GUGLIELMO BIASUTTI

FATHER
LUIGI SCROSOPPI

OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI
FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

INTRODUCTION

UPDATED EDITION – APL

Since the distant year of 1927, with the arrival of the Sisters of Providence in Brazil, the spirit of Charity of Father Luigi began a slow and unstoppable global spread.

Today, the world can say it has come to know the work of the saint through the deeds of his "*daughters*." However, current times demand a further step: the diffusion of a deep and capillary knowledge of the cultural roots that generated and nourished this Saint.

These are roots that clearly sink into the pulsing heart of Christianity, but which draw vital lifeblood from the identity of the Friulian people, who provided the air, the soil, and the elements necessary for the extraordinary flowering of this Holiness.

To offer the world access to this heritage, there is only one main road: the one reconstructed by the biographer par excellence, Monsignor Guglielmo Biasutti, who with precision and rigor brought to light every moment and every context of the Saint's life, starting from the historical premises preceding his birth.

However, to allow this precious work to travel beyond the boundaries of time and space, an intervention of philological and linguistic transposition became necessary. The objective is as ambitious as it is dutiful: to respect the integrity of the original work, while making it accessible to cultures and sensibilities distant from those of twentieth-century Italy, presented by Biasutti also with the style and language of Father Luigi's times.

The updating developed in this particular edition was designed for the modern reader: for the Italian one, but especially for the international one, who met Father Luigi only through the concrete testimony of his Sisters, but who now wishes to return to the "*source*" of their charism.

Through a streamlined syntax and a more concise narrative structure, Biasutti's work is today "*freed*" from the constraints of a language of other times. This process of modernizing the Italian language ensures that the translations into the main languages of the territories where the Sisters of Providence operate maintain absolute coherence with the original text and spirit.

If the charitable action of Saint Luigi, through his "*daughters,*" has known no borders, so must his story be able to flow fluidly and powerfully in every culture: a tale that remains faithful to its own roots but opens itself forcefully to the embrace of the world.

Reasons for the intervention

The original text presented structural barriers that hindered modern enjoyment:

- The archaic prose and the fragmentation of concepts are often discouraging for the average reader and, given the need to translate the work into various foreign languages, impenetrable for modern digital translation software.
- The obsolete use of dashes and guillemet quotation marks (often opened at every paragraph but never closed) today generates confusion between the author's narrative level and that of historical testimonies.
- In the original edition, the need to print photographs on coated paper, of a higher weight than the common paper of the text, forced printers to print the images in separate blocks. This technical requirement makes the photos disconnected from the linear and logical development of the story.

The method of updating

The updating intervention was conducted in compliance with these criteria:

- To keep the author's original thoughts and concepts intact, simplifying the syntax and replacing obsolete terms. This process ensures that the translations in the five languages of the volume (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English) are symmetrical, coherent, and faithful to the original message.
- The versions in the four foreign languages were created using Gemini AI, which, among all those tested, proved to be the most suitable and faithful to the characteristics of this hagiography. It is inevitable that, despite the great progress of artificial intelligence and modern translators, the result — while perfectly understandable to the foreign reader — cannot be considered free from imperfections. Given the continuous technological progress, we intend to carry out a more accurate revision with the next versions of these translators, which will be even more advanced and effective.
- A new formatting system has been introduced. All historical testimonies are enclosed in a single pair of guillemets «...», making them immediately distinguishable from the body of the narrative thanks to the systematic use of italics.
- Passages in Latin and Friulian have been promptly translated or commented upon where the original did not do so, in order not to interrupt the flow of reading.
- Thanks to the use of digital files (.pdf), it was possible to release the images from the typographical limits of the time, repositioning them in correspondence with the narrated facts. The story thus acquires a new visual and documentary force.
- Addition of some photographs that complete the stories and the characters.
- This edition opens with an image of Father Luigi in the prime of his life — distinct from the one interpreted by the painter Emma Galli — developed from the unique and most faithful original pictorial reproduction of Father Luigi at eighty years of age, by the painter Antonio Milanopulo in 1885. The rejuvenation attempts (35-40 years of age) were carried out by testing three different artificial intelligences and

three distinct processing algorithms; although the results appeared very similar to one another, human evaluation, conducted through a direct comparison between the AI outcomes and Milanopulo's painting, led to the preference for the image produced by the Gemini AI.

- Documentary Integrations: Two unpublished sub-chapters have been added to cover aspects not explored in depth by Biasutti:
  - *Don Giovanni Battista and the will of 1873*: to clarify the material and family roots of Father Luigi's works.
  - *The pedagogy of sacrifice*: a reflection on Father Luigi's "*penances*" to understand that they are not part of a culture of the past, today outdated because they lack a theological foundation.

A bridge to the future

This work aims to offer the Friulian Saint to the contemporary world. It is not a new work, but a "*bridge*" that allows the powerful voice of the Father, faithfully "*recorded*" by the biographer Guglielmo Biasutti, to reach intact anyone in the world today who seeks inspiration in the industrious charity of this Friulian Saint.

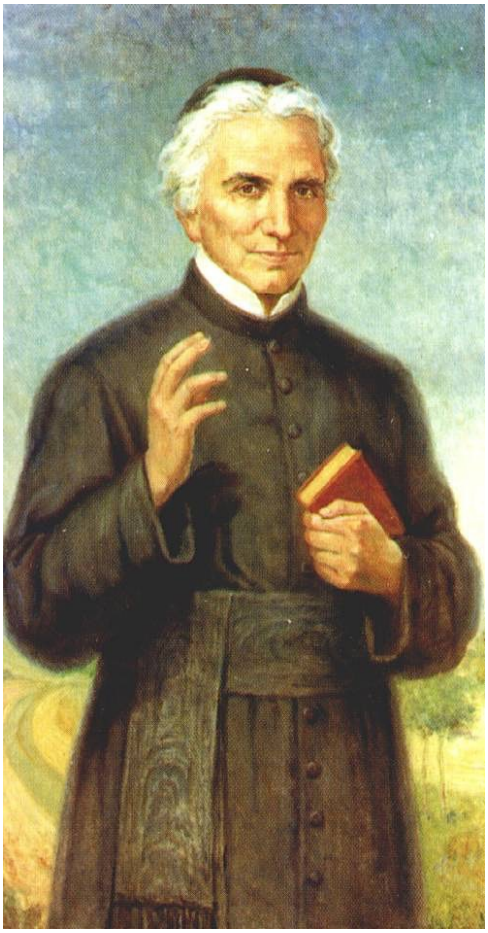
APL
Amici Padre Luigi

The evolution of Father Luigi's image: the contribution of Emma Galli

If the Milanopulo portrait of 1885 represents the visual testimony closest to the Saint's passing, the image that has accompanied popular devotion for much of the 20th century is indissolubly linked to the work of the Gorizian painter Emma Galli (1893–1982).

Called to give a face to the cause of beatification, Galli carried out a significant and refined artistic reworking. Starting precisely from the facial features of Milanopulo — who had fixed the image of the eighty-year-old Father based on the death mask and the minute indications of the sisters who had lived and collaborated side by side with him — the painter chose to bring the Saint back to his full apostolic maturity.

Her famous oil portrait from the 1960s was not just a work of art, but an operation of spiritual « *humanization* »: Saint Luigi appears there with an intense gaze, his right hand raised in an eternal blessing and the breviary pressed to his heart.



Emma Galli completed this iconographic mission by creating a cycle of canvases illustrating the most significant episodes in the life of the founder, creating a visual language that has nourished the faith of generations of Sisters of Providence and faithful throughout the world.

Today, this updated edition takes a further step in this direction.

Where Galli used her artistic sensitivity and her brush to interpret the face of the Saint, contemporary Artificial Intelligence technology allows us to approach the original anatomical truth with scientific criteria, reparameterizing biometric data and thus offering us a vision of the Father that is, at the same time, ancient and modern. The "*face of charity*" thus continues to transform, remaining faithful to its essence, but speaking each time the language of its own time.

The work represents the Saint in the crucial period in which he takes the leadership of the House of the Derelicts and lays the foundations for the future Congregation of the Sisters of Providence. The portrait is the result of a sophisticated process of digital computation analyzing, decoding, and reparameterizing based on the set age, the morphological features present in the only oil painting that portrays Father Luigi at the end of his life, executed by Antonio Milanopulo in 1885. The AI has operated an objective synthesis, returning a consistent physiognomy freed from the subjective interpretation of a human artist

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.A.U.	= Archive of the Archbishop's Curia of Udine
A.C.U.	= Archive of the Chapter of Udine
A.L.S.	= Luigi Scrosoppi Archive
Arch. parr.	= Parish Archive
Bibl. Com.	= Municipal Library
c.r.	= folio recto
c.v.	= folio verso
doc.	= document
fasc.	= file/fascicle
lett.	= letter
ms.	= manuscript
par.	= paragraph
Summ.	= Summarium

PRESENTATION

By Father Cornelio Fabro

This life of the Friulian Oratorian Father Luigi Scrosoppi is the third in chronological order, following those of Monsignor Tinti and the Jesuit Father Colombara: it draws on a knowledge of testimonies and documents pursued according to the most demanding historical criticism, so as to place the character within the turmoil of those religious and political events of the nineteenth century that changed, with a leap in quality, the new figure of the world and of man.

Now that I have finished reading this monumental life — which can compete with the most successful productions of contemporary hagiography — if someone were to ask me: what is the characteristic of this priest's personality, the dominant force of his soul, the deep secret of his spirit that guided and sustained him in the trials and distresses with which his long life was scattered...? — the answer would be immediate and of extreme simplicity: Father Luigi loved his neighbor with the very love of Christ and, following the example of Christ, he preferred the little ones, the marginalized, the sufferers of all the sorrows of the soul and body, considering himself, literally, the « *servant* » of all. He is a priestly personality who immediately attracts you with an unspeakable charge of Christian sympathy, with a tenderness as if you yourself, nearly a century after his departure, felt touched and benefited in the aura of his flame of love.

It is not a waste of rhetoric if we say that the humble Oratorian anticipated in deeds, along the lines of the Gospel and the examples of the saints of charity who were his patrons (especially St. Cajetan), the call to the ecclesial conscience of Vatican II, so that every Christian, following the example of Christ who came not to be served but to serve, must realize themselves with a « *life of service* » for their brothers and sisters. St. Catherine of Siena already, stimulating her disciples to works of charity, warned that God does not need our things but wants to be loved in our brothers.

And closer to us, younger than many of us, Benedetta Bianchi Porro — struck down by a cruel illness in 1964 at twenty-eight years of age and already today in the race for the glory of the saints — had chosen as her motto, in the terrible and almost complete isolation of her mission: « *dwelling in others* ». Working for others, suffering for others, living for others... is dwelling in others as in the chalice where the sum of the sorrows of Christ is gathered, who calls us to participation in his passion, according to a renewed presence of love that he expects from each one as a response to the gift of grace.

The response of Father Luigi is documented by the facts of his life spent first in the shadow of his worthy brother Carlo and then for thirty years, until his death, carried in the daily responsibility and suffering of feeling inadequate for a mission of spiritual and corporal charity for which he was burning his whole self. If today, within the Church and especially through the impulse of Vatican II, the sense of « *diaconia* » is more emphasized in the lives of Christians, the Models for the service of brothers come to us from afar in the history of the Church which has raised at all times appropriate institutions, finding souls of fire to realize and animate them. Among them, our Father

Luigi has his worthy place alongside St. Francis — of whom he was particularly devoted and of whom he wanted to become a son — who embraces the leper, St. Jerome Emiliani, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John of God, and Cottolengo, his contemporary... Various are the charisms in the Church of God and all spring from the identical Spirit who « *works all in all* », thus the wisdom, the science, the realizations of imposing works and structures: over all, however, advance the works of mercy that Christ asked of us for our brothers and that Pope John recalled as the aroma of Christian witness to the world.

The response of Father Luigi to the Gospel message was the consecration of his entire life above all to the work of the House of the Derelicts of Udine and to the spiritual formation of the Sisters of Providence destined for the care of the residents: a small seed that has now grown into a flourishing tree at the four points of the horizon. As a natural extension of his mission of service in the Church, he extended the work of his daughters to assistance in hospitals, where their heroism shone above all on the occasion of frequent war events and public calamities (cholera, smallpox...) even to the immolation of their lives. A sign of a formation and of a singular grace that came from the Father's example and from the entreaty of his prayers: he too, like his models in the service of charity, reminded the sisters that they should consider the girls and the sick as their masters, even to washing and kissing their feet. He himself gave the example in visits to hospitals, being moved with joy: Biasutti's account is a continuous flowering of this humble and industrious love of the intrepid priest in favor of those who no longer knew warmth of affection or the light of a smile in this world.

One would need to collect the « *little flowers* » of Father Luigi, scattered in this life since the beginning of his apostolate of charity. Here he is: he was barely twenty-four and a half years old and nearly two years a priest — a mere youth — and he offers to his brother Carlo to become a beggar to relieve the pious House from the destitution in which it found itself. Father Luigi's philosophy and the impatient concern of Christian compassion: « *it is not practical to stand waiting for offerings when they come. It is necessary to go and look for them and he was out, knocking from door to door. The girls are hungry every day. Nor should we be satisfied, he thinks, with giving them a piece of bread and a little soup. They are malnourished from birth and are going through the delicate age of formation. It is necessary to provide some substantial food on the table: a few slices of cheese and, quite often, a little meat. For this we need a seeker who puts his whole soul into the quest and who knocks without fear at the doors of private individuals, shops and farmers in the suburban farmsteads: I beg you, Father Carlo — thus ends the short imaginary discourse, but more real than any contingent appearance — let me go* ».

And he went, sustained by the presence of Christ in the little ones and the poor:

« *...as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me* » (Matt. 25, 40).

And so, beginning in March 1829, there appeared on the table what most of those creatures had never or too rarely tasted: eggs, cheese, and veal, chicken and even kid meat. Touching in this regard is the testimony of the sister Angelica Faccini with which Biasutti perfumes his story:

«*I remember* — the sister attests — *that the little girls from three to four years old ran to meet him, clinging to his clothes as if to those of their lost mother, asking him with innocent freedom:* "*Gigi, dami cicìn*" — that is: Luigi, give me meat — *in Friulian child's slang*».

A touching testimony of an innocence that is trusting and certain of a valid protection. A similar charity and delicacy also shine through the leaflet that the two brothers, Carlo and Luigi, distributed in the city of Udine to solicit aid for their work. The request is placed, in the title, into the mouths of the residents themselves: « *Words of the poor abandoned girls to their good fellow citizens and benefactors of Udine* ». In the humble request one could read, among other things:

« *We ask that each of you, who can and feels compassion for us, does the charity of taking on the task of maintaining for a single day a month, for the course of a single year, a single one of us unhappy ones. The expense is small, only 50 cents a month* ».

The adjective « *single* » — Biasutti carefully comments — repeated three times in the sentence, while underlining the modesty of the request, clearly shows the humility of the plea and lets the delicate fear of being troublesome leak through.

