mother Raffaella, who asked him to write it. When the Mother was overwhelmed by trials and tribulations, as well as physical suffering that afflicted her for a long time, she was heard to recite the verses below, with delight and emotion:

My God what do you want? What You want, I want,
I want what you want, the way you want.
Will you give me Heaven? I want it because you want it;
I want life and death, as you wish.
Do you want me to live or die? I want to live,
I want event to die, when you want me to.
Do you want me to live dying? I still want it,
I want life and I want death, as you wish.
Do you want me to suffer, Lord? I want to suffer,
I want to suffer always, if you want it so:
You want it? It is enough for me, I do not want anything else.
I want to love you, my Goodness, as you want me to.
Do you want me not to feel love? I want not to feel it:
I just only want You, in all what you want.

The reputation of the Monastery of Saint Alphonsus quickly spread beyond the boundaries of the nation, so that two noble women from far away Austria, with Pope

Pius VIII's permission, came to get to study and experience the rule, which then became a base for a monastery established under the patronage of Frederick II.

The two ladies were Eugenia Dijon and Countess Antonia von Welsersheimb (who become later Sister Mary Alphonsus of the Divine Will and Sister Maria Anna Joseph of the Resurrection). They stayed for four months from November 18th, 1830 until March 19th, 1831, in the monastery of the Redemptoristines at Saint Agatha dei Goti, which is certainly an important fact in the history of the nuns of the Most Holy Redeemer.

The purpose of their stay was to study the practice of the Redemptoristine's observance in all its details, so as to be able to establish a new house of the Order, erected in Vienna, with an authentic and genuine spirit, going back to the time of Saint Alphonsus. On returning to Vienna, the two nuns commenced the observance seen and experienced in Saint Agatha. The arrival of the two ladies from Vienna is a clear witness of the spiritual union of the monastery with the first Alphonsian Redemptoristine monastery behind the Alps, as well as its influence expanding to other foundations, which originated in Vienna and spread around the world.

Saint Alphonsus maintained constant relations with his monastery, as testified by numerous letters sent to the "nuns of the monastery of the Most Holy Redeemer, Saint Agatha dei Goti". What emerges from those letters, beside his paternity, is the strong and decided personality of Bishop Alphonsus, a man focused on his goals.

His humility was like other heroic virtues he possessed (according to the testimony of Sr. M. Celestina). When Sister Maria Raffaella learned about his departure from Arienzo and his inability to come to Saint Agatha to greet the sisters, because of his failing health, she wrote stressing the grief of all the sisters and imploring him to remember them in his will and to leave his heart to them. At these words, Saint Alphonsus expressed terrible distress saying: "*I have always considered Mother Raphael a wise woman, but now, she has lost her common sense: what do they want to do with my heart, fry it? The soul is important and if they love me, they can give my body to the dogs*".

Then Alphonsus sent a big Cross of rough wood to the Redemptoristines, which was "adorned with the instruments of the Passion" and decorated a thousand times by his kisses (according to Catarina Minutillo's testimony and reported by people worthy of faith and by the same Mother Raffaella).

The commitment, the concern and the affection of the Saint for his holy Monastery continued, according to another testimony. During a discussion at the Court of Turin on July 7th, 1866, concerning paragraph n. 3096 about the reversion of the ecclesiastical and monastic institutions, in which a man from Saint Agatha took part, an old prelate appeared. He intervened and said solemnly: "Do not touch my Monastery of Saint Agatha". Then the prelate disappeared. The old prelate had not been announced by anyone, neither was he seen before or afterwards. The mysterious appearance and the sudden disappearance made everybody believe that it was Saint

Alphonsus. Nevertheless the extraordinary intervention did not change the assemblies' mind and the Monastery of Saint Agatha was treated in the same way as all the others.

Today, in spite of all, about 250 years after the foundation, the Monastery exists and remains one of the most glorious and worthy works for Jesus Christ commissioned by Saint Alphonsus, a "SAINT AMONG US " who still imparts his paternal blessing and heavenly protection, continuing to radiate the light of holiness and faith, just as he had wanted it. Thank you!

