

C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Eph 4,4)

09 - RENEWED STRUCTURES FOR MISSION

The logo or the documents themselves of the XXIV General Chapter can be used or placed in the meeting room. Begin with a hymn or this brief introduction:

The XXIV General Chapter will go down in history as the Chapter of restructuration.

Four years have passed since 2209, enough time for each one of us to have some notion of this process, of the hopes which it raises for the Congregation, and of the dangers to which it's exposed.



In our prayer we ask the Lord to help us understand what he's asking of the Congregation. May he open our heart to the dimensions of our world and enable us to understand the urgent demands of our mission.

We pray with Paul VI:

Come, Holy Spirit, and give us a pure heart, ready to love Christ the Lord with the fullness, the depth and the joy with which you alone know how to fill us.

Come, Holy Spirit, and give us a large heart, open to your inspiring word, and closed to all kind of mean ambition.

Grant us a heart that is big and strong, capable of loving everyone, ready to bear for their sake every trial, irritation and weariness, every disappointment and offence.

Grant us a heart that is large, strong and constant even to the point of sacrifice, and happy only to beat with the heart of Christ and to do God's will humble, faithfully and courageously. Amen.

From God's point of view

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son"(John 3,16). God has loved each and every one of the 78 countries in which the Congregation pursues its mission today, and all the other countries where we are not present. God loves all colours of skin, he loves those who write with the latin alphabet and those who write in ideograms, those who live in the desert and those who live in the great cities.

Today we have a **new perception** of the 'world', quite different from that of Alphonsus de Liguori. He too burned with the desire to go to China, but it was something to reach out for, a dream which he had of course to leave in the hands of his spiritual director.

The world today importunes us and summons us; it's the **village** in which we live each day; it fascinates us and at the same time disturbs us. The question of the abandoned has the same dimensions as the planet itself.

If many of us have been shaped by the history of salvation, today it's the **geography of salvation** which stimulates us. Where are we called to exercise our charism? How are we to love the world and not simply bind ourselves to one country, one culture? How are we to enter into conversation with each other, as a community and a Congregation? What structures must we establish so that our mission may be a response to this world?

These are questions to which none of us has answers, and still less solutions ready for use. We find ourselves **impotent**. For this reason prayer should make us move to a plane a little higher than where we normally spend our days, and make us occupy the position from which God regards the world, the most lofty position which one can imagine.

Your word is a light for my steps

A hymn precedes the reading of Acts 11, 19-26. It's an account of one of the many 'restructurings' which the Church had to face. Here we underline two aspects:

- **The discrepancies of the early Church.** The apostles dreamt of reaching “the furthest limits of the earth”(Acts 1,8), but had difficulty in leaving Jerusalem behind. The apostolic community had already its **firm points**: the breaking of bread, communion in charity, sharing of goods, prayer and the Word. But it also had its **temptations**: parochialism, suspicion of the outside world, fear of facing tensions such as those created by the Pharisees and the religious leaders (Acts 4, 1ff), fear of responding to needs: remember the Hellenists who complained about how their widows were treated (Acts 6, 1-6). The very arrival of a former persecutor, Paul, occasioned suspicion.
- **Openness to a new world:** the Gospel had just arrived in Antioch, a cosmopolitan city, the third city of the Empire (with 500,000 inhabitants). At first the disciples preached only to the Jews. In verse 20 there's a change: they begin to talk to the **Greeks**. In a certain way they solve the problem of the language but, above all, they become open to new values, to a different culture. Barnabas is the one who helps to grasp the **positive** aspect which the new situation provides: a less fanatical mentality, and religious freedom. It's the ideal environment in which the work of Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, can take off. From Antioch where the disciples were called 'Christians' for the first time, it will be easy to reach Rome.

From the Redemptorist tradition

Anyone who looks at our history will realise that **restructuring** characterised the first efforts of Alphonsus and his companions. We could say that it has been part of our DNA from the very beginnings, even if at that time they used a different terminology.

The Congregation was born in 1732 in a hospice at Scala, the year after it moved to Casa Anastasio, which the confreres had to leave five years later. How was this, if the first thought of our foundation was born a thousand meters higher up, on the heights of Santa Maria dei Monti? And leaving the second house, Villa degli Schiavi, was not that also a trauma for the first Redemptorists?