That same name of « *poor abandoned girls* » expresses all the desperate sadness of the residents whom the Christian charity of the two priest brothers had gathered under the shadow of trust in Providence, as can still be read, not without a surge of emotion, above the foundling wheel adorned with Robbia's putti in the *piazza dell'Annunziata* in Florence: « *Pater et mater mea dereliquerunt me, Dominus autem assumpsit me* » from Psalm 27:10.

In the saints of charity, the pain of one's neighbor feeds love, and this flourishes into heroism to succor the brother on whose face is the same *Christus patiens* who presents himself as a suppliant and in need: it is from here, from the Heart of Jesus for which Father Luigi promoted devotion, that the self-denial of charity and the tenderness of compassion for those who suffer spring forth. This tenderness was the flower of holiness and when, through the profound pressure of the love of Christ, it illuminated his grave and austere figure, it must have been for those fortunate souls a spectacle of Paradise. But Father Luigi, to carry forward his work of charity, had generous help and support; he found them more among the humble than among the powerful, experiencing how « *the charity of the rich is thorny* » — with few exceptions.

Instead, he experienced and found contrasts, oppositions, and contestations of every kind: he too, as is the style of the life of saints, and Biasutti takes care to note it, tasted the bitter chalice of misunderstanding and contempt, the bites of envy and petty jealousy. Although alien to politics, he was accused of being « *pro-Austrian* »; although detached from everything and having become for the poor also *derelitte*, he was constantly harassed by the tax authorities, first Austrian and then Italian, even being accused — even then! — of currency exportation. Then, and even more painful, the snare of the same political movements among his own spiritual daughters:

« *Thank God, Biasutti comments, no failures of faith or conduct, but a subtle restlessness, a dangerous dejection, a melancholy fog of weariness — like today, in this fog of compromises with the world that attacks us from every side?* »

This life of total self-denial was an ardor of charity and not a frenzy of action, it was an exercise of love of neighbor and not an ambition for personal affirmation to overcome obstacles; it was simply fidelity to the mission that Providence had entrusted to him. His ideal was that of the apostle: « *Caritas Christi urget nos* » (II Cor. 5:14). His aspiration was not, as he would shy away from with Oratorian irony, to figure among the « *altar saints* » but to realize his motto, reproduced also in his posthumous portrait: « *to do - to suffer - to be silent* », which is the synthesis of active and contemplative life in which, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, Christian perfection is realized.

In him, it was contemplation that founded action — unlike certain post-conciliar theology that is about to cross over to compromise with modern activism and even with Marxist sociology. The fervent and sleepless life — also in the literal sense of this last term — of this humble priest in succor of his brothers is the contestation in action of that madness which has already caused very serious damage to souls, drying up the sources of piety and holiness.

Father Luigi had timely established, as the foundation of his priestly ministry, the purpose of Christian perfection according to the examples of Christ and the saints. These were resolutions that he frequently renewed and upon which he examined himself, especially during retreats and spiritual exercises, recorded on small slips of paper that he wrote and kept for himself. One of these writings, already reported by Tinti and taken up by Biasutti, bears the title: "*Affetti e pratiche sante*" and reflects the concerns of the young priest for the salvation of his soul:

« *As a strong excitement to holy perseverance I will often say: What will anything profit you if you are damned and what will it harm you if you are saved?* »

And he sighs:

« *Ah! I promise, Lord, to suffer anything and death itself rather than offend You with a venial fault, sin being the true monster of ingratitude towards God, and the torturer and executioner of souls and our bodies* ».

And after a fervent resolution for the concrete practice of humility *(«that is, as he describes himself, being a mass of putrefaction and disgusting miseries in terms of the soul»*), he takes it up and begins to contend with the devil:

« *I want to fight the demon, taking the prey from him at the cost of any of my hardship, inconvenience, and difficulty, and defend the little sheep of Jesus Christ from the assaults of the demon; forestalling them from his deceptions, breaking the snares, making his blows go in vain, reinforcing them in the assaults and stealing the prey from him, and all this for the glory of my captain Jesus Christ* ».

Biasutti is right to find here the holily combative fervor of the Ignatian stamp joined to the sweet and vehement realism of the "*Massime eterne*" of St. Alphonsus, he too among the constellation of the celestial protectors of Father Luigi.

Profound was the consideration of his priesthood in solidarity with Christ:

« *I want to think often that I am with Jesus Christ offered to the eternal Father in sacrifice, and that therefore I must glorify Him with my meager person, considering myself as a* "*victim*" ».

Follow the resolutions of tender devotion to the Mother of God and to St. Joseph, to the Guardian Angel, to his patron saints under the sign of his special consecration to the service of the Church. He ends with a resolution of mortification and above all of fidelity to prayer and union with God:

« *I will recite short prayers throughout the day and I will pray even while walking and in bed, when unable to sleep, so as not to lose time and the merit of glory for Heaven* ».

Hell and Heaven, contrasting and frequent themes also in Father Luigi's preaching, that is, what Biasutti happily calls « *elementary Christianity* » and which could also be called simply evangelical Christianity, essential Christianity, which is the radical Christianity of « *quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?* » (Matt. 16:26).

It is the Christianity of the origins and of the saints of all times that has been capable of fascinating the very enemies of the Church, from Voltaire to Feuerbach, to Garaudy... This fear of Hell was a bit of a fixation for Father Luigi, as also appears from a slip of resolutions made on the occasion of a course of spiritual exercises around that time (1829-1830):

« *To suffer everything cheerfully with that memory (that is, of Hell), everything being a nothing compared to that* ».

This is solid faith, the « *charcoal-burner's faith* » of Pascal: something quite different, therefore, from the « *demythologization* », the « *anthropological turn* », the « *maturity of the world* » and similar turnabouts from the Gospel of so much theology — unfortunately also in the Catholic area! — of our day. This anxiety for perfection seems to me the true profound characteristic of Father Luigi's life, which intensifies with the passing of the years. Let us make a great leap and move to the resolutions of 1852, when he is almost about to cross the threshold of 50 years and is about to profess in the Third Order of St. Francis. Here the resolutions are dominated by an ardent desire for perfection, in all « *daily works* » starting from the practices of piety which are listed with meticulous scrupulousness.

The spiritual progress of his soul is evident: the stage of fear of Hell is overcome and the thirst for conformity with Christ, still considered as his captain, has taken its place. The resolutions are six in number, but it is the third that forms the center and the core, where content and style merge and vibrate with a heavenly inspiration. Its characteristic is still the belonging between the perfect exercise of humility (3rd degree) and the imitation of Christ on the one hand, and on the other between the exercise of personal perfection and the unconditional dedication to his mission of charity and mercy. We believe we do not exaggerate if we consider this resolution the key to understanding the holiness and spiritual physiognomy of his great soul and a document of urgent relevance also for the Christian life of our days.

Let us read:

« *I propose to embrace the third degree of humility and to want to follow Jesus Christ in poverty, in humility and in mortification. I will think more often that Jesus is my captain and I his soldier, that I want to be faithful to him, perfectly attached to him on the path to heaven, and to become a true copy of him. Ah yes, Lord, I will often gaze upon*

You on the Cross, where I will find You as the exemplar of the third degree of humility. I must not, therefore, only esteem and love poverty, humility and suffering; but I shall have to desire these three virtues. To practice which, and to desire them as the supreme good and my portion, I will hold myself as a servant in the congregation of my father St. Philip, and also as a servant in the House of Providence of the holy father St. Cajetan. I will visit the sick and the poor, holding myself near them as a servant ».

Justly, Biasutti again highlights the « *exceptional importance* » of the document that opens a window onto the work of grace in the soul of the humble Oratorian. But it is the theme of the apostolate as « *service in Christ* » that makes us feel it even more vibrant with the evangelical spirit.

The service of one's neighbor, therefore, in Father Luigi was as in Paul:

« *...nos autem servos vestros per Jesum* » (II Cor. 4:5) and who knows how much his soul would have rejoiced in reading the high teachings of Vatican II on the « *theology of service* », especially in the constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*: only in this supernatural climate can one understand and implement what the Council called « *dialogue* » (*colloquium*) with the modern world.

Asceticism and mysticism, apostolate and immolation merge in Scrosoppi's soul into an exceptional vocation. Biasutti outlines it with his usual insight:

« *Father Luigi's asceticism was strongly centered on Jesus Christ. But even here he made a choice. Not on the Jesus of miracles and of Tabor, not on the risen Jesus, not on the Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father. But on the poor Jesus upon the straw of Bethlehem, on the industrious and hidden Jesus of the house of Nazareth, on the bleeding Jesus of the Way of the Cross, on the Jesus hidden in the Eucharist. And, precisely for this reason, on the Jesus living in the humble, in the poor and in the sick; on the Jesus living in the community gathered in his love and in his name. A permanently valid, and at the same time very modern perspective of religious life* ».

And the commentary that follows is worthy of the text where the distinguished author seems to identify with his humble hero. This — he tells us — was the Jesus to be loved and served; this was the Jesus as spouse of the soul, of every Christian soul, but with a greater emphasis on the religious soul. Only a petty superficiality or grotesque residues of sentimentalism can ignore or misinterpret the powerful instance of such a spiritual union. To the wedding of the Lamb one goes to labor and die with Him and like Him, a victim of charity for the benefit of the brothers. And while we are at it, let us also report what the Author observes about the devotion to the saints who in a large host populated the space of the soul and illuminated the works of Father Luigi themselves because « *those sweet and dear figures, and others still, all led to Jesus and spoke of Jesus* ». It could not be said better: but of these pages, in Biasutti's biography, there are plenty.

The life of Father Luigi Scrosoppi, unlike that of other saints and founders, does not present spectacular crises of conversion: everything in his life, even in the most heroic gestures, flows in simplicity and hiddenness, even if singular phenomena of grace are not lacking. For the life of Father Luigi Scrosoppi, making the necessary proportions, the words that Manzoni has for Federigo Borromeo can apply. He too — although relegated to the borders of Italy and almost ignored by official culture and history — « *was of those*

rare men in any age who employed an outstanding intellect, all the means of a great opulence, all the advantages of a privileged condition, a continuous intent, in the search and exercise of the best ». And even the life of the humble Friulian Oratorian, although with external variations due to the diversity of times and environment, was « *like a brook that, having sprung limpid from the rock, without ever stagnating or becoming turbid, in a long course through various terrains, goes limpid to throw itself into the river* » (*I Promessi Sposi*, c. 22).

We must be grateful to the Author for the in-depth study he has given us of this holy priest, who ranks among the brightest testimonies of the supernatural in nineteenth-century Italian religion. As a Stigmatine, I have noted with deep satisfaction the ancient and recent relationships of Scrosoppi and his work with my confreres: so in particular Monsignor L. Bragato, confessor and almoner of Empress Maria Anna of Austria, had been the favorite disciple of the Blessed Gaspare Bertoni, who intervened several times at the court in favor of our subject's works; likewise also the former general of our congregation, Father G.B. Tommasi, who half a century ago pushed to start the process for his beatification.

Rome, April 3, 1979.

Father Cornelio Fabro [1]
of the Stigmatines

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[1] Cornelio Fabro represents one of the highest and most rigorous peaks of philosophical and theological study of the twentieth century, distinguishing himself for a method of investigation that combined impeccable philological precision with an uncommon capacity for speculative synthesis. His activity as a scholar was marked by an incessant search for truth that led him to carry out a real revolution in the field of Thomism, where he was able to isolate and bring back to light the original notion of the act of being as the dynamic foundation of reality. This analytical depth was not limited to classical metaphysics alone, but extended with extraordinary intellectual audacity toward modern and contemporary thought. His linguistic mastery allowed him to directly approach the texts of Søren Kierkegaard, translating them from Danish and offering the academic world a key to interpretation that integrated existential anguish with the solidity of the Christian tradition. Fabro's rigor also manifested itself in his critical approach to modernity, studied not out of preconceived opposition but with the will to understand its deepest roots, as demonstrated by his vast production on the history of atheism and the dynamics of freedom. Every page of his exudes an erudition that is never an end in itself, but always placed at the service of a conceptual clarity capable of guiding the reader through the labyrinths of complex thought. His work remains today an unavoidable point of reference for anyone intending to approach the study of the human soul and intellect with the seriousness and absolute dedication that only great masters know how to embody.

N.B. — So as not to burden excessively and without necessity, we will give only the explanatory notes of some passages or additional news: not those referring to citations made in the text, except in special cases. The citations, moreover, are taken either from the biography by Tinti or from the pastoral letters of the ordinaries of Udine or from the documents preserved in the « *P. Luigi Scrosoppi* » archive at the *Istituto della Provvidenza* in Udine, accompanied by a precise and complete card index, which facilitates their retrieval; and not a few from the « *Cenni biografici della vita edificante delle nostre amate consorelle* », or from the « *Deposizioni* » of sisters contemporary with the Father, preserved in the aforementioned archive.

Guglielmo Biasutti

PART ONE

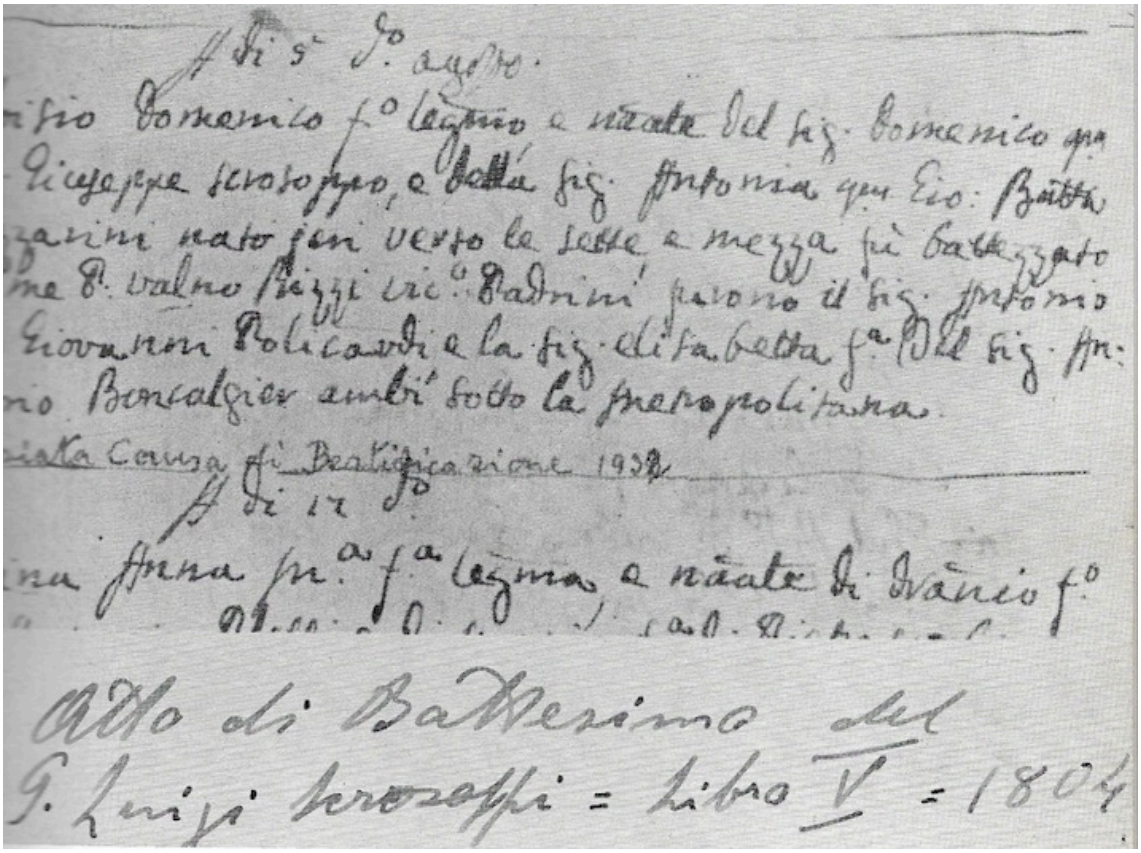
The Lord calls

Chapter 1:

