

Traditions of Spiritual Guidance

ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

Preacher of the God of Loveliness

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ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS in the study of spirituality since the Second Vatican Council has been the attention paid to the spiritual experience of the ordinary Christian. Latin American liberation theologies value the reflections on Scripture of the basic ecclesial communities as a genuine source of spiritual tradition. Increasingly scholars of spirituality are aware of the need to correct, or at least to amplify, the traditional 'schools of spirituality' by considering how these traditions actually influenced the life of the ordinary believer.¹ Often the very perspective that a school of spirituality considers as most characteristic has had the least influence on the life of the ordinary believer; the perspective or practice that the school considers more marginal by contrast has had a formative effect on Christian life and piety. While the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola are the defining text of Jesuit spirituality, the Society of Jesus has had far more influence on the life of the ordinary Catholic through propagation of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Order of Preachers, the Dominicans, has had the greatest direct influence on Catholic life not through the magisterial theology of Thomas Aquinas, but through preaching of the rosary. Few ordinary Catholics would have much familiarity with the content of the spirituality of Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross, but the Carmelite tradition touched countless Catholics until very recently through the Brown Scapular.

When the history of spirituality is studied not from the perspective of schools and classic texts but from the perspective of the religious experience of the ordinary Roman Catholic, there is scarcely a more influential figure in modern Catholicism than St Alphonsus Liguori. While the average Catholic may not have known his name, Alphonsus Liguori has had a decisive formative influence on the way Roman Catholicism has been experienced by the ordinary believer for the past two hundred years.²

Alphonsus de Liguori³ was born on 27 September 1696, the eldest son of Giuseppe de Liguori and Anna Cavalieri, in Marianella, then a country suburb of the city of Naples. Don Giuseppe was a naval captain and both he and his wife were members of the Neapolitan nobility. They entertained high aspirations for their son. Alphonsus received the finest education available to the nobility in art and music as well as in the liberal arts and sciences. Influenced by his father, he studied for the bar, and graduated with the doctorate in civil and canon law at the unprecedented age of sixteen. His religious formation

was extensive as well. He was a member of the 'Oratory for Noble Youth' and thus early in life was influenced by the gentle and attractive spirituality of Philip Neri. He made an annual Lenten retreat with his father, alternating each year between the Jesuit and Vincentian retreat houses. The young Alphonsus was torn between the career plans of his mercurial father and his own desire to dedicate himself to the service of the Church. Matters came to a head in 1723 when, after years of brilliant success as a lawyer, Alphonsus lost an important case because a judge was bribed. Alphonsus left the court room in disgust, never to return despite the pressure of his father and friends. While attending the sick in the 'Hospital of the Incurables', many of whom were suffering from the painful last stages of venereal diseases, Alphonsus heard the voice of God calling him to leave the world and give himself to God's service.

It is evocative of Alphonsus' later spirituality that his moment of conversion came when he probably had a bedpan rather than a rosary in his hand: his spirituality was intensely apostolic. The change of 'worlds' that Alphonsus was to make involved a movement that was more socio-political than geographical: his life has been characterized as an 'exodus to the poor'. From the moment of his conversion onwards, he moved away from the world of prestige and power into which he was born, and towards the world of the most marginalized citizens of his age. In this movement from the centres of power to the periphery of his society Alphonsus was to find liberation.

Don Giuseppe was infuriated by his son's change in life and Alphonsus, while wishing to become an Oratorian, compromised with his father and was ordained to the diocesan priesthood in 1726. From the earliest days of priestly ministry he distinguished himself by his zeal. Often the eighteenth-century Neapolitan priest never received faculties to hear confessions, but lived off mass stipends and benefices, devoting little effort to pastoral care. Alphonsus devoted himself to the spiritual formation of the laity. He, with other priest friends, established the *cappelle serotine* or evening chapels in which laity would meet in the evening after the day's work for prayer, instruction in spirituality, and mutual support in virtue. While Alphonsus and other priests served as resource people, the evening chapels were directed by the laity, both men and women. Their membership included the *Lazzaroni*, the numerous street people of Naples, many of whom reached high levels of sanctity. Later in life when, as a theologian, Alphonsus would reflect on the universal call to holiness, his reflection came not just from theological conviction but because he knew by experience the holiness of people like Agnello, the fireworks-maker, and Nardiello, who made a living selling chestnuts on the street.