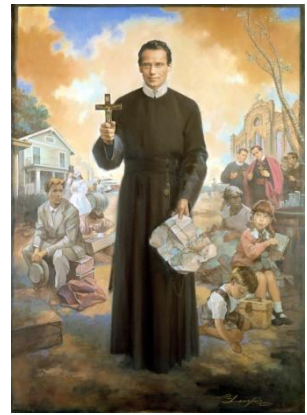
Restructuring means also making **painful choices**, taking our charism to heart. Among the various motives which induced Alphonsus to leave Scala, one was decisive: this little town on the Amalfi Coast was isolated. It didn't facilitate a wide-ranging mission. The circumstances were lacking in which the community might be a sign of the presence of the Redeemer among the abandoned. If they had to leave Villa degli Schiavi because of the jealousy of the local clergy, **Ciorani** was shown to be providential, so much so that the Redemptorists throughout the whole world regard it as the mother house: it was certainly so for the first group of our missionaries but also, one would have to say, for the new and innumerable people who were to be receivers of their mission.

Obviously this DNA had **other ways** of showing itself. Some of them were traumatic, such as the division of the Congregation by pontifical decree (1781). But there were also positive ones, such as the first migration beyond the Alps, which led to new expressions of the charism. Or the migration to the new world; the two Americas, and then the foundations in Asia, Oceania and Africa. Or the first subdivision of the Congregation into provinces, which took place in 1841.

The protagonists of these epochal phases of the Congregation were quite numerous.

We like to think of our saints and beatified members, among whom St. Clement M. Hofbauer, the outstanding propagator of the Congregation (St. Gen. 05) deserves a special place. St. John Neumann and the Blessed Seelos were among the pioneers of the first spread of the Congregation in the U.S.A. Theirs is also a shining example in that crucial engagement of restructuring – the learning of languages. Beyond his native German language, St. John Neumann learnt French, English, Italian and Czech. Eight languages in all, if one takes into account Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He learnt to read Spanish, and when he was bishop he set himself to study Gaelic to hear the confessions of Catholics of Irish origin. Death took him before he was able to complete that study.

As regards P. **Seelos**, his example is at least an invitation to us not to lose courage. When he arrived in the U.S.A he did his best to learn English. His first homilies were more or less a disaster. Someone heard a lady murmuring: "You can't understand anything he says, but at least we appreciate him for the effort he makes". Whoever learns languages in the service of mission, knows at least to what Saint/Blessed to rely upon!



The Constitutions today

The "key" to restructuring is to be found in Constitution n. 15. "Redemptorists cannot allow themselves to be bound by those forms and structures which would make their work no longer missionary, but should wisely try to discover new ways of bringing the Gospel to every creature".

The "where" and the "how" are neither of them optional, but rather unavoidable criteria of our mission. They are at the origin of an apostolic strategy which leads us to occupy those places which the Church has passed by, and to do so in a manner and a style the is inescapably ours.

We must recognise that Constitutions and Statutes are formulated within perspectives proper to their time, that of the (V) Provinces. Thirty years later, a **new missionary horizon** challenges us. "Think globally and act locally" is the attitude in which we must live in this context.

In recent times then we have become more and more familiar with another word which runs

like a parallel track to that of restructuring: **solidarity**. It's an invitation to rethink the economy, the resources and formation in a world perspective, overcoming all temptation to provincialism. It's to see ourselves more and more as one single missionary body"(Const. 2). It's to be able to say to a young man who knocks at the door of our institution: your vocation has wings as wide as the planet.

There are a few things to which we must be **attentive** in the process of restructuring. In the first place we must be interiorly "free and ready"(Const. 15) to detect where the abandoned are to be found today and, with a view to them, to define our priorities as (V) Provinces and as a Congregation.

In this process the central services of our Congregation should be taken into consideration (the major offices, the Historical Institute, the General Archive, the Office of Communications, the Centre for Spirituality etc.) or those services which feature the Congregation's mission in the universal **Church** (the Accademia Alfonsiana). A specific preparation for working in these areas will be reflected on at the proper time.

Finally, an obligation which concerns us all, for the whole of our lives: familiarizing ourselves with the language and the key values of the **Constitutions and Statutes** CSSR, for it's from them that a renewed missionary impulse springs.

A free exchange among the participants can enrich the general reflection

Conclusion

A prayer taken from the liturgy can bring the meeting to an end. There follows an Ave Maria, the blessing and a hymn.



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality

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