THIRD FLOWER (1786-1804)

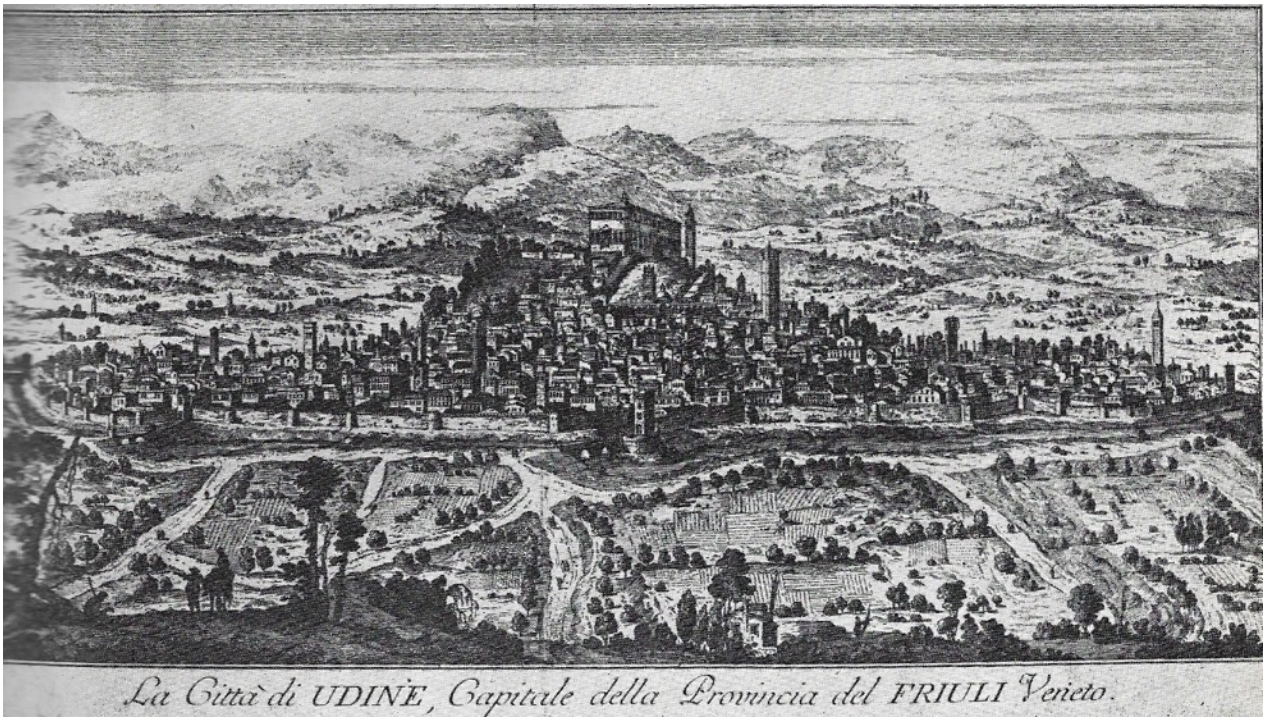
Birth of Father Luigi Scrosoppi

Father Luigi Scrosoppi was born in Udine at half past seven in the morning on August 4, 1804, to Domenico Scrosoppi [1] and Antonia Lazzarini; he was baptized the following day in the parish church of the Most Holy Redeemer and was given the names Luigi Domenico.

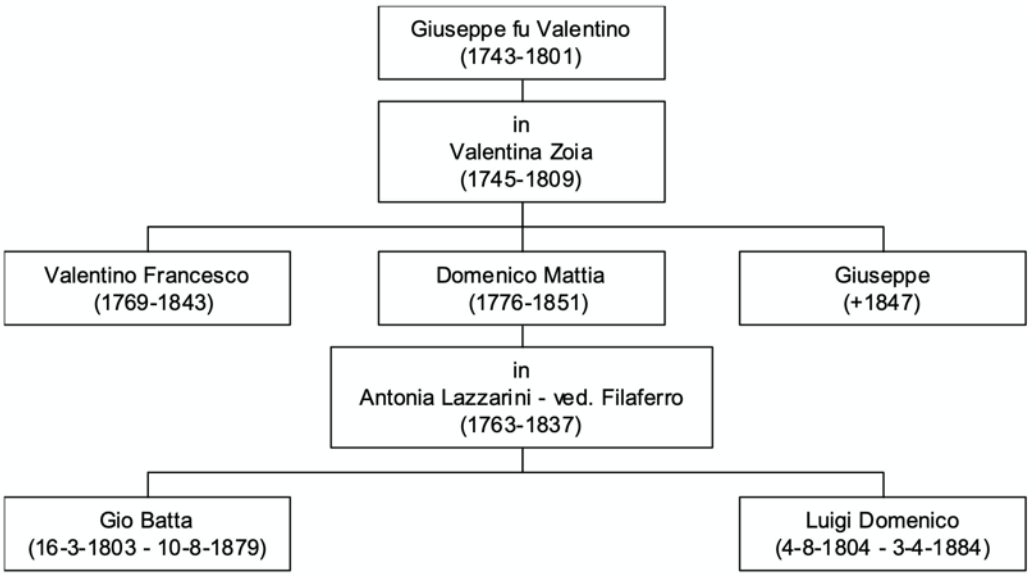


Luigi's Baptismal Act preserved in the archives of the parish of the Most Holy Redeemer – Udine

[1] The Scrosoppi (in the parish registers the form « Scrosoppo » is found) came from Martignacco (Udine), where they had been present since 1500. Originally they were modest people, artisans and peasants, as evidenced by the surname itself (in the Friulian language « scrosop » means a hovel or a blunt and poorly combined object). In the first half of the seventeenth century, a certain Benedetto Scrosoppi came to settle in Udine in the parish of the Redeemer and, by the end of the century, there were already numerous branches. The branch from which Father Luigi came was headed by Francesco, son of Valentino Scrosoppi, who had his home at number 1487 in via Pracchiuso.



Udine. – Panorama of the city in a 19th-century engraving



The spouses: Giuseppe Scrosoppi and Valentina Zoia have three children: Valentino, Domenico and Giuseppe.
The spouses: Domenico Scrosoppi and Antonia Lazzarini have two children: Giovanni Battista and Luigi

Aloisio is the Latinized form of the Italian name Luigi. However, since Friulian was commonly spoken in the Scrosoppi household, he was later called Gigi and, during his childhood, probably Gigiùt [2].

The first name most likely was derived from his mother, whose second name was indeed Aloisia. The second name was chosen in honor of his father Domenico; however, in this

[2] « Gigiùt » in the Friulian dialect is the diminutive of « Luigi ».

case, there was the happy coincidence that August 5 celebrated Saint Dominic of Guzmán, founder of the Dominican order. Perhaps for this very reason, the baptismal rite was postponed by one day.

It was therefore a double celebration in the Scrosoppi house: the son's baptism and the father's name day.

It is very probable that the combination of the parents' names in the newborn was intentional, as if to confirm and crown through the child the love that united them. However, mysterious and prophetic presentiments are not infrequently hidden in human actions. That last son would truly become the most precious flower of their marriage.

Mother Antonia — commonly called "*siore Tunine"* in the Udine dialect — was then over forty-one years old. She was born, in fact, on January 14, 1763, to Giovanni Battista Lazzarini and Angela Dossi.

The father came from the southern part of the Grazzano district of Udine, nicknamed « *frog-eaters' borough*», because on the west side of the road ran a canal, perhaps populated by these amphibians. But by then the most audible croaking was that of the neighborhood women who went to that canal to wash the family's clothes... and to gossip about those of their neighbors.

That short watercourse, however, also powered a few sawmills and some textile industries. The Lazzarini family managed precisely a weaving mill and a sawmill, which was flanked by the trade of timber and iron for construction companies. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, while not abandoning the family home, the business was moved a few hundred meters further upstream along the same canal: precisely in the north-west corner between the ancient "*via Poscolle"* and the recent "*via Zanon*", as in those parts the famous Antonio Zanon [3] had established his spinning mill. More than for the frogs and the industries, the Grazzano district was then proud of the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, born in the fifteenth century in the church of San *Francesco della Vigna* of the Friars Minor Observant. Giovanni Battista Lazzarini was a fervent member. He joined when he was still very young, remained faithful even after moving to the Poscolle district, and held leadership positions from 1764 to 1775. Indeed, when he died on March 12, 1785, at the age of seventy-one, he wanted to be buried in the tomb of the brothers, despite now belonging to the Cathedral parish, where he had also had a family tomb constructed.

From his grandfather, therefore, through his mother, Don Luigi inherited a deep Marian and Franciscan devotion [4].

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[3] Born in Udine in 1696, he kept a factory for the processing and production of silk active there and opened one in Venice, where a school of professional design and improvement of dyeing was formed. He supported the campaign for the agricultural and industrial rebirth of Friuli; with others he founded the Society of Practical Agriculture and received the gold medal of the government of Venice, where he died in 1770. He treated economic problems with an « almost apostolic tone » and saw in wealth only its social function. (Cf. G. MARCHETTI, Il Friuli - uomini e tempi, Udine 1959, pp. 429-435).

[4] He could not go to pray at his grandfather's tomb, because the church and the convent of the Vigna were occupied a first time by French troops in 1797 and then suppressed by the Napoleonic laws of 1807.

The Mr. Lazzarini had eight children: one boy and seven girls. Death — in those times of true slaughters of children — took five of them away, newly born or at a very tender age. Only three girls remained: Antonia, the future mother of Don Luigi; Francesca, born in 1769 and married in 1790 to Pietro Bassi of Pordenone; and Rosa, born in 1772, married first to Francesco Simonetti in 1796 and later, in 1818, to Gabriele Pecile.

Wearing short trousers closed with a bow under the knee, with lace descending from the sleeves of the jacket, starched trimmings that stood out above the undershirt and a powdered wig on his head, Mr. Giovanni Battista Lazzarini attended to his business, trying to set aside a good dowry to have those three dear daughters adequately married. It was a decidedly considerable dowry: over twenty-two thousand Venetian lire of the time.

Among the suppliers of the Lazzarini hardware warehouse was Francesco Filaferro [5] of Malborghetto, owner of iron mines (then being exhausted) and workshops for metalworking.

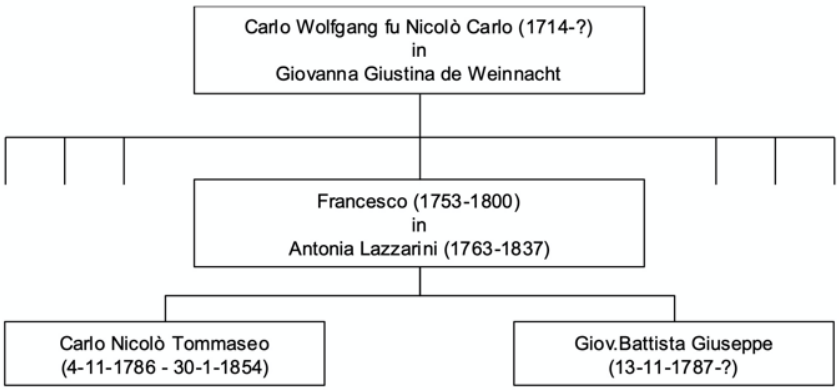
He was the son of the « *very illustrious and remarkable* » — as he is defined in the documents of the time — Carlo Volfango, who imposed the name Maria on all ten of his children and who had two priest brothers, Don Giuseppe and Don Leo. The Filaferro lineage was also characterized by a vigorous faith and deep Marian piety. The marriage between Francesco Filaferro and Antonia Lazzarini was celebrated on March 18, 1786, by Don Giuseppe, the groom's uncle. Thus Mrs. Antonia left Udine to move to Malborghetto, in the Val Canale.

She spent over ten years there, gladdened by the birth of two children: Carlo Nicolò Tommaso, on November 14, 1786, and Giovanni Battista Giuseppe, who died as a child on November 13, 1787.

On March 16, 1797, Napoleon Bonaparte defeated the Austrian troops commanded by Archduke Charles on the Tagliamento, and a week later General Massena forcefully entered the Val Canale. The Filaferro family was forced to leave in great haste, fleeing as refugees to Klagenfurt and irremediably losing every property in Malborghetto. Up there, Mr. Francesco had to adapt to the sale of sausages to support his family members.

The year 1800 marked a painful turning point in the life of Mother Antonia. On April 3, her mother Angela Dossi died. On the 16th of the same month, her sister Rosa lost her young husband Francesco Simonetti, who left her a small son, Luigi, only two years old.

[5] The surname Filaferro dates back at least to the 15th century and probably had its origin in Pontebba, a border town between the Venetian Republic and the Austrian States: it alludes to the traditional trade of the family. Francesco Filaferro belonged to the branch of the Filaferro who had moved up into the Valcanale perhaps at the beginning of the 17th century and had settled in Malborghetto, exercising the metallurgical industry.



Perhaps Antonia came down from Carinthia to Udine to assist her dying mother and remained there to comfort her sister in her mourning. She was certainly in Udine when, on July 1, the division of the paternal inheritance was carried out among the three Lazzarini sisters, one of whom, Francesca, had died previously. Excluding the dowries and debts, only a share of 8,235 lire inherited for each. To Rosa, however, remained the father's commercial businesses and the houses in via Poscolle and via Canciani. Antonia, whose dowry had by then vanished among the vicissitudes of her family, was able to return to Klagenfurt with a small sum of money. It was a short-lived relief, because on October 30, 1800, at only forty-seven years of age, her husband Francesco Filaferro died.

Antonia Lazzarini, mother of Father Luigi, in an oil portrait

And there she is, Mrs. Antonia, with her only remaining son, Carlo, celebrating a very sad feast of All Saints; there she is, on the Day of the Dead, returning in mourning clothes to the still fresh grave under which lay the companion of her life! Later, having gathered the few most precious things and sold the others, she returned with her son to Udine, where her sister Rosa welcomed them with affection into her home.

The father Domenico Scrosoppi

In that same house in via Paolo Canciani, Mr. Giuseppe Scrosoppi lived at that time as a tenant with his two sons, Domenico and Giuseppe, who managed a goldsmith's shop a little further along the same street, at the height of the third to last portico in front of the market in "*piazza San Giacomo*" (now "*piazza Giacomo Mat*teotti"). They were skilled artisans and good Christians.