In 1730 Alphonsus had the first of two decisive encounters that would change his life for ever. Persuaded by friends to take a vacation in the village of Scala in the hills above the beautiful Amalfi coast, Alphonsus was appalled by the religious ignorance of the local peasantry. The cities were crowded with idle and reluctant priests and religious, but the rural populace had little if any access to the ministry of the Church. In Scala Alphonsus also had a decisive encounter with Maria Celeste Crostarosa. As a novice in a small convent in

Scala, Celeste had a series of mystical experiences through which she was moved to reform the convent according to a new Rule. Celeste's spirituality centred around the notion of *viva memoria* – that the life of the community should be a 'living memory' of the person and life of Jesus Christ. Alphonsus was asked to meet Maria Celeste and to make a judgement on the authenticity of her experiences. To the surprise of many, for he was no great friend of those claiming extraordinary revelations, Alphonsus judged Maria Celeste to be genuine and in 1731 he helped in the founding, in the convent of Scala, of the 'Order of the Most Holy Saviour'. Later Celeste was to have a further vision that God wished the foundation of a corresponding congregation of missionary men, headed by Alphonsus, who would follow the same rule as the nuns and devote themselves to itinerant preaching. Alphonsus was initially sceptical. However, the combined influence of his experience with the abandoned poor of Scala and the spiritual intuitions of Maria Celeste led him to recognize God's will. On 9 November 1732 Alphonsus and some companions gathered in Scala to found the new missionary institute, the Congregation of the Most Holy Saviour, dedicated to preaching the word of God to the most abandoned, especially the rural poor. The name of both communities was later changed to 'of the Most Holy Redeemer', and thus Alphonsus' congregation received the name by which it is known to history – the Redemptorists.

The particular ministry to which the Redemptorists dedicated themselves was the evangelization of those who had least access to the Church's ministry. The means they used was the parish mission. Alphonsus, of course, did not invent the parish mission, which originated in the reform movements after the Council of Trent and which had been employed with great success by the Jesuits, the Vincentians (whose formal name is the 'Congregation of the Mission'), and other religious communities. The mission consisted of a series of preaching events and prayer experiences oriented toward the fundamental conversion and catechesis of a population that consisted largely of baptized unbelievers. The subjects of the mission talks were fairly standard among post-Tridentine missionary congregations: the eternal truths of death, judgement, heaven and hell; the nature of sin and the need for conversion; the love and mercy of God; the intercession of Mary; instruction on how to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. Alphonsus and the early Redemptorists refined the mission system and integrated it into a wider pastoral plan. Often missions were given in a central church to which people were expected to travel but Alphonsus, in contrast, required his missionaries to go *paese per paese*, from one small hamlet to the next, and to remain until every person had been reached. Eighteenth-century Neapolitan pulpit oratory was full of sonorous tones and replete with allusions to classical literature, but Alphonsus said that good preaching should resemble a conversation between friends and his allusions are to the daily experience of the peasant.