Saint Agatha dei Goti , June 22nd , 2012

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An On-Going Challenge to Redemptoristine Life

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The primary rule for religious is the following of Christ (*sequela Christi*)² and in order to do so we need to discern with the Holy Spirit through ever new eyes on how best to accomplish this. After looking at the impetus given by Vatican II to religious this paper will focus on a specific aspect of authority that is relevant.

General Comments on Vatican II



Wulff described “manifest weaknesses in contemporary religious life: inadequately based spirituality, a one-sided attitude to superiors, lack of missionary spirit, out of date forms and practices, being out of touch with the world, too narrow profiles, inadequate education” to pre-Vatican II religious life.³ To his description could be added inappropriate governance structures, lack of human development and a form of living that often failed to meet the criterion for health, of

the individual and /or of the community.

At the Council the language of “charism” began to be used for the first time.⁴ This together with other words such as “dialogue,”⁵ “subsidiarity,” “collegiality,” and “co-operation” indicated quite a shift in thinking, one which Paul VI described in terms of a “*Novus habitus mentis*,” that is, a new way of thinking without which nothing of the Council would make sense.⁶

² *Veritatis splendor*, Encyclical Letter, John Paul II in www.vatican.va/.../hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html (Accessed 16th October 2013)

³ WULFF, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), London and NY, Burns and Oates and Herder and Herder, 1968, p. 325.

⁴ O’MALLEY, J.W., *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008, p.11.

⁵ Paul VI issued an Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* during the Council. This Encyclical alone contains 77 references to “dialogue” a further indication of the shift in language that was taking place.

⁶ PAUL VI, “Allocution to the Roman Rota,” 4 February 1977, in *AAS*, 69 (1977), pp. 147-153. English translation in *The Pope Speaks*, 22 (1977), pp. 173-179.

Specific Emphases of *Perfectae caritatis*⁷

Principles of authority remain but a new emphasis emerges:

1. All authority in a religious institute is received from God, through the ministry of the

Church, and exercised in a spirit of service after the example of Christ, the servant of all.

The May 11th, 2008, Instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "*The Service of Authority and Obedience*", spells out a number of ways in which this service is offered:

- a) In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority;
- b) Persons in authority are called to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer;
- c) Persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person;
- d) Persons in authority are called to inspire courage and hope in the midst of difficulties;
- e) Persons in authority are called to keep the charism of their own religious family alive;
- f) Persons in authority are called to keep alive the "*sentire cum ecclesia*";
- g) Persons in authority are called to accompany the journey of ongoing formation.

2. Such authority is exercised with genuine respect for the individual and so promotes voluntary obedience and fosters co-operation for the good of the whole institute.

This respect is manifested in consultation, communication and dialogue, yet, it must be remembered that the personal authority of the Prioress remains - to initiate a course of action and make a final decision.

3. Again, referring to the May 11th, 2008 Instruction, this service of the community is carried out various ways:

- a) The service of listening;
- b) Creation of an atmosphere favourable to dialogue, sharing and co-responsibility;
- c) Soliciting the contribution of all for the concerns of all;
- d) At the service of the individual and of the community;
- e) Community discernment;
- f) Discernment, authority and obedience;
- g) Fraternal obedience.

4. The principal duty of the Prioress is to build community through mutual co-operation, sharing the Word of God and daily celebration of the liturgy.

⁷ VATICAN II, Decree *De accommodate renovatione vitae religiosae*, 28th October 1965, Vatican City, 1965.

5. We cannot legislate for a person's style of leadership. So much depends on the personality of the one who is selected for leadership.

6. Government structures are to be designed to further the mission of the institute in fidelity to its charism.

The May 11th, 2008 Instruction gives details in this regard.

a) Persons in authority encourage the taking up of responsibilities and respect them when taken up;

b) Persons in authority invite us to confront diversity in a spirit of communion;

c) Persons in authority maintain a balance between the various dimensions of consecrated life;

d) Persons in authority have a merciful heart;

e) Persons in authority have a sense of justice;

f) Persons in authority promote collaboration with the laity.