All three were members of the Confraternity of the Crucifix, one of the most vital city brotherhoods, founded at the beginning of the sixteenth century in front of the church of San Francesco of the Conventual Friars Minor, which for some decades had served as the church for the main hospital of *Santa Maria della Misericordia* [6]. The main purpose of the confraternity was the worship of Jesus crucified: among other activities, the brothers used to set up every year a sacred representation of the mysteries of the Passion, sometimes in the nearby *piazza del Fisco*, today *piazza XX Settembre*. They had also taken on the task of assisting those condemned to death, replacing in Udine the famous Confraternities of Mercy.

[6] The hospital stood, from the beginning of the 14th century to the second half of the 18th century, between the current streets Monaldo Stringher and Beato Odorico da Pordenone, with the entrance on via Stringher, in front of the current piazza XX Settembre. Subsequently, with the Venetian law of concentration of convents of 1768, after the Carmelite convent in via Aquileia had been suppressed, Archbishop Gian Girolamo Gradenigo had the idea of transferring the hospital to the convent of San Francesco of the Friars Minor Conventual: this would have offered a higher and healthier site and greater possibilities for development to the hospital itself. He therefore obtained that the Friars Minor moved to the Carmelite convent in via Aquileia, thus freeing up the place. (Cf. Old Archive of the Ospedale Maggiore of Udine, now preserved in the archbishop's seminary).

Udine. Piazza San Giacomo in a 19th-century miniature. The goldsmith's shop of Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi overlooked this square

It is dear to us to think that Father Luigi Scrosoppi's tender love for the Passion of the Lord and for the pious practice of the Way of the Cross derived also from his father. The good sprout does not belie the stock (that is, the qualities of the son reflect those of his origins); and it is a great grace to be born to good parents.

But how did it happen, then, that Domenico fell in love with « *siore Tunine* »?

Mrs. Antonia was thirteen years older than him, as Domenico was born on January 26, 1776. She was not a beauty, although her portrait suggests she was lively, witty, and pleasing; and he was not a young man of romantic character, inclined to reckless passions, but of a remarkably practical temperament. Nor could any reason of economic interest have influenced him, as Antonia was an almost poor widow with a fourteen-year-old son to support; a better match would certainly have been Mrs. Rosa, also a widow, but economically solid and almost his contemporary.

However, the moral qualities of « *siore Tunine* » broke through into Domenico's heart.

From some clues, it appears that she had the noble habit of rushing solicitously to the beds of the sick and of comforting those in the neighborhood who needed help, especially moral support. The many trials she had suffered had taught her to understand and soothe those of others. The same industrious mercy would later shine very brightly in her children. We like, therefore, to imagine her frequently visiting Scrosoppi's father, who in that same house was approaching death, which then occurred on December 7, 1801. During these visits, the young Domenico was able to admire the goodness and strength of mind of the woman.

She was, moreover, very devout. The sad experiences she had suffered certainly did not make her favorable to the atmosphere of agitation of that time, spread and aggravated by the French occupation of 1797: a ferment present even among women, several of whom had lost their reason — sometimes clinically — to follow Napoleon's soldiers.

Because of these qualities and the affinity of feelings, Domenico asked Antonia to marry him. And if she was initially surprised and reluctant, the need for affection and support, together with the understandable desire not to remain a burden on her sister, led her to consent.

They were married with simplicity on February 20, 1802.

A touching detail shows us with what spirit they entered into that marriage.

Among the few family objects that Father Luigi preserved with jealous care is a small silver ring which — according to an attached official certificate [7] — had been placed in contact, on a day in March 1802, in the cathedral of Perugia, with the ring attributed to the marriage between the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph.

The three sons of Mother Antonia

From that devout marriage, a son was born on March 16, 1803, who was baptized on the same day with the names Giovanni Battista Angelo. He had Mr. Angelo Giupponi [8] as his godfather and Aunt Rosa as his godmother. The first name brought back that of his grandfather Lazzarini, which had already been given to the second-born of the Filaferro family; the second name, instead, took that of the godfather Giupponi, a cultured and wealthy gentleman who lived nearby, in the Saint Thomas district, today via Cavour.

Shortly after, the Scrosoppi family left the Lazzarini house and moved to the parish of the Redeemer, where our Luigi would be born on August 4, 1804.

Probably the cause of the move was the marriage that Giuseppe — Domenico's younger brother — entered into on June 12, 1803, with Pasqua Morocutti. The two brothers were very close and wanted to continue living together; however, the Lazzarini house must not have been suitable to accommodate a new family group.

Furthermore, the death of the father must have weighed on their economic condition due to the hereditary division with the eldest brother Valentino, who had left the paternal home as early as 1797: so much so that, in the same period, they moved the goldsmith's shop from via Canciani to a more modest setting on the southern side of "*via del Monte di Pietà.*"

We do not know in which house in the parish of the Redeemer the two Scrosoppi brothers settled and, consequently, in which house our Father Luigi was born. However, we have intentionally mentioned Mr. Angelo Giupponi who, for various reasons, appears

[7] It is preserved in the Luigi Scrosoppi Archive (A.L.S.).

[8] From Udine, born in 1747, he was a cellarman (that is, in charge of the cellar) and later an administrator (that is, a chamberlain) at the hospital. By continuing to advance in rank within the office, one could acquire the title of « noble ».

to be a person very dear to both. He owned a house at number 920 in "*Borgo Santa Lucia*", corresponding to number 14 of the current *via Mazzini*, recognizable by five windows with round arches. It is not improbable that he offered hospitality to his two protégés there.

They remained there for about four years, until the need arose to separate the two families. Domenico retired with his own to the *Riva del Giardino* — today *via Liruti* — , not far from the sanctuary of the Graces. Giuseppe, instead, settled near the old gymnasium [9].

The two young sons of Domenico and Antonia, Battistin and Luigi, thus spent their childhood in domestic serenity; they would not have gone out except to go with their devout mother to the nearby church of the Redeemer and Saint Christopher or to visit Aunt Rosa.

House in which Luigi was born: number 920 of Borgo Santa Lucia, corresponding to number 14 of the current via Mazzini

And Carlo Filaferro?

Having come down from Klagenfurt at fourteen years old, he was already at an age to choose his own path. It seemed obvious that, to follow in his father's footsteps according to the custom of the time, he would be started in commerce. Some relatives in fact thought of placing him as an apprentice in some company in Trieste, perhaps also because of his mother's second marriage.

He, instead, decisively chose the priestly life. This happened with great joy for his mother, who had secretly implored that grace from the Lord. He went, therefore, to study

[9] The old gymnasium was located in that stretch of the street, at a right angle, called today « Ginnasio Vecchio », which currently joins piazza XX Settembre with via Beato Odorico da Pordenone.

grammar (that is, to study syntax) — crossing the city center — in the archbishop's seminary, located in the current palace of the court in via Treppo.

In truth, the seminary premises had been almost totally occupied by the French in 1797 and the Austrian government had not wanted to return them. However, it had been possible to preserve some rooms and others had been made available by Archbishop Monsignor Pier Antonio Zorzi [10] in his nearby palace. In that precarious situation, the seminary continued as best it could from 1798 to 1808.

Carlo had already attended schools in the Carinthian city, but in the German language, which he knew very well. Now he had to catch up with the Italian language. He soon succeeded, helped by his great intellect. In 1803, having successfully passed the courses of classical studies (that is, the courses of humanities and rhetoric), he enrolled in those of philosophy.

From the seminary, he returned every day to the home of his stepfather, who was always very close to him.

Solid and sharp intelligence was accompanied in him by a vigorous and tenacious will, a sensitive and generous heart, and a character that was straightforward and at the same time balanced. Qualities that oriented his personal life toward magnanimous and holy resolutions, and shaped his spirit, making him capable of guiding souls.

He gave the first proof of this in the family, as he led and almost drew his two half-brothers to a common and total dedication to the Lord, for whom he was always the model, the guardian angel, and the guide.

Especially for Luigino.

The third flower of Mother Antonia.

[10] Born in Novigrad, near Zara, in 1743 to a noble Venetian family. A man of vast culture (that is, very learned), he belonged to the Somascan congregation, was Bishop of Ceneda and then Archbishop of Udine. A vigilant and zealous pastor, he especially cared for convents and educational institutes, distinguishing himself for the practice of charity towards the poor. Francis II of Austria wanted him as a State Councilor, Pius VII created him a cardinal in 1803 and in the same year he died. (Cf. A. BELGRADO, Funeral Eulogy..., Udine 1804, pp. XXIV).

Chapter 2

UNDER THE TALONS OF THE CORSICAN EAGLE (1805-1813)

Well, yes. We would like to dwell with a smile on some episode of the infancy and childhood of our Luigino. Especially the kind and devout female readers would wish it.

I am not referring to the first little teeth, the first babbling, the first steps or, perhaps, the first small tantrums. Nor even, perhaps, to those sweet and exemplary episodes — as also happens in many biographies of saints — from which gleams of divine predilection and presages of future sanctity shine through. Some small news, however, we would like; some detail that allows us to catch a glimpse of the growth of this flower in the period of the greenhouse — that is: the protected and fruitful years of infancy —.

Instead, nothing.

There was never room, in the life of Father Luigi Scrosoppi, for the events or feelings of his little ego. Nor did he abandon himself, as an old man, to the usual and nostalgic evocations of his loved ones or his youthful years.

And the reason why must be explained.

It was not at all due to aridity of feeling. On the contrary, by temperament he was inclined to tender and vigorous feelings.

That reserve and that discreet shyness which still enveloped and restrained individual life may have had an influence; and a certain frank reserve typical of the Friulian people undoubtedly contributed to it. But the profound reason is another.

In Luigi's spirit, that psychological type which can be defined at the same time as metaphysical and active soon had a decisive upper hand. Because, for him, only the values to be loved and reached always and only mattered: that is, when the choice of the priesthood and of charity clearly emerged, God and souls. Because, for him, only what he had to do and what he had to serve with total dedication always and only mattered: God and souls.

A man, therefore, contemplative and at the same time industrious. Projected outward in aspirations and activity, to the point of forgetting or sacrificing his own personal dimension.

This psychological portrait is not out of place: rather, it is a projector, placed in the right perspective, which illuminates and clarifies his whole life.

And here it came spontaneously to us, and a bit convenient too, to excuse ourselves if we will say nothing of Luigino as a child, but will speak only of... Napoleon and Carlo Filaferro.

Carlo Filaferro becomes an Oratorian

On May 18, 1804 — nearly three months before Luigino was born — Napoleon Bonaparte had been crowned Emperor of the French in Paris by Pope Pius VII. And on March 19, 1805, in Monza, with the assumption of the Iron Crown, he became King of Italy.

Much water had flowed quickly under the bridges of the Seine. The guillotined Louis XVI and the incorruptible Robespierre would certainly not have imagined that after only twelve years France would see a new throne rise: as ephemeral as one might wish, but fascinating for its dazzling exploits. Nor would the Enlightenment and revolutionary Paris, after the death in prison of Pope Pius VI in 1799, have foreseen hosting, a few years later, another Pope, come to crown the Little Corporal (Napoleon's nickname).

Rapid strokes of memory!

The two crowns served only to secure the rear for even more audacious projects.

In the autumn of 1805, a new war began. On December 2, there was the dazzling Napoleonic victory at Austerlitz. And on Christmas Day itself, the Treaty of Pressburg (present-day Bratislava) was signed, which put an end, even in name, to the Holy Roman Germanic Empire, the thousand-year-old political construction of Charlemagne and Otto I, which had been born precisely on a Christmas Day.

With that treaty, the entire Veneto was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy together with Friuli, which Napoleon had left to Austria in 1797 with the Treaty of Campoformio.

This second French occupation, although very different from the first, awakened sad memories of 1797 in the soul of Carlo Filaferro, who by nationality, past misfortunes, and personal feelings could not be favorable to the French. The abrupt changes confirmed him in his desire to escape the storm of the century, to consecrate himself entirely to the service of the Lord. Indeed, they pushed him further: not only would he become a priest, but a « *priest of the Oratory* ».

The Oratory was a special religious association of laypeople and priests, who met to meditate together on the truths of the faith and to perform certain particular practices of devotion. Founded in Rome by St. Philip Neri, it had soon spread throughout the Catholic world.

One was also established in Udine in 1629; and then two others in San Daniele del Friuli and Tolmezzo.

The Oratory of Udine initially held its meetings in the small Church of the "*Compagnia del Crocifisso*", but in 1643 it obtained its own seat in the ancient Church of Santa Maria Maddalena, now disappeared, whose area is occupied by the post office building.

To the Oratory, since the time of St. Philip, the « *Congregation of the Oratory* » had been added, that is, a group of priests and lay brothers who, without taking religious vows, lived a common life.

In Udine, the congregation had been instituted in 1638, following a ducal concession on June 7 of that year. The members of the congregation had to be, by rule, fairly well-to-do and remained owners of their assets, the income of which, however, they devoted either to the benefit of the congregation itself or to works of charity. The priests who

were part of it were particularly committed to exercising the priestly ministry entirely free of charge, to remove even the slightest shadow of economic interest. Without a doubt, it was this aspect of gratuity and pure spirituality that attracted the young Carlo among the fathers of the Oratory.

But his choice had the clear flavor of a spiritual challenge. It must be remembered that the Napoleonic regime, under a utilitarian appearance of religiosity, maintained an arrogant, rapacious, and oppressive spirit toward religious matters.

On Easter Day 1806 itself [1] the civil authorities gave the Chapter of Udine the gift of an Easter egg of bitter surprise. Before the solemn mass, an official, with a following of guards (that is, a retinue of gendarmes), entered the sacristy of the cathedral by force and took possession of the « *treasure* » reconstituted after the looting of sacred gold and silver carried out by the French in 1797.

In the meantime, the laws of ecclesiastical policy already applied in the Kingdom of Italy were also extended to Veneto and Friuli, which provided, among other things, for the suppression of brotherhoods and many religious houses.

The Oratory congregation itself lived under the nightmare of dissolution. On August 6, 1806, the Chapter of Udine — the archepiscopal see was then vacant — deliberated to intervene in favor of the Oratorians, so deserving of the city's religious life.

Exactly in that period of uncertainty and anxiety, Carlo Filaferro, not yet twenty years old, and Antonio Specie from Resiutta, eighteen and a half, asked to be accepted into the threatened congregation [2]. On September 2, 1806, the fathers of the congregation decided to accelerate the acceptance « *for a serious motive arising from the present difficult circumstances* »; on September 6, the two seminarians (that is, clerics) made « *with their utmost contentment their entry into the congregation* ». And on Sunday, October 5, the solemnity of the Rosary, the two candidates — who had already received minor orders — donned « *with utmost joy* » the habit of St. Philip.

Thus, from September 6, Carlo left the Scrosoppi family and went to live in the house of the Oratory congregation, now the headquarters of the Udine police. From then on, who knows how many times mother Antonia, with her children, must have gone down to that house or to the Church of Santa Maria Maddalena, to see her firstborn and enjoy his sweet and devout conversation.

On March 16, 1808, the seminarian Carlo Filaferro constituted for himself the ecclesiastical patrimony (the economic dowry necessary for ordination), prescribed by the synods for those aspiring to major orders.

The patrimony consisted of two small houses in Gemona, inherited from his late great-uncle Father Giuseppe Filaferro, who died in 1799 [3], in a small capital assigned to him by his mother, and in another capital added by his stepfather Domenico Scrosoppi.