Alphonsus made two notable additions to the mission system. First, he put a great emphasis on concluding the mission with the exercise of the *vita devota* – with teaching people how to live in a devout manner after the mission was

over; he was suspicious of missions which were merely 'fires of straw', producing a lot of smoke but no long-term warmth. He would form the village into confraternities, small groups that would meet regularly, often in the absence of a priest, for meditation and support in the Christian life. Second, Alphonsus required the Redemptorists to hold a 'renewal' of the mission, between six months and a year after its conclusion, to rekindle the enthusiasm of the people and to ensure that the confraternities were functioning well. Further, Redemptorist houses were always to be built in a central location in a rural area so that people could come to the public church attached to the house to hear sermons, and to receive religious instruction and spiritual direction. The communities were also to be themselves centres of prayer and evangelization to which people could come and make a retreat. A contemporary observer of the missions of the early Redemptorists marvelled that the priests even entered the peasants' huts. This is the image of the Church to which Alphonsus dedicated his life: a church that leaves the security of the pulpit and enters the dirt and mess of human experience, preaching the good news eye to eye.

It is one of the great ironies of the history of spirituality that Alphonsus dedicated his life to preaching the bounty of God's mercy available in Jesus Christ, while the Redemptorists later came to be renowned as blistering preachers of hell-fire and damnation. The Redemptorists enjoyed their largest expansion in the nineteenth century through communities located in Northern Europe – France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. The Northern European Redemptorists absorbed from the surrounding ecclesial environment a rigorism and a preoccupation with sin that was quite alien to the spirit of their founder. The mission system, which was a flexible instrument of evangelization in the hands of Alphonsus, became fossilized in the nineteenth century. In later centuries, what was originally intended to be a tool of primary evangelization of the rural poor became a tool for inducing scruples in already practising Catholics. But while acknowledging the limitations of the Redemptorist mission system, we should not underestimate its influence on forming the Catholic consciousness of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jay Dolan, historian of immigrant Catholicism in the United States, points to the parish missions as second only to the parochial school in forming the vigorous American church.⁴

Alphonsus also had a formative influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholicism through his writings. He took to writing only as a second career; most of his major works were written after he was fifty, in moments snatched from a busy life as missionary, religious superior and, later, as bishop. Alphonsus wrote in all 111 works which appeared, several a year, from his fifties until about ten years before his death. They range in length from pamphlets to his massive *Theologia moralis*, which went through eight revised editions. Alphonsus intended his writings to serve two purposes: to provide material for preachers, and for the spiritual formation of the illiterate faithful who could hear the work read aloud. (This fact accounts for the

repetitive style of his works.) Each of Alphonsus' works is intended to be a text book of prayer: they are intended not so much to be read through as to be prayed through. Each section of one of his ascetical works concludes with *affetti e preghiere*, affections and prayers, to which one ought to be moved often in the course of reading.

Alphonsus' works were staples of Catholic spiritual reading from the time of their publication until the Second Vatican Council. His masterwork of spirituality, *The practice of the love of Jesus Christ* (1768) is an extended commentary on Paul's hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13. It expresses well the fundamental intuition of Alphonsian spirituality: they deceive themselves who think holiness consists in an austere life, in prayer, in frequenting the sacraments, in alms-giving – rather, holiness is love.⁵ In an age when popular spirituality and sacramental practice was heavily influenced by Jansenism, the spirituality of Alphonsus was liberating good news. Holiness does not consist of Olympian feats of virtue, nor even in reception of the sacraments to which many have no access, but in the activity accessible to every human heart – love. Alphonsus treated in his writings of the various aspects of the mystery of God's love poured forth in Jesus Christ: the incarnation, the passion, the eucharist. His text for the Stations of the Cross (1761) became standard in the Catholic world. Generations of Catholics in their Lenten devotions echoed its lovely refrain, 'Jesus, grant that I may love you always; then do with me what you will'. His *Great means of prayer* (1759) and other works on prayer refined his insight that God willed the salvation and holiness of all people because God gave to each person the grace to pray. Prayer for Alphonsus was the fundamental option of the human person. On faithfulness to prayer depended all the other graces necessary for salvation and holiness.