7. Aware of the mind of the Church, government structures are to be based on the principles of communion and inter-dependence.

8. The communion model of government demands appropriate decentralization, as well as corresponding communication and accountability at all levels to ensure the unity of the institute.

9. This model respects unity in diversity according to different cultures and needs.

Where to from here?

An alternative approach to government resulted from the influences that clearly impacted on the understanding of religious life in the Church. A new theological understanding of Church as 'People of God' emerged (LG 9; cf. *Acts* 10:35; *1 Cor* 11:25.)⁸ resulting in the principle of communion. The primacy of baptism which conferred equal dignity on the baptised with inherent rights and duties was more clearly recognized. Canon 220 for example offers general principles for the rights of religious. It advocates that

(i) candidates' right to their good name and

(ii) the right to privacy.

Human development became a necessity for the realization of these. One of the factors that has greatly shaped our understanding of the law has been the advances of the behavioural sciences from the 19th century onwards. Their findings infiltrated theology and law and affect the way we understand and operate as persons. This, together with a new emphasis on responsible obedience, includes accountability. Accountability is not only on an individual level but also has a communitarian aspect. What is lived in common is subject to accountability in common, whilst still respecting the right to privacy where it pertains.

⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, Paul VI, Nov 21st 1964.

A mature exercise of authority generally involves some form of delegation which is real and recognizes the necessity of an active participation of all for the common good. This calls for new expressions of community life and government, ones which allow religious to bear witness to the Gospel in the midst of the world. ‘The Prioress is above all the animator of the community entrusted to her care and her role is to encourage the spiritual growth of the Sisters.’⁹ Being docile herself to the Spirit of God in the carrying out of her office, she exercises authority in a spirit of service for her Sisters and in a manner, which expresses the love the Lord has for them.¹⁰ Therefore, the emphasis on authority as service, beget a need to consult and collaborate and especially to enable those who are governed. Exercising the principle of subsidiary, which out of respect for the dignity of the person, enables Sisters and teams within community to function authoritatively in those areas in which they have competence: ‘The Prioress distributes the work according to the capability of each. She leaves each Sister free to take whatever initiative her office requires.’¹¹ The principles of co-responsibility and collegiality emphasize the legitimate contribution of every person and teams of Sisters within community to the building up of the body of Christ.

In particular, this different approach to the question of government in religious institutes must be brought about in Redemptoristine communities according to our Constitutions and Statues. The pre-eminent relationship within community is now seen to be more of a sisterliness and not of superior/subject. ‘It is the task of all and each one must feel personally responsible for the atmosphere of understanding, agreement and harmony which ought to be prevalent in the monastery.’¹² Each community examines itself on the collective witness of poverty which it should, on the methods used to bring this about, and on the degree to which it really shares with the poor.¹³ We all try to live in an atmosphere of loyalty, frankness and good-natured simplicity, thereby avoiding all desire to dominate others or to impose ourselves on them.¹⁴ All contribute to creating in the community an atmosphere of goodwill and mutual charity’.

The agenda of the Council will remain with us as a perpetual legacy. The process of renewal it calls for is endless. In its documents we hear a repeated call for non-stop renewal. It is a great adventure that must engage every generation until persistent renewal becomes our second nature and thus ceases to be a source of a centre-periphery conflict. However, as Pope John Paul reminds us: “Only from a faith perspective can we see the Council event as a gift whose still hidden wealth we must know how to mine”¹⁵

⁹ Constitutions and Statues, Order of the Most Holy Redeemer, Rome 1985, N. 114, p. 27 (Constitutions and Statues will hitherto be referred to as CS); (Canon 630.5)

¹⁰ CS 114.

¹¹ CS. 055; Canon 626.

¹² CS 01.

¹³ CS 013

¹⁴ CS 046.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Address, 27th February 2000, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), 8th March 2000, p. 4.

Religious life is one of the organs through which the Church perfects her own life. On the evidence of our Constitutions, Statutes and the times in which we now live, there is still much that needs to be done.