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[1] Cf. Atti del Capitolo, vol. VI (1801-1812) e 439 (A.C.U.).

[2] Cf. Memorie della Congregazione, manoscritto, fascicolo 5, sotto la data 2-9 e 5-10-1806 (A.L.S.).

[3] Born in Malborghetto in 1719, in the Val Canale. After the suppression of the Patriarchate of Aquileia in 1751 and the assignment of the Val Canale to the Archdiocese of Gorizia, he chose the Archdiocese of Udine. He was elected by the town council of Gemona as chaplain of the altar of St. Anthony, and remained here until his death.

On June 11, 1808, Carlo was ordained a sub-deacon; and on December 17 of the same year, a deacon. But before he could become a priest, new grave events disturbed Europe and Christendom.

Father Carlo as a priest

The hopes of peoples are too often like the will-o'-the-wisps that wander in cemeteries.

The two French occupations did not fail to produce benefits, because no human event exists that is not a mixture of good and evil. They were paid for, however, at a high price.

In the second occupation, especially because of the continuous wars that it was necessary to support with means and men, taxes, duties, and loans defined as voluntary rained down; furthermore, the hated forced conscription was imposed, with the unhappy ranks of draft dodgers and deserters, who were often forced to live as outlaws in the most remote and inaccessible areas [4].

On March 27, 1809, a new conflict broke out between Austria and Napoleon, who, after a decisive victory at Wagram on July 7, entered Vienna in triumph.

In that rapid wartime event, however, the Austrians had been able to occupy Udine and the Friuli on April 12 and held them for exactly one month. Indeed, on April 16, Archduke John of Austria had defeated the French army on the Livenza and the Archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Baldassare Rasponi, had to present himself to sing in the *Duomo*, on April 23, a solemn *Te Deum* (hymn of thanksgiving) commanded for the Austrian victory. The Udine-born diarist Giacomo Caimo wrote:

«*An extraordinary crowd of people attended the service, never seen in twelve Te Deums under the French*» [5].

Napoleon learned of this shortly after and was not at all pleased. On May 10, from the camp of *san Pölten*, he ordered the Viceroy of Italy Eugene Beauharnais to shoot the Archbishop within twenty-four hours, because «*it is time to set an example* — he said — *to these priests*» [6].

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[4] Testimony of how disastrous the second French occupation (1805-1813) was for the economy of Friuli is also given by the petition-complaint of December 13, 1808, presented to the Viceroy E. Beauharnais and by correspondence of the time: the assets of landowners were put up for auction, if action was not taken, the country would be reduced to beggary. (Cf. G. PIERI, Napoleone e il dominio napoleonico nel Friuli, Udine 1942, pp. 286, 357-361). The law of military conscription was applied in Veneto and Friuli on 4-8-1806. The years 1806-1813 were distressing for fleeing draft dodgers and deserters. Pastoral letters document this situation. In them, the clergy is exhorted to persuade the people to adapt to the law in order to avoid worse evils. If some amnesty decree brought a certain effect, desertion reached peak levels in the years 1808-1809, and continued until the fall of the Kingdom of Italy in 1813 with deleterious consequences for the faith and morality of the people. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Alcuni friulani soldati di Napoleone, Udine, 1968, pp. 14-23).

[5] G. PIERI, o.c., p. 316.

[6] G. PIERI, o.c., p. 316.

The Viceroy, who had had Monsignor Rasponi at his court as a secret almoner, managed to save his life, limiting himself to inflicting a political confinement in the villa of the Counts *Prampero* in *Tavagnacco* [7].

Something happened then that deeply wounded the heart of Father Carlo Filaferro. On May 17, after the Austrian troops were pushed back beyond the Alps, the French artillery destroyed Fort "*Hensel*", which overlooked "*Malborghetto"*, his birthplace; the church of his baptism was also damaged, though it was immediately repaired, enough to be reopened for worship on September 21.

Meanwhile in Rome, occupied by the French since February, on July 3, 1809, by order of Napoleon, Pope Pius VII was arrested and taken into captivity, which lasted over four years: first in Savona, until June 1811, and then in Fontainebleau.

The Sunday of September 24, 1809, Monsignor Rasponi, in the chapel of the archbishop's palace, ordained Father Carlo Filaferro a priest. To be ordained by a confined and humiliated bishop, while the Pope is in prison, is not something that happens often. And the spirit of the catacombs hovered over those new priests, because serene horizons of devout apostolate did not open for them, but threatening times full of difficulties. Perhaps they dreamed dreams of martyrdom: a wonderful ferment for a holy priesthood.

Father Carlo celebrated his first Mass in the Church of "*santa Maria Maddalena*" the next day, Monday, September 25: with great simplicity.

«*In the church of the filippini* — Tinti writes — *beside the young priest, two innocent children were seen who, like two guardian angels, assisted at the first Mass. They were the little brother Giovanni Battista, not yet seven years old, and the cousin Luigi Simonetti (son of Aunt Rosa)... who, with an act of reverent piety and composure superior to their age, made that sacred office more solemn. It goes without saying* — Tinti continues — *how Antonia, with her Luigino by her side and with a mother's heart deeply moved, exulted before that scene of paradise; nor should one be surprised if, from those years, Antonia's little sons, following the edifying example of their brother, cultivated in their innocent souls the solid piety that their thoughtful mother instilled in them.*»

Suppression of the *filippini*

Shortly after his ordination, on October 6, Father Carlo and Father Antonio Specie were definitively enrolled in the "*congregazione filippina"*, « *having completed the three-year trial period to everyone's satisfaction* ». On November 29, Father Carlo was admitted to give sermons in the Oratory, that is, among the devotees who followed the religious practices established by St. Philip: a clear sign demonstrating that he already possessed an excellent aptitude as a sacred orator and spiritual guide, qualities he would later reveal at the highest levels.

[7] For another version of the affair of Archbishop Rasponi cf. ibid, pp. 314-322.

In the meantime, the inevitable decree of suppression was reaching maturity. Avoided twice, in 1808 and 1809, it was suddenly communicated on May 13, 1810; the fathers were granted only three weeks to leave the house. They abandoned it, in fact, at the beginning of June, taking with them only their books and personal furnishings, while all the rest of the property passed to the State. On that occasion, the vast library of the congregation was also dispersed, and its fate has never been discovered.

However, the church of "*santa Maria Maddalena*" remained open for worship, and some of the fathers continued to celebrate services there, aided by other priests.

The congregation then numbered twelve priests of the Oratory and two or three lay brothers [8]. Its superior was the venerable elder Father Massimo of the Counts of *Brazzacco*. Already in 1797, he had managed to save it by going on a touching pilgrimage to *Passariano* to see General Bonaparte and then literally throwing himself on his knees before the officials of the "*Comune di Udine"*. This time he was unsuccessful and was overwhelmed by grief. The entire city was so moved by this that, when he died in 1812, it unanimously requested and obtained that he be at least buried, almost as a moral compensation, in his church, despite the fact that for some months the burial of corpses had become mandatory in the new and only city cemetery, that of *san Vito*.

The former "*filippini*" divided among various lodgings, welcomed with pleasure in private homes. Father Carlo took refuge in the new home of his mother and stepfather in *via Liruti*, near alley *Agricola*.

Since, however, he wished to remain faithful to his beloved church of "*santa Maria Maddalena*", Domenico Scrosoppi thought of making his task easier by purchasing a house nearby. He bought it, in fact, on December 21, 1811, from the nobleman Giuseppe Pace for over ten thousand lire; but he must not have had much cash available, as he paid only 843.92 lire and the rest remained as an outstanding debt. Thus, the whole family was reunited at number 1833 of the "*contrada di santa Maria Maddalena"*, which corresponds to number 46 of the current "*via Vittorio Veneto"*.

[8] Notes on the origin, development and end of the fathers of the Oratory in Udine, file 14, document 1 and 3 (A.L.S.).

Udine, "*via Vittorio Veneto*", 46: house inhabited by the Scrosoppi family from 1811 to 1822.

And "*Luigino*"?

It was two months before the completion of our *Luigino*'s sixth year when Father Carlo returned to live with the family: he was undoubtedly aggrieved, but with a sadness that made his vocation like tempered steel (that is, a will made invincible by trials) and increased his ardor in serving God and doing good.

Who knows how many times he must have spoken at home about the imprisoned Pope, the suppression of religious orders, particularly the "*filippini*", and the gloomy prospects that weighed upon the world and the Church! Who knows how many times and with what passionate and firm accents he must have expressed his certainty in the final triumph of faith and his unshakeable will to witness and preach it, even at the cost of his life. *Luigino* could not fully understand all those discourses, but he perceived the profound and generous tension of that older brother and felt it penetrate the depths of his heart.

In that period, he was already at the age to put aside his games a little and begin learning to read, write, and do arithmetic.

There existed then in Udine municipal elementary schools, divided into lower and upper classes; there were also several small private schools, and well-to-do families used to entrust their children to some devout priest, even though French influence had drastically reduced the number of private teachers.

It is probable that the two little Scrosoppi boys received their first education from some former "*filippino*", perhaps from Father Carlo himself, who certainly contributed to the growth of the two younger brothers.

What is certain is that "*Luigino*", especially after the move to the new house, could be seen constantly in the sacristy and nearby rooms that had remained at the disposal of the oratorians.

His first biographer, Don Ferdinando Blasich, loves to remember little Luigi while «*as a child he frequented the Church of santa Maria Maddalena, and moved with innocent ways and religious fervor among those environments and among those venerable priests*» [9].

«Twice in the dust»

Later came the ruin of the Russian campaign and then the defeat of Leipzig on October 18, 1813.

Two months earlier, the last solemn parade of the Napoleonic regime had taken place in Udine.

It was August 15, the feast of the Assumption, which that year fell on a Sunday. Viceroy Eugene was in the city with his military retinue and, as was customary, attended the sung mass in the Cathedral.

This did not happen to celebrate the Assumption or because it was Sunday.

Among the extravagant ideas of the Emperor of the French, or more likely of some of his courtiers, there had been that of tracing in the list of martyrs a certain Saint Napoleon. This saint's feast was to be celebrated precisely on August 15; the funeral oration was to be centered on him or, better still — remaining understood! — on Bonaparte himself. All accompanied by the inevitable final hymn of thanksgiving (*Te Deum*).

As often happens in the bitter staging of history, the powerful do not disdain even forcing the liturgy to their own ends. And they always find some ecclesiastic who, through shrewdness, naivety, or a sense of forced adaptation, lends himself to furthering these desires.

Eugene Beauharnais therefore went to the *Duomo*. At the door, to receive him, was the Chapter of the Cathedral, with a canopy, whose poles were supported by four canons [10].

When the singular procession reached the vast space reserved for the clergy, the Viceroy went to sit on the Archbishop's throne and his officers occupied the seats of the Chapter, while the canons were forced to withdraw to the small space behind the high altar.

Irony of politics! Later, the Austrian authorities would try to continue this prevarication, and the Chapter had to struggle not a little to demonstrate that the abuse committed by the French in no way justified that of the Austrians.

Eugene thus attended the mass: he wore high boots with silver spurs, tight white trousers, a jacket with tails and a collar twenty centimeters high; the suit was all a rustle

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[9] F.B. udinese [FERDINANDO BLASICH], Il padre Luigi Scrosoppi dell'Oratorio - memorie ed appunti, Udine 1884, p. 4.

[10] Cf. Atti del Capitolo, vol. VII, (1812-1820), cc. 49-50 (A.C.U.).

of decorations and cords, he held his left hand on the hilt of his sword and on his head the famous bicorne hat. At heart he was a good man, devoid of hostile feelings towards religion, but neither he nor his retinue shone with devotion and recollection.

On October 25, 1813, the army of Francis I, Emperor of Austria, entered Udine. On November 27, a hymn of thanksgiving was sung in the "*Duomo*" for the victory of the Austrian troops, in the presence of General Baron de Scivich, who commanded the siege of the fortress of *Palmanova*, which was still resisting. On April 27, 1814, another solemn rite was held to celebrate the entry of the allied troops into Paris.

Thus, Napoleon was sent into exile on the island of Elba.

The brief return of the Hundred Days would be but a distant disturbance.

Then came Waterloo.

Finally, Saint Helena.

Chapter 3

LUIGI SCROSOPPI AS AN ADOLESCENT (1814-1819)

On April 10, 1814, Easter Sunday, another *Te Deum* was sung in the "*Duomo"* of Udine, this time deeply felt by the good Christian people: a hymn of thanksgiving for the triumphal return to Rome, after the imprisonment in Fontainebleau, of Pope Pius VII. The Pontiff had been miraculously restored to the Church, wrote Monsignor Capellari, diocesan administrator "*vicario capitolare*" of the Archdiocese of Udine, just as St. Peter was once freed from the prison of King Herod Antipas [1]. The bells rang festively for an entire hour on the evenings of Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday; late at night there was a great illumination, even in the poorest homes [2]. It seemed one could touch with their own hand the truth of Christ's promise:

«*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*»

Thus it appeared to the believers, who exulted with joy.

The non-believers, on the contrary, were struck by the same irritated surprise as the Jewish Sanhedrin when the guards of the sepulcher announced the resurrection of Christ or when, after Pentecost, the apostles threw Jerusalem into turmoil with the preaching of the Gospel and with wonders.

The crucifixion, therefore, had not been enough to extinguish the voice of Jesus except for a brief period.

And the same wonder has crossed and will cross the centuries: from external persecutions or internal decays, the Church will always rise more vigorous than before.

Something similar must have been said then by Father Carlo from the pulpit and in the intimacy of the Scrosoppi home. This time our "*Luigino*", who was almost ten years old, was able to understand and must have drawn a deep and indelible impression from it.

And perhaps precisely in the spring of 1814, luminous with faith and exultation, he was admitted to his First Communion. The custom of the time suggests this, although documentary proof is lacking. Father Carlo surely prepared him for that sacrament.

More than the modeling of a statue under the hand of the artist, it is wonderful to contemplate the formation of a man under the touch of grace and by his own inner choice, among the people and events that gradually surround him. Especially in the years of adolescence, when the personality is docile and sensitive.

The humble Luigi, the silent Luigi, will never seek to be a protagonist. Until the age of fifty, he will live in the shadow of Father Carlo Filaferro; in the following thirty years he

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[1] G. BIASUTTI, La Pasqua, le Festività di quest'anno, (1814), schede su Pastorali, vol. I, fasc. Mons. Mattia Cappellari, vic. cap. 2a volta (A.C.A.U.)

[2] Cf. Atti del Capitolo, vol. VII (1812-1820), c. 70 v. (A.C.U.).

will love to hide behind others, often and willingly; finally, he will choose his own grave in a remote place because, he said, «*everyone should forget about this poor man.*» It is his spiritual constant.

His unique biography, therefore, will be largely a web of references to him; yet it will not speak of anything or anyone else except to let us glimpse the formation and development of his personality.

As happens, for example, in this spring of his.

One month after his return to Rome, Pius VII extended the feast of "*Maria Santissima Ausiliatrice*" of May 24 to the whole Church, as he attributed his liberation to her. This form of Marian cult had a fervent spread also in *Friuli*, precisely with the specific meaning of recognizing in the Holy Virgin the sure defense of Christendom against every threat. Later, St. John Bosco would become its apostle.