Alphonsus also used the arts and music as instruments of evangelization. He painted several portrayals of Jesus and Mary which he would use to incite devotion on the missions. Invariably the couple are depicted not as regal and remote but in ordinary peasant dress. One such painting shows Mary wearing a peasant's straw hat on her head as she indulgently watches Jesus playing with the sheep. To the shepherds of Scala such an image spoke eloquently of a God who was truly Emmanuel, a God who is with us. Alphonsus would also take the tunes of peasant songs and set religious lyrics to them. His *Tu scendi dalle stelle*, 'You come down from the stars', remains the most popular Italian Christmas carol.

It was only with great reluctance and after several refusals that Alphonsus allowed himself to be prevailed upon by the Holy See to become a bishop. He was consecrated Bishop of the diocese of St Agatha of the Goths in Rome in 1762 – the only trip he took outside of Naples after his 'exodus to the poor'. He was a model Tridentine bishop, and during his fourteen years as bishop he devoted himself to the welfare of his people, especially during times of severe famine. In 1775 the Holy See accepted his resignation from his see and he retired to the village of Pagani, to the headquarters of his Redemptorist community. During the last years of his life he was racked with ill health.

Even more painful was the experience of seeing the Redemptorist Congregation split in two in 1790 by order of the Holy See, as a result of a conflict between the Pope and the King of Naples. Alphonsus died, surrounded by his confrères, as the Angelus rang on 1 August 1787.

The genius of the spiritual project of Alphonsus is impossible to appreciate except with an understanding of the spiritual abandonment of large portions of the population of eighteenth-century Naples: official church structures were unable to reach them, and official spirituality failed to touch them. The poor of eighteenth-century Naples shared the general characteristics of cultures of poverty and marginalization: a perception that the good things of the world are in finite quantity and short supply; that the divine powers are capricious and must be bought over by magical rites; a conviction that the structures of society are organized in opposition to the best interests of the poor. To this world that saw all good things as limited, Alphonsus preached a redemption that was plentiful. (The motto that he gave to his Congregation was the verse of Psalm 130: '*Copiosa apud eum redemptio*' – 'in him there is fullness of redemption'). To a culture where morality was based on honour and shame, Alphonsus proclaimed that all people are in a covenantal relationship of love with Jesus Christ, a relationship which is the real source of our worth. For people who were on the margins of their society and of their church Alphonsus fostered integration into existing structures, and called existing structures to change to accommodate the marginalized person. To people who saw themselves as passive victims of history, Alphonsus promoted the development of people as ethical subjects. His moral theology is based on the primacy of the conscience that strives for the good, even when, through social circumstances, it is erroneous.⁶

Popular piety and pastoral practice in Naples of the eighteenth century were heavily coloured by Jansenism. Jansenism is a complex phenomenon and it is important not to caricature it. As it affected the religious experience of the Neapolitan peasant, Jansenism promoted an image of a God who is remote, and preoccupied with the divine glory and prerogatives. God's grace was seen as scarce and available only to a select few. Standard moral theology and pastoral practice bore signs of Jansenist influence – the delay of absolution in confession up to a dozen times so that the penitent will not lose respect for God's grandeur; the eucharist seen mainly as an object of adoration rather than as the Christian pilgrim's food; a suspicion of novelty in moral theology and a constant reference to the text of the Scripture, the Fathers, and the Canons of the Church as normative for all moral quandaries.

Through his wide pastoral experience among the poor and marginalized, Alphonsus saw the inadequacy of the prevailing Jansenist moral theology and pastoral practice. He himself wrote his first formal theological work in 1776 in response to the burden Jansenist rigorism had placed on the consciences of the poor. In many dioceses the peasant practice of using the words 'Cursed be the dead!' as an expression of indignation was considered to be not only a mortal sin but a reserved sin, which had the consequence of placing most of the

population in mortal sin on an almost perpetual basis. Alphonsus revealed the absurdity of this type of moral reasoning and its disastrous pastoral effects.⁷

He clearly rejected a Jansenist spirituality which reserved holiness to an élite group of spiritual champions. For him holiness was above all the natural response of the human heart when it comes into contact with the true God whom he loved to call, 'the God of loveliness'. For Alphonsus, if people did not love so good a God, it was because they had never really met God. The first pastoral activity for Alphonsus was always to present a picture of the amiability and beauty of God that would be as compelling as possible to the human imagination.

The text that Alphonsus cites most often to illustrate the divine activity is Philippians 2:7, 'He emptied himself'; kenosis, self-emptying love, is the expression encapsulating the very nature of God. He frequently called God *Iddio pazzo*, 'the insane God'. To an age that prided itself on being the 'Century of Light' and the 'Age of Reason', Alphonsus dared to proclaim a God who is not the well-bred Divine Geometer of the Deists, but someone driven by the mad passion of love. Alphonsus countered a Jansenist spirituality that would make the human person grovel before the divine majesty with an image of a God who grovels at the feet of human creatures, begging for love.

The God of Alphonsus empties himself into history with the aim of communicating divine life to each person without exception. Alphonsus places these remarkable words on the lips of God: 'As long as I have loved myself, I have loved you. As long as I have been God, I have loved you.'⁸ He sees this kenosis of God into human history as having four distinct movements. First, God empties the divine self into creation, hoping to attract human love by the beauty of the created universe. Alphonsus shares nothing of the Jansenist suspicion of creation and human nature; he sees them both as reflections of the divine beauty.

God is not content with merely attracting us from outside. The second movement of the divine kenosis is the incarnation, in which God assumes human nature from the inside. Alphonsus' Christmas carol, *Tu scendi dalle stelle*, is a marvellous evocation of his theology of the incarnation. He bids us look at the starry perfection of the firmament and know that God has left that cold, perfect world to enter human history as a child. God is as close as your latest *bambino*, shivering from cold and crying for milk. The philosophers of the Enlightenment would have us see God in the mathematical perfection of the stars. Alphonsus directs us instead to find God in the realities of human history, the hungry child, the daily struggle for life.

The third movement of the divine outpouring is the passion, in which God assumes human life at its weakest and most vulnerable. Alphonsus' writing on the passion is sober and restrained for his age: he focuses less on the gruesome physical details of the passion than on the stupendous love they reveal. He is, however, characteristic of the spirituality of his age in that he pays scant attention to the resurrection. The Jesus living in glory is found for Alphonsus primarily in the eucharist.

The kenosis of God reaches its climax in the fourth movement – the eucharist. In the eucharist, that is, at the moment of reception of communion, the divine dramatic action by which God comes to be united with the human heart reaches its climax and its fulfilment. Alphonsus' teaching was markedly in contrast to Jansenist eucharistic practice: he encouraged weekly communion for those who gave ordinary effort to living a Christian life, and even daily communion for those of whatever state of life who longed for holiness. He certainly encouraged devotion to the blessed sacrament and one of his earliest and most popular works is his *Visits to the blessed sacrament* (1745). Even in his *Visits* he always included an act of 'spiritual communion' so that eucharistic devotion would always be oriented to reception in communion. His eucharistic theology is expressed well in another of his hymns, *O fiore felici voi*: he pictures a peasant standing at the door of the church, progressively admiring the beauty and good fortune of the altar furnishings, the flowers, the candles, the ciborium. The peasant concludes, 'Ah, far more fortunate than all of you am I, when my Beloved comes within my breast, a tender lamb to lie'. Far more beautiful for Alphonsus than church furnishings is the poorest human heart, the truest dwelling place of God.

Alphonsus believes that human history does not consist primarily in the human struggle to 'go to heaven' but rather in the story of a God who finds heaven in the human heart. 'My paradise is the human heart' are words he puts on the lips of God. Thus the spiritual and the moral life are the response in love to this experience of God. The proclamation of who God is must always precede the explanation of what love demands of us. Alphonsus decried Jansenist pastoral practice, which began evangelization with the explanation of the moral law, as 'the devil's work'. For him, once a person has encountered the love of God, a life of goodness is the nearly inevitable response.