And in the month of May, shortly after, the devotion of the Marian month developed.

On February 3, 1816, the diocesan administrator Monsignor Capellari ordered that in all the churches of the diocese, following the example of what was practiced in Rome, special prayers to the Sorrowful Virgin be held in the last ten days of Carnival; for this purpose, he had a copy of the "*Breve esercizio ad onore dell'addolorato Cuore di Maria Santissima*" sent to the parishes.

From then on, the Church of "*santa Maria Maddalena*" became, in Udine, the living center of such expressions of devotion to the Madonna, as it had already been for a long time for the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

Both of these devotions vigorously nourished the adolescent *Luigino*, whom we already saw moving in that church with innocent conduct and religious fervor.

Father Carlo as a Jesuit?

Another gesture of Pius VII seemed to touch the Scrosoppi family closely: the restoration of the "*Compagnia di Gesù"* (Society of Jesus), desired by the Pope with a decree in August 1814.

In the climate of religious enthusiasm of that year, this decision aroused a real wave of aspirations to become Jesuits among the most noble souls of the young clergy. Not all, it is true, came to fruition; nevertheless, the phenomenon remains equally indicative of a precise spiritual orientation.

Two men from Udine, close friends of Father Carlo, became Jesuits: don Niccolò Piccini and don Antonio Rizzi, who for some years had been vice-chancellor in the archiepiscopal curia, alongside the venerable Count Alfonso Belgrado [3], apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

[3] From Udine, born in 1769 from a family that produced men of the Church, including the Jesuit Father Jacopo, distinguished for his scientific writings, and the Count's own son, Monsignor Carlo, papal nuncio, bishop, and later Patriarch of Constantinople. Although a layman, Count Alfonso held the office of archiepiscopal chancellor from 1830 until his death in 1832, always appreciated in the diocese, especially by the clergy, for his noble qualities of mind

Together with Piccini, the seminarian Giuseppe Marchi from *Tolmezzo*, destined to become a famous archaeologist, entered the novitiate of the Society. He was followed not long after by Father Paolo Beorchia from *Trava*, who would become a distinguished bibliographer of the same Society.

From a letter by Piccini [4] we know that the same desire was shared by *don* Giovanni Antonio Sala from *Forni di Sotto*, *don* Pietro Benedetti from *Ampezzo* — future founder of the nursery school of Udine —, *don* Giovanni Battista Bearzi, a very dear friend of Filaferro, *don* Giuseppe Gortani, a professor in the seminary, and, indeed, Father Carlo himself.

Piccini expected him in Rome for the period immediately after Easter 1815, but Father Carlo did not depart.

He certainly spoke of that desire at home and among the former *filippini*.

Mother Antonia must have objected:

«*Why go far away, if you can do so much good here too?*»

And the confreres must have told him:

«*Why do you want to leave us? Why not work, instead, on the restoration of our own congregation?*»

Undoubtedly, Divine Providence, which disposes everything with sweetness, had a hand in it. If Father Carlo had left, the lives of the two small Scrosoppi boys would have had a different development. Especially for "*Luigino*", who was for Father Carlo, more than a brother, his favorite spiritual son.

Nevertheless, that unrealized aspiration left in Father Carlo a perennial affective bond toward the "*Compagnia di Gesù"*. His brother Luigi would follow him and surpass him even in this, as he would have the opportunity to live in total unity of intent (*cor unum et anima una*) with some Jesuits and, especially, because Ignatian asceticism will assume a central place in his spirituality.

The great famine of 1816-17

Once the series of wars of the Napoleonic era ended, hearts had opened to the hope of a period of tranquility. But it was not to be; although, this time, the misfortunes came from another cause. It is quite true that misfortune changes its name, but remains an obstinate tenant of this valley of tears (that is, this world full of suffering).

The agricultural season of 1813 had already gone poorly; even worse was that of 1814, when in the mountainous areas the cereals defined as "*minute*" (that is, secondary grains) — such as red sorghum, buckwheat, and rye — could not even ripen, while a severe form of animal epidemic raged in the mountains and on the plains.

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and heart. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Mille anni di cancellieri e coadiutori nella curia di Aquileia ed Udine, Udine 1967, pp. 33-36).

[4] L. TINTI, Memorie del padre Luigi Scrosoppi d.O., Udine 1897, pp. 260-269.

In 1815, from the very beginning of the year, the mountain populations were in the grip of the horrors of famine; sad processions of starving people began to form, descending toward the plain in search of a piece of bread. That year the winter lasted until late spring: snow fell on the stacks of the first hay.

In 1816, the continuous rains gave the final blow. Suffice it to say that since 1812 the prices of cereals had increased by three hundred percent: and that was assuming one could find them!

In the first months of 1817, smallpox and typhus exacerbated the hunger — the latter being a disease until then unknown. The population of Udine numbered, in 1817, just over seventeen thousand inhabitants. That year, nearly two thousands of them died. More than a massacre. Many among the dead, however, were beggars not resident in the city, who in the morning were found lifeless along the streets or in the peripheral farmhouses where they had sought refuge for the night.

Only with the first harvests did the hunger cease; the agricultural season of 1817 proved to be exceptionally good [5].

At least here we would like to be able to recount some merciful gesture of our "*Luigino*", showing him to us as he shares his bread with a hungry child or perhaps as he takes something from the household pantry to help one of the many unfortunate people. However, if tradition is silent, we can reasonably believe that no one knocked in vain at the *Scrosoppi* door. The habitual merciful tenderness of mother Antonia makes us believe so. The heart overflowing with charity of Father Carlo, who then risked dying for his generous dedication, makes us imagine so.

The government authorities looked on, frightened and helpless. Not so Monsignor Capellari, vicar general of the Diocese of Udine, who organized two collection centers: one for beggar boys in the premises of the former seminary (now the seat of the court) and the other for girls in the *Casa di Carità* (now *Istituto Renati*); furthermore, he assigned a group of zealous priests to their assistance.

Among these, however, Father Carlo does not appear. Because of his perfect knowledge of the German language, he was tasked with assisting the numerous sick Austrian soldiers, gathered in the military hospital in *via Pracchiuso* [6]. There he was also struck by typhus, after having spent months in total solitude toiling in that sacred mission, bringing even several Protestants and some Jews to the Catholic faith.

From the military hospital, he returned, when he could, to the house in "*via Vittorio Veneto*". He returned there one summer day trembling with fever, which in a short time brought him near to death. Thanks be to God, he recovered.

What must thirteen-year-old "*Luigino*" have felt when he saw his brother struck down by the illness contracted in his apostolate of charity? What feelings must have vibrated in his soul the many times he entered the room of his dying brother? What conversations must have taken place between them during the long period of convalescence?

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[5] Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Alcuni friulani soldati di Napoleone, Udine 1968, pp. 23 ss.

[6] It is still found next to the Church of san Valentino, on the site where the monastery of the mantellate or Sisters Servants of Mary previously stood.

It is in pain that noble souls perceive most vividly the enchantment of love.

"*Luigino*" had already been thinking for a few years about becoming a priest. Now his vocation had grown stronger.

In November 1817, he enrolled in the course of grammar studies at the archiepiscopal seminary. It was necessary to go through those studies. But the longed-for goal of his soul shone far off: God and charity.

The House of the *derelitte*

In the Cisalpine Republic, the Oratorian fathers (the *filippini*) were suppressed as early as 1797; instead, they continued to exist, as has been said, in the Veneto territory annexed to Austria until 1810.

It was thus that in 1798, from the dissolved congregation of *Mantova*, the Oratorian father Gaetano Salomoni, a native of *Verona*, moved to the one in Udine.

In a short time, he gathered around him a group of noble ladies and encouraged them to implement his project of charity: to establish in Udine a House of the *derelitte* (that is, a house for abandoned girls) on the model of a similar work founded in *Verona* by Father Bellavita.

An institution with the same name already existed in *Milano* and in other cities. The common purpose, in the words of Father Salomoni himself, was «*to collect, shelter, instruct, and feed a certain number of girls, to be chosen from the poorest class and who are deprived of their parents, or abandoned by them*»: in short, a sort of protected institute in which to save the daughters of the common people from widespread corruption and prepare them with vocational schools to earn an honest living.

At the head of those ladies was the Countess Giulia *di Brazzà* [7], born *Piccoli*, who even interested Napoleon in the institute under creation during his brief stay in Udine from December 10 to 12, 1807; the Emperor made her many promises. But, occupied in quite other matters, he did not follow up on them [8]. Countess Giulia died on September 5, 1815, without seeing her dream realized.

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[7] Only daughter of Count Ascanio Piccoli, whose family held the title of Counts of Manzano, and wife of Count Francesco di Brazzà-Cergneu, she delighted in poetry, literature, and art. Grandmother of the famous African explorer Pietro di Brazzà, from whom the city of Brazzaville in Congo took its name. She was a «woman of cultured intellect, of widespread charity toward the poor, of solicitous care toward her children, a distinguished example of her age» (1765-1815) (Funeral tablet in the small Church of Soleschiano - Udine).

[8] Count Antonio Bartolini (1741-1824), an Udinese Commander of Malta, on the flyleaf of a manuscript in his library, recounted the episode of the meeting between Countess Giulia and Napoleon at the social theater on the evening of December 11, after which she reportedly sent the Emperor a Memoria (a formal petition) of hers, contained in the aforementioned manuscript. This Memoria is a sacred discourse or, rather, a sermon; it is quite evident that its author is a priest, and it can be none other than the Oratorian Father Gaetano Salomoni. It seems impossible that Countess Giulia di Brazzà sent Napoleon an exact copy of this Memoria; it is preferable to think that a text more suited to the mindset of the recipient was drafted. If the Memoria had indeed been sent, how could it be hoped that the Napoleonic bureaucracy, which had suppressed the brotherhoods and was about to suppress the religious houses, could approve the funding of a new institute with a Christian or Vincentian program? (Cf. ms. 125, pp. 27, Fondo Bartolini, Archiepiscopal Library of Udine).

However, the work was born shortly after, on April 1, 1816. Father Salomoni placed it under the protection of the Virgin Mary and of St. Cajetan *da Thiene*, the «*Saint of Providence*», who was also the saint of his own name. Indeed, in the first chapel he placed that painting of St. Cajetan of good eighteenth-century workmanship, which is still found at the center of the altar in the small church built in his honor, many years later, by Father Carlo and *don* Luigi, and where the body of Father Scrosoppi now rests.

The *House of the derelitte* found its seat in the same place where the *College della Provvidenza* stands today. There was, at that time, a modest little house, once inhabited by a very devout woman, Paola *Florenzis* [9], who had kept a private school for girls there. Upon her death in 1801, she had left it as an inheritance to the *House of the Convertite*, today *Istituto Micesio* [10], from which Father Salomoni rented it for 450 lire per year.

A few days after the opening, on Easter Sunday, April 14, there were nineteen girls housed, because nineteen loaves of bread were distributed. But even then, external students were also welcomed, as in the registers we find the entry: «*eggs at Easter no. 153*».

In February 1817, at the most critical moment of the famine, there is mention of «*soup for about forty girls under twelve years of age*».

Dedicated to the direct assistance of the children were two young women in their thirties, both seamstresses and embroiderers by profession. Santa *Marpillero*, born in 1786 from a family coming from *Venzone*, who served as superior and remained in the house until 1828; later she resumed the trade of seamstress privately and died in *calle Stabernao* on March 11, 1855. And Margherita *Gaspardis*, born in 1786 in *Sevegliano* [11] near *Palmanova*, who from January 1822 — since the work was in difficulty — left her monthly salary of 12 lire and 10 "*soldi*" in the treasury: she was the first superior of the Sisters of Providence from 1835 to 1842 and died piously on November 26, 1862, after having had the joy of seeing the new congregation of the Sisters of Providence praised and approved by Pope Pius IX with the decree of praise of February 7 of that same year.

These two were called «*maestre*» (that is, teachers). Certainly, teachers mainly of the needle, scissors, and broom, because it was necessary to form good workers and housewives, not readers of novels. However, they taught a little «*reading, writing, and arithmetic*» and especially Christian doctrine.

The spiritual and organizational direction naturally remained in the hands of Father Salomoni, who wrote the very first *Regole* (Rules) to be observed in the *House of the*

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[9] She died at the age of 92 in 1801 and was buried in the Church of the cappuccine.

[10] Name derived from Father Giovanni Micesio (1630-1702) born in Trivignano Udinese. He entered the Oratorians of Udine and lived a life of humility and charity. He was especially concerned with women of ill repute, leading them to conversion and some even to become Capuchin nuns. He founded for them the House of the Soccorso, later called House of the Convertite, to which he devoted all his care, and which was distinct from the monastery of the Capuchin mothers, suppressed by Napoleonic laws. (Cf. M. TOLLER, Casa del Soccorso o delle Convertite - vicende e persone (a.a. 1680-1944), Udine 1969, pp. 6-13).

[11] Erroneously, in the registers of the congregation, Sedegliano is indicated as the birthplace of Gaspardis.

Fanciulle derelitte; however, these only concerned the daily schedule in the life of the house.

He had chosen as a collaborator, and in particular as the bursar of the institution, *don* Andrea *Scipioni*, who rightly deserves the title of co-founder.

He was a religious of the *Congregation of san Paolo*, commonly called the Barnabites, to whom the city of Udine had entrusted the direction of the public gymnasium since 1676. They had then built a church of their own, dedicated to St. Lawrence *Giustiniani*, now disappeared, in the northeast corner of the current "*piazza Garibaldi*".

Also suppressed by Napoleonic laws, *don* Andrea had retired to the house of the two priest brothers *Scala*, in the city parish of "*san Giacomo*". There he died on May 10, 1819, at only fifty-two years of age.

Father Salomoni, then, turned to his young confrere Father Carlo Filaferro and begged him to lend a hand. He did not have to insist. His robust physical constitution had allowed him to completely overcome the after-effects of the serious illness of 1817: and his heart was always burning with the desire to do good.

But not even Father Carlo could foresee what an extraordinary work of charity he would embark upon with that decision.

A work that still continues, because into that brief furrow Father Luigi Scrosoppi would soon sink the plow.

Monsignor Mattia Capellari

The public or private events in which every man encounters throughout the course of his life have an indubitable influence on his personality. This is especially true for certain events and, above all, during the years of the most receptive adolescence.

Until now, we have spoken at some length about the wars of Napoleon and his ecclesiastical policy, the imprisonment and liberation of Pius VII, the great famine of 1817, the choices of Father Carlo and his generous dedication, precisely because in such a framework the personality of *Luigi* as a child and adolescent was being formed and defined. It is a process similar to iron that takes shape under the blows of the hammer (that is: the power hammer).

It is only necessary to observe that, in the face of events, not everyone reacts in the same way. Some are captured by them and remain trapped in the temporal affair. Others instead, by grace and by choice, free themselves from them and are more strongly pushed toward the love and search for eternal certainties. To these latter belong Father Carlo and, following in his footsteps, Father Luigi.