The model of human response to the divine initiative is the Blessed Virgin Mary. One of Alphonsus' most popular works is his *Glories of Mary* (1750). Although the *Glories of Mary* has enjoyed multiple editions in many languages, it is often pointed to as the prime example of a 'maximalist' and perhaps even excessive mariology because of Alphonsus' focus on the universal necessity of Mary's mediation of grace. He is anxious to demonstrate that Mary is not merely a model for Christians but an active presence in the Church and the world, using her intercession in favour of the poor and of sinners. Alphonsus compares Mary to the biblical figure of Ruth who was allowed by Boaz to follow the gleaners into the field and take the wheat they left behind (Ruth 2). Thus Mary follows after pastoral workers in the Church and is God's instrument of salvation for those whom the ordinary ministry of the Church fails to reach. This was confirmed by Alphonsus' own pastoral experience on the missions. Sinners who were not moved by threats of hell would be stirred and changed by the sermon on the Mother of God.

While the poor and the abandoned were the special object of Alphonsus' concern and the most immediate audience of his spirituality, he also gave considerable attention to the spiritual direction of those more advanced in the

spiritual life. Of the hundreds of extant letters of Alphonsus, a large number are letters of spiritual direction to the members of his religious community and also to women religious. With a number of religious he maintained a correspondence of spiritual direction over a number of years.⁹ His *Praxis confessarii* (1757), a handbook to aid priests in the ministry of hearing confessions, included a chapter on the spiritual direction of souls called to perfection. The teaching of Alphonsus on the higher states of prayer is traditional and heavily influenced by the spirituality of Teresa of Avila. What is most significant is not the content of the teaching but Alphonsus' assumption that the average confessor in the ordinary exercise of his ministry would be likely to come across people who needed direction in contemplative prayer. Nor did Alphonsus consider spiritual direction the exclusive preserve of the ordained minister. He permitted a Redemptorist lay brother, Gerard Majella, to serve as spiritual director, adviser and counsellor to several monasteries of cloistered nuns. Alphonsus was particularly adept at the direction of people afflicted with scruples, a common enough affliction, given the Jansenist climate of the day, and a condition which Alphonsus himself wrestled with at various points in his life. He wrote a work on the spiritual direction of the scrupulous, *Quiete per le anime scrupolose* (1751), and was patient and tireless in assuring that the God of loveliness was not obsessed with trifles.

The popularity of the spirituality of Alphonsus was aided considerably by his beatification in 1816 and his canonization in 1839, and even more so by his proclamation as a Doctor of the Church in 1871. Thus far no one who lived subsequent to Alphonsus has been proclaimed a Doctor of the Church, giving him a certain authority as the spiritual master of the Church in the last century. The person and spirituality of Alphonsus suffered a loss of credibility in the period of renewal after the Second Vatican Council, since the Council seemed to repudiate everything that he represented. It is unquestionable that the figure of Alphonsus Liguori marked modern Catholicism in a crucial way. The sociologist Werner Stark points to Alphonsus and his tradition as having an influence comparable to that of the Benedictine and the Franciscan movements. At the beginning of the modern era, the Roman Catholic Church, reeling from the effects of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, could have fallen prey to,

the recurrent double evil – the twin tendency towards the loss of international and social all-inclusiveness; towards nationalism on the one hand and concentration on the upper classes on the other . . . If religion has anything to do with emotion then St Alphonsus Liguori . . . brought about a total rebirth of it.¹⁰

Alphonsus and the movement he represented were responsible for more than establishing a school of spirituality. They captured the religious imagination of several generations of Roman Catholics. The spiritual tradition of Alphonsus never merited much attention in academic studies of spirituality.

Several prominent histories of spirituality fail to consider him at all. Yet his mark on the spiritual life of the ordinary Catholic has been profound. Frequent reception of the sacraments of penance and the eucharist, a rich tradition of popular devotion to Jesus and Mary, the use of the emotions in prayer and song: these elements considered standard in the pre-conciliar period all bear the traces of the influence of Alphonsus Liguori.