No less influence is held by the people with whom we find ourselves in close relationship, especially some of them. If we have alluded to the spiritual orientations that *Luigi Scrosoppi* drew from his family origins and the home environment, we would now like to illustrate extensively some figures of his educators among the former *filippini*, among the professors of the seminary or among the clergy of *Udine*, and also among his fellow students. Not so much to linger on the portrait of these historical profiles, though

very interesting and exemplary, as much as to catch their echo and reflection in the soul of "*Luigino*".

But the discourse would become long and dispersive. It will therefore suffice to say one thing, precise and significant, which summarizes everything.

Many years later, Father Luigi, speaking to the Sisters of "*Provvidenza*", would often resort to the example of the bees, which know how to orient themselves in search of wax and honey over any form of terrain and even in the midst of thorny briars.

This was the gift and the joy of his youthful years.

There was then, as always, good mixed with evil. He flew toward the most precious flowers, driven by that spiritual rapture that was inherent in the depths of his soul.

One cannot, however, avoid dedicating a few lines to Monsignor Mattia Capellari [12], already mentioned several times, both because he was among the most constant benefactors of the charitable works of Father Carlo and Father *Luigi*, and because he transmitted to both a well-defined spiritual attitude.

Capellari, formerly professor of morals in the seminary, then parish priest of *Pozzuolo* and finally canon in charge of the confessions of *Udine*, was twice elected by the chapter to lead the diocese during the period when there was no bishop. It must not be forgotten that, at that time, the government of the Diocese of *Udine* was accompanied by metropolitan government over all the dioceses of *Veneto*, excluding only *Venezia*, *Chioggia*, and *Adria-Rovigo*.

The first time for a little more than four years, after the death of Archbishop Cardinal *Pier Antonio Zorzi*, which occurred on December 17, 1803; the second from the death of Monsignor *Rasponi* on February 14, 1814, until the arrival of Monsignor Lodi on November 30, 1819.

The spiritual attitude mentioned should be referred particularly to his second appointment as diocesan administrator. Since October 1813 — as we said — the *Lombardo-Veneto* territory had fallen back under Austrian rule; Emperor Francis I wanted to implement an ecclesiastical policy inspired by the so-called *giuseppinismo* (that is: Josephinism). It was an undue interference in the matters of the Church, more subtle and therefore even more dangerous than the Napoleonic one.

Capellari opposed it with apostolic courage, refusing any form of compromise or submission, even at the cost of being confined or imprisoned; and the threat was made to him.

A stormy meeting of his, on April 13, 1817, had great resonance with the Governor General *de Goess*, who had officially summoned him to *Venezia* in the hope of bending him. But he did not succeed, despite the reproaches of Abbot *Farina*, ecclesiastical

[12] Born in Pesariis in Carnia in 1754, died in Udine in 1832; graduated in theology and in civil and ecclesiastical law. His lessons on morals, even later, were considered the best of their kind. He governed the diocese in extremely difficult times, defending with admirable strength the vigor of ecclesiastical disciplines, promoting the regularity of the clergy and the spiritual benefit of the faithful. (Atti del Capitolo, vol. IX (1828-1830), c. 100, A.C.U.).

consultant to the governor, and the intimidating pressures of the Patriarch of *Venezia* himself.

From that meeting Monsignor Capellari sent a detailed report to his friend and distant relative, the *camaldolese* monk Father *Mauro Capellari*, the future Pope Gregory XVI. «*I cannot express to you* — he wrote to him — *the universal joy, especially of the inhabitants of Venezia and Udine, for the successful outcome that occurred*» [13].

A successful outcome, because he had not yielded. The friction continued unstoppably as long as *Capellari* remained diocesan administrator. He, the curia, and the Diocese of *Udine* were marked negatively on the Austrian registers. Rebellious, stubborn, indomitable: that is what they were! And Monsignor Lodi would often remind the Austrian rulers that they had been described to him as such.

It was, instead, about something quite different. Capellari, with a marked distrust toward changing civil governments, intended to state with pride the freedom and independence of the Church in its field of competence and the right of local churches to remain in direct union with the Pope and with the Roman Curia, against any intrusion by the government.

Of the same opinion were later Father Carlo and Father *Luigi*. The former would struggle with all his strength so that the Austrian government would recognize the private character of the *House of the derelitte* and would only admit a formal control by a civil commissioner. The latter would fight until nearly his death to prevent the transformation of the work into a moral entity. In the tenacious opposition of both, the thought and the pride of Monsignor Capellari were reflected.

He had in the two brothers the authentic heirs of his other orientations as well. It was he who removed from the Diocese of *Udine* the last remnants of *giansenismo* (that is: Jansenism). And it was still he, as an old professor of morals, who, avoiding the excesses of rigor and laxity, traced the lines of an austere yet benevolent pastoral conduct, with which to guide souls in Christian virtues and in the discipline of the Church. A supporter of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, he promoted — as we said — that to the Sorrowful Heart of Mary; and he concluded his mandate as diocesan administrator exhorting, in his last pastoral letter for Lent of 1819, «*if not to daily or nearly daily, at least to frequent participation in the Holy Eucharist*»: a proposal, at that time, new and courageous.

If Father Carlo and Father *Luigi* would follow the same spiritual directions by their own convinced choice, they will both be glad, from heaven, that we have dedicated these pages to their great protector and friend, Monsignor Mattia Capellari. They were due to him.

[13] G. BIASUTTI, L'udinese Mons. Carlo Belgrado ed i moti del Risorgimento, Udine 1962, p. 54.

Chapter 4

THE YOUNG LUIGI TOWARD THE ALTAR (1820-1827)

We have already seen our *Luigino* enroll in the course of upper grammar studies in the autumn of 1817 at the seminary schools, following closely behind his brother *Giovanni Battista*, who had enrolled in the same course the previous autumn.

Since 1811, the seminary had already found a new permanent seat in the former monastery of *san Bernardino delle clarisse osservanti* [(1)], founded in 1325 and suppressed in 1807. Several years later, once the convent premises were demolished, Bishop Monsignor Emmanuele Lodi would erect a large quadrangular building on that area; this building, severely damaged by the aerial bombardment of February 22, 1944, would be replaced by Archbishop Monsignor Giuseppe Nogara with the modern building on *viale Ungheria*, which was inaugurated in 1956 by Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, Patriarch of *Venezia*, the future Pope John XXIII of holy memory.

The two *Scrosoppi* brothers, however, always attended the seminary as external students. They participated in the lessons and community prayer exercises and then returned to their paternal home.

Until 1818, the program of seminary studies took place over a duration of eight years. The first four were called «*humanistic studies*» and were divided into grammar, upper grammar studies, humanity, and rhetoric. In the other four years, the «*sciences*» were studied, namely philosophy, moral theology with canon law, dogmatic theology with Church history and, finally, Sacred Scripture, combined with lessons in Greek and Hebrew. But in 1818 the Austrian government imposed a new school system divided over ten years. The cycle of the first four years remained unchanged; it was followed by two years of philosophy and then another four dedicated to ecclesiastical studies [(2)].

The studies of the young Luigi

The biographer of Father Luigi, Monsignor Luigi Tinti, writes that «*from the beginning in the lower schools, although very diligent, it seemed that Luigi did not obtain the hoped-for progress; but growing with age, his intelligence developed gradually in such a way that in the classical and theological studies he completed in the episcopal seminary he obtained a very favorable judgment from those distinguished professors.*»

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[1] The monastery had been founded by the testamentary disposition of the Udinese Giacomo Rainerotto (February 18, 1517), on the site of his houses, to gather those young Udinese women, «born of an honorable house and of civil class», who could maintain themselves with his assets. (Cf. VARIOUS AUTHORS, Il Seminario di Udine, Udine 1906, pp. 256-257).

[2] Cf. Ibid., pp. 320-342.

What Tinti states finds confirmation in the overall judgment of our *Luigino* at the end of the course of upper grammar studies in the summer of 1818, as can be read, although in Latin, in the seminary registers:

«*In the studies, to which he has dedicated himself with a diligence beyond the ordinary, he has obtained a result superior to the natural capacities of his intellect*» [(3)].

Certainly he was of less prompt and brilliant intelligence than his brother *Giovanni Battista* and less acute and penetrating than Father Carlo. The Lord, who attracted all three of them to Himself, carried out in them the preferred design of His providence: the last became the first. It is indeed true, in fact, that God does not usually choose the most gifted to operate, in them and through them, the wonders of His grace, but often prefers the weakest to confound the strongest. A famous example was offered to us by the Curé of *Ars*, St. John Baptist Mary Vianney, about twenty years older than Father Luigi.

It is correct to specify, however, that the young Luigi was always, by merit of diligence if not by natural gifts of intellect, among the best in his class.

At that time, the marks of merit were expressed in Latin with the following qualifications: excellent, first class, second class, third class; sometimes, between the first and second qualification, a «*first eminent (excellent)*» was inserted.

Well, *Luigino* never received any «*third class*», and a «*second class*» only in Greek in the first semester of the first course of philosophy. In the rest, his report card is filled with «*first class*», «*first eminent*», and «*eminent*». In the last two theological courses, he resulted «*eminent*» in all subjects.

His application, then, is always defined as «*maximum*»; sometimes it is specified that he «*demonstrated the maximum commitment*» or «*dedicated to study the maximum of his own strength.*»

As for conduct, here are the judgments given of him in the year-end reports to the political authorities, who intervened directly in this as well. In 1818 «*he dedicated himself to religious practices with an exceptional commitment.*» In 1819 «*he led an excellent life for the whole year.*» In 1820 he obtained «*first excellent*» in conduct. In 1821 and 1822 he «*demonstrated excellent customs.*» And for the four years of theology, while the Bishop Monsignor Lodi certifies to the government authorities that «*the conduct of the aforementioned student was fully compliant with the academic laws*», in the internal judgments of the seminary he is defined as having «*conduct that was most excellent*» or «*excellent in cultivating virtue.*»

Everything, therefore, concurs to prove that *Luigi Scrosoppi* embellished his nine years of seminary with a tireless application to study and with a truly exemplary conduct. And without any interruption. There is not, in fact, even a shadow of the crises or small difficulties that are accustomed to afflict adolescence and early youth. No doubt he too felt their disturbances; but grace, the purifying concentration in the work of study, and his natural and — we would like to say — obstinate tension of will toward the good protected him from any wandering.

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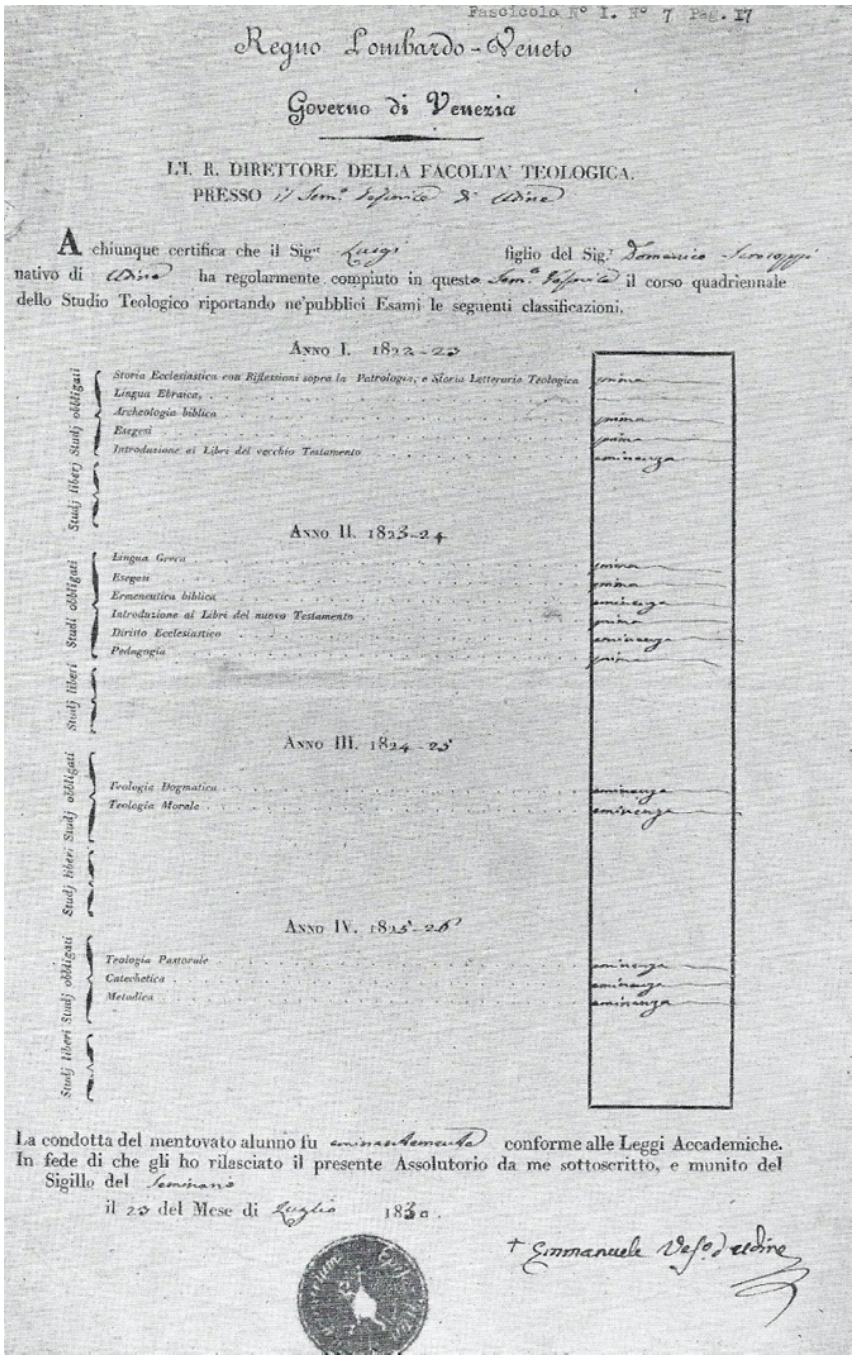
[3] Archivio Luigi Scrosoppi (A.L.S.), fascicolo 1, documento 2.



Regno Lombardo-Veneto

Governo di Venezia

L'I. R. DIRETTORE DELLA FACOLTA' TEOLOGICA
PRESSO il Sem.° Seminario di Udine

A chiunque certifica che il Sig.r Luigi figlio del Sig.r Domenico Scrosoppi nativo di Udine ha regolarmente compiuto in questo Sem.° Seminario il corso quadriennale dello Studio Teologico riportando ne' pubblici Esami le seguenti classificazioni.

Anno I. 1822-23

Studj liberi Studj obbligati
- Storia Ecclesiastica con Riflessioni sopra la Patrologia, e Storia Letteraria Teologica — eminenza
- Lingua Ebraica, — [illegible]
- Archeologia biblica — prima
- Esegesi — prima
- Introduzione ai Libri del vecchio Testamento — eminenza

Anno II. 1823-24

Studj liberi Studi obbligati
- Lingua Greca — prima
- Esegesi — prima
- Ermeneutica biblica — eminenza
- Introduzione ai Libri del nuovo Testamento — prima
- Diritto Ecclesiastico — eminenza
- Pedagogia — prima

Studj liberi

Anno III. 1824-25

Studj liberi Studj obbligati
- Teologia Dogmatica — eminenza
- Teologia Morale — eminenza

Studj liberi

Anno IV. 1825-26

Studj liberi Studj obbligati
- Teologia Pastorale — eminenza
- Catechetica — eminenza
- Metodica — eminenza

Studj liberi

La condotta del mentovato alunno fu eminentemente conforme alle Leggi Accademiche. In fede di che gli ho rilasciato il presente Assolutorio da me sottoscritto, e munito del Sigillo del Seminario

il 25 del Mese di Luglio 1826.