As the Roman Catholic spiritual traditions look to the task of communicating an experience of the divine to the next millennium, the spirituality and example of Alphonsus Liguori have much to offer. As the number of ordained ministers continues to decline, Alphonsus' work offers us an encouraging example of flourishing Christian communities in the absence of priests. As the number of people alienated from church structures grows, he challenges us to discover new images of God that both speak to the experience of the marginalized and encourage their integration into the wider Christian tradition. While we may feel justifiable panic at the moral chaos of the end of the twentieth century, Alphonsus warns us not to imagine that moral catechesis is merely shouting venerable moral laws all the louder. True formation of conscience is a much more delicate and time-consuming process. It requires of us a familiarity as much with the anguish of those who struggle for life on the margins of our fragmented society as with the moral tradition of the Church. Alphonsus reminds us that spirituality must not only be faithful to the gospel but must also compel the imagination and stir the heart. Perhaps the great prophet of our age, Pope John XXIII, was aware of all this when he wrote,

O St Alphonsus, what a glory and what an example he is . . . This great doctor and bishop . . . presents in his beloved person all that best corresponds to the genius of Italy, alert, shrewd, full of common sense and at the same time full of liberty, substance and poetry . . . St Alphonsus never grows old.¹¹

NOTES

¹ For a treatment of the disparity between spirituality as taught by official church sources and spirituality as experienced by believers see Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and history: questions of interpretation and method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

² For treatments of the influence of the spirituality of Alphonsus Liguori in the last two centuries in England and Ireland, see John Sharp, *Reapers of the harvest: the Redemptorists in Great Britain and Ireland, 1843–1898* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1989); in Ireland, see 'The mission' in Lawrence J. Taylor, *Occasions of faith: an anthropology of Irish Catholics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp 167–189; in the United States, see Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic revivalism: the American experience, 1830–1900* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

³ In the past ten years two comprehensive biographies of Alphonsus de Liguori have been published in English: Théodule Rey-Mermet, *St Alphonsus Liguori: tireless worker for the most abandoned*, translated from the second French edition by Jehanne-Marie Marchesi (New York:

New City Press, 1989); Frederick M. Jones CSSR, *Alphonsus de Liguori: the saint of Bourbon Naples* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992).

⁴ Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic experience* (New York: Image Books, 1985), p 255.

⁵ Alphonsus de Liguori, 'The holy eucharist' in *The practice of the love of Jesus Christ, The complete works of Saint Alphonsus of Liguori*, edited by Eugene Grimm CSSR, vol 7, p 263.

⁶ For treatments of Alphonsus' theology of conscience and how it affected his pastoral practice see Rey-Mermet, *La morale selon Saint Alphonse de Liguori* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), and Marcano Vidal, *Frente al rigorismo moral, benignidad pastoral* (Madrid: Editorial PS, 1986).

⁷ Cf Andreas Sampers, 'Controversia quam S. Alphonsus sustinuit de maledictione mortuorum' in *Spicilegium Historicum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris* 14 (1966), pp 3-47.

⁸ *Practice of the love of Jesus Christ*, p 264.

⁹ Giuseppe Orlandi, 'La Corrispondenza di S. Alfonso M. de Liguori dall'Episolario al Carteggio' in *Spicilegium Historicum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris* 36 and 37 (1988/1989), pp 284-314.

¹⁰ Werner Stark, *The sociology of religion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), pp 304-7.

¹¹ Pope John XXIII had a Redemptorist spiritual director, Father Francesco Pittochi, while he was a seminarian in Rome from 1902-5 and again in 1921-2 when he worked as a priest for the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This appreciation of St Alphonsus forms part of 'A tribute to Father Francesco Pittochi', written by John XXIII on the death of Father Pittochi in 1922.