† Emmanuele Vesc.o di Udine

Academic certificate of the cleric Luigi with the evaluation notes relating to the four years of theology

The time that remained free from studies he continued to spend in prayer in the dear Church of *santa Maria Maddalena* and in serene or devout conversations with the excellent former oratorians. When he is about to receive major orders, the rector of that church will testify that he had been constant in the practices of the Oratory and that since childhood he had frequented and served «*this church with the maximum devotion, approaching the holy sacraments of confession and the Eucharist devoutly almost in all the festivities of the year.*»

Let us not forget that at that time daily communion was not in use. However, besides Sundays, the feasts of precept or devotion were very numerous, so we can deduce that *Luigino* approached the eucharistic banquet at least twice a week.

To respect the chronological order, we will now take the classic step back.

In the autumn of 1818, therefore, at fourteen years of age, *Luigino* was admitted to the school of humanistic studies, equivalent to the upper *ginnasio*, that is, to the first two years of the modern classical *liceo*. In those two years his teacher was the professor *don* Pietro Peruzzi [4] from *Buttrio*, who also trained his disciples to compose verses in Latin and in Italian, as continued to be practiced in the seminary schools until the early twentieth century. *Luigino* himself learned to compose poems and some short poetic compositions of his remain.

If *Scrosoppi* did not learn much from the refined Italian and Latin poetic art of the distinguished master, he remained fascinated by him, like everyone, especially for the humility and devotion that Peruzzi possessed to the highest degree. Tempted several times, because of his literary skill, to follow the roads of the world like the numerous priest-poets in vogue in the eighteenth century, he preferred to remain in the seminary, retired and poor; so poor that, when in 1822 he was appointed honorary canon, they had to waive the Austrian bureaucratic tax of one hundred lire for him. The same religious fervor, which had pushed one of his brothers to go as a missionary to Asia, dictated to him beautiful sacred compositions, in which clarity and spontaneity are joined by a vibrant charge of faith.

From November 1820 to August 1822 our Luigi completed the two philosophical courses. *Don* Giuseppe Gortani [5] taught him philosophy, who in 1814 had nourished, together with Father Carlo Filaferro, the desire to become a Jesuit.

He learned mathematics and physics — for which he seemed happily inclined — from *don* Giovanni Mazzaroli [6], of a reserved and quiet nature and of proven devotion, much esteemed and loved by the students for his very brilliant teaching: our cleric drew from him the passion for astronomy, to which he remained faithful throughout his life.

In history he had as a teacher that *don* Francesco Ostermann [7], whom Bishop Lodi defined as the pearl of priests regarding doctrine and conduct.

Later, in the theological courses, the young Luigi had as teacher of morals Monsignor Andrea Tonchia and of dogmatic and biblical studies Monsignor Gian Paolo Foraboschi. Tonchia, born in *Aprato di Tarcento* in 1783, also distinguished himself by an intense and fruitful preaching of spiritual exercises to the people and for his great virtues was called «*the saint who walks*» [8].

Foraboschi, born in *Moggio* in 1794, «*was of upright conduct* — says his death certificate — *of righteous mind, of exemplary devotion, of unshakeable faith*»: dean of

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4 Born in 1767, died in Udine in 1841.

5 Born in Teor (Udine) in 1792, was rector of the seminary, canon, and died in Udine in 1863.

6 Born in Cabia di Zuglio (Udine) in 1789, was vice-dean of the chapter of Cividale del Friuli, where he died in 1873.

7 Born in Gemona (Udine) in 1785, died as parish priest of Codroipo (Udine) in 1845.

8 He was canon penitentiary, died in Udine in 1856; he was one of the priests officiating in the Church of santa Maria Maddalena, of the filippini.

the chapter of Udine in the difficult years from 1855 onwards, he defended the rights of the Holy See with such fidelity that in 1866 he suffered a public and burning humiliation from which he was led in a few months to death [9].

It was a great fortune, especially for a young aspirant to the priesthood, to grow under teachers capable at the same time of enriching minds with knowledge and of spurring souls to virtue with word and example. *Luigino* had this opportunity, and he took advantage of it with enthusiasm.

Rosmini in Udine

In 1821, the Abbot Antonio Rosmini Serbati from *Rovereto di Trento* [10] arrived in Udine and remained there for some time; at the time, he was not yet a priest.

A part of the Rosmini family owned a house in this city, a little further on from the beginning of *Aquileia street*, on the western side. However, what attracted him to *Friuli* was above all his affection for his brotherly friend, *don* Sebastiano De Apollonia [11], who had been his study companion at the University of Padua and who since 1819 had been teaching methodology in the seminary.

Rosmini was already known for his first philosophical studies. He would later become the great Christian philosopher of the Italian nineteenth century and one of the main exponents of the Catholic political-religious movement defined as *neoguelfismo*: driven also by a profound religious fervor, he would found two religious congregations, the *Fratelli della Carità* and the *Sisters of Providence*. However, for him, philosophy, political commitment, and religious action were but aspects of that total Catholic rebirth that represented the dream of many, and his in particular.

Precisely to favor such a rebirth, Rosmini had created, during his studies in Padua, the famous «*Società degli Amici*» and De Apollonia had been one of its very first members. We have recalled these well-known facts because, during his stay in Udine, he founded a nucleus of that society. But for the fire of the initiative to remain lit, a passionate coordinator was necessary. And who better than Father Carlo? Who if not Father Carlo?

Unfortunately, we have no information on the activity of this Udinese Rosminian circle; it probably had a very short life. It is suspected that it was not welcomed by Bishop Monsignor Lodi [12]; and Father Carlo, always submissive to the authority of the diocese, will have let it dissolve.

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9 Died in Udine in 1867.

10 L. ZANUTTO, Il filosofo di Rovereto ed i suoi amici in Friuli, Udine 1911, pp. 24.

11 Born in Romans di Varmo (Udine) in 1792, died as a canon in Cividale del Friuli in 1854.

12 Born in Milan in 1770, died in Udine in 1845, he was a Dominican religious. A preacher, he gave «life, increase and splendor» to sacred eloquence, was a parish priest in Venezia, and Bishop of Udine from 1819. He restored the Abbey of Rosazzo, built the seminary almost entirely, and helped the poor. He was very attached to the discipline of the Church, had the culture and holiness of the clergy at heart, and fought against vice and opinions that disturbed public order. (Cf. P. BANDINI, Elogio funebre di monsignor Emmanuele Lodi vescovo di Udine, Udine 1845, pp. 32). Monsignor Lodi, in a note of November 9, 1820, denounced to the Austrian authorities the presence of a sect under the name of Società biblica or Fratelli Amici, in support of the carbonari. He mentioned four small works

Despite this, the figure and enthusiasm of Rosmini had a strong impact in the most active circle of Catholics in Udine. They certainly impressed *Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi*, who always maintained a deep admiration for the great thinker from *Rovereto*. Indeed, about ten years later, he would seriously evaluate entering the Rosminian congregation and carefully preserved, as long as he lived, some letters written to him by Rosmini, which today are lost.

Our Luigi too must have received a strong impression, as he saw the young Abbot frequent with devotion, in those days, the Church of *santa Maria Maddalena* and probably could listen to some of his passionate conversations: Father Carlo, in fact, will certainly have hosted him sometimes in the *Scrosoppi* house. Much later, Luigi will have the opportunity to go and visit Rosmini in his spiritual retreat in *Stresa*.

Meanwhile, Silvio Pellico [13] also passed through Udine. But in a very different form: in chains, among the guards of the Austrian police, bound for the prisons of the *Spielberg*. In the air, the first movements of the *Risorgimento* and the trends of Romanticism were already blowing.

Luigi in the cassock

Luigi Scrosoppi donned the ecclesiastical habit on November 19, 1821 [14]. This was a fundamental date in his life, so much so that it was even cited in the memorial card printed immediately after his death. He received it with a holy spirit and with the same spirit he always wore it.

It is worth remembering that this model of clothing, today fallen into disuse, had to reach, according to the rules of Church law, down to the ankles: for this very reason it was defined as "*talare*" (that is: a cassock). Over it, during the fair season, one wore the *ferraiolo* — the short cloak — in the Roman style or a light coat, which became heavier in winter; but Father Luigi would always prefer a cape, according to the style of the *filippini*.

On his head, instead, he wore a hat whose brims were raised at the sides by special tension cords.

In those very years, that model of hat was the subject of a harsh protest by the more exuberant members of the young clergy. No cords: the brim fell in a circular way on

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distributed by this sect, polluted by doctrinal errors of a Protestant nature and of insubordination against the established order; he therefore invited intervention with drastic means. However, the characteristics of this Society — Pellegrino observes — were «such as to distinguish it clearly from the one founded by Rosmini. Note in fact how Lodi refers to a book titled Sommario dell'Istoria, Dottrina e disciplina della società dei cristiani denominata degli amici, different from the book Regolamento della Società dell'amicizia cattolica, Torino 1819, which inspired the plan of Rosmini and his friends». (U. PELLEGRINO, Sebastiano De Appollonia e Antonio Rosmini - Ricerche sul rosminianesimo del Friuli, Milano 1973; vol. II, pp. 148 s.; vol. I, part II, p. 45).

13 Above the current Albergo Roma in Poscolle street, where it is crossed by Brenari street and Gorghi lane, is placed the plaque that commemorates Pellico's passage through Udine, on the night between March 27 and 28, 1822.

14 Archivio Luigi Scrosoppi (A.L.S.), fascicolo 1, documento 8.

every side. «*In this way it protects better from the rain*», the protesters argued. The older priests, instead, accused them of a lack of ecclesiastical spirit.

But there were those who did worse, both among the young and the old. Some wore, as it was said then, the short habit — that is: *in curtis* —, which was a coat that reached only to the knee. This was a habit tolerated for mountain priests, but considered almost scandalous for those of the plains or the city. And it would have been acceptable if the overcoat had been black: there were those who wore it colored, following the civil fashion of the time, and of the religious clothing only the white stiff collar remained.

If it is true that «*the habit does not make the monk*», it is equally true that the dressing at will or according to the secular fashion of certain ecclesiastics of the time was in contrast with the existing laws of the Church and, in Udine, with the will of Bishop Lodi, who was very rigorous on this point. Luigi, as well as Father Carlo and *don Giovanni Battista*, were strictly faithful to the discipline of the Church. This involved more work for mother Antonia, who found herself now having three cassocks to keep clean and mended.

He received the first two minor orders, that is, the office of porter and that of lector, on the Saturday «*Sitientes*» — that is: the Saturday preceding Passion Sunday —, March 23, 1822, in the Cathedral of Udine. The other two orders, the exorcistate and the office of acolyte, were conferred upon him on the Sunday «*in albis*» — that is: the first Sunday after Easter — of the same year, April 14, in the Church of *sant'Antonio abate*, located next to the Bishop's palace [(15)].

Father Carlo at the direction of the *House of the derelitte*

In the same year 1822, Father Gaetano Salomoni left Udine, perhaps to retire to his native *Verona* or, more probably, to re-enter some reconstituted *oratoriana* congregation. Three years later — as the tablet of benefactors in the *Istituto della Provvidenza* attests — he went to receive the reward for his charity in heaven.

It was thus that Father Carlo automatically became the director of the *House of the derelitte* , of which he had been the administrator for three years. He chose as a collaborator *don* Giovanni Battista Bearzi from Udine, belonging to a family originally from *Ampezzo* in *Carnia*, who remained at his side until 1829, when he was elected to lead the city parish of *san Giorgio*.

One might think that Father Carlo, due to his personal qualities and the influence he enjoyed, had given a vigorous impulse to the life of the house. Instead, it gradually weakened, so much so that an official request by him and Bearzi on February 6, 1829 [(16)]

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[15] A.L.S., fascicolo 1, documenti 9-10.

[16] In the application, the two priests, after having renewed the petition to the prefecture for the acceptance of a capital to discount the rents that the House of the *derelitte* had to pay to the Casa delle Convertite, added: «the preservation of the Istituto delle *derelitte* unfortunately appears to us in danger, nor would we now know where to turn to draw further valid means if the charitable subsidies on which it is solely founded continually decrease; therefore it has already been proposed that whatever remained of the capital... after having settled the rents owed to the pious Casa delle Convertite, everything be left in its favor». (Archive of the Istituto della Provvidenza, folder I).

to the prefecture — the provincial delegation of that time — seems almost like a funeral dirge for the pious institution. Suffice it to say that on June 10, 1819, when Filaferro took over its administration, there was a cash balance of just over a thousand lire; at the end of the year, the income was 6,674 lire (it had been 9,362 lire in 1816), against an expenditure of 4,991 lire. The budget decreased from year to year, so much so that in 1829 it was reduced to an income of 2,361 lire, against an expenditure of 2,537 lire.

In 1830, the income would jump to 3,137 lire and would never fall again. Why? Naturally, because in 1829, with Bearzi appointed parish priest, our *don* Luigi became vice-director.

The causes of such economic decline had been numerous. Father Carlo could not dedicate himself much to the house because he was absorbed by the priestly ministry; he often went to various places to lead retreats or spiritual exercises for the clergy or in convents of nuns; furthermore, his confessional in the Church of *santa Maria Maddalena* was always crowded with penitents, as Father Carlo had revealed himself to be an incomparable master of the spirit.

The fervor of support around the *House of the derelitte* had then dwindled to a flicker, as often happens. The constantly growing social and political restlessness and a progressive decay of faith and Christian customs struck the flower of charity at its roots. Only an ardent and courageous soul will be able to challenge the indifference of the environment and provoke the rebirth of the work.

The Scrosoppi family changes house

Opposite the house that Domenico Scrosoppi had purchased in 1811 in the district of *santa Maria Maddalena*, *via Rauscedo* opened; at the beginning of this street, on the southern side, lived the Berettini family. After the deaths in 1812 of Mrs. Vittoria and in 1814 of Monsignor Paolo, archpriest of *san Daniele* [17], the sister Faustina remained alone, passing away at eighty-five on July 30, 1822. Two years earlier, on July 24, 1820, she had made a will, arranging some charitable bequests and naming Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi as heir:

«*who for many years has provided me with the most cordial and committed service and assistance, both in my domestic affairs... and in my frequent and very serious infirmities..., nor could I have acted differently without failing in a pressing duty of justice*».

Berettini does not mention mother Antonia, but it was undoubtedly she who assisted her during her illnesses, and not her husband, who moreover continued to manage the goldsmith shop in *via del Monte di Pietà* with his brother Giuseppe.

Thanks to that will and subsequent purchases and exchanges, Scrosoppi became the owner of a complex of houses, comprising eight house numbers of that time, which extended from *via Vittorio Veneto* to include the site of the current *via san Francesco*. To the north ran *via Rauscedo* and to the south the *roggia* — an artificial canal — of the

[17] Born in 1735, died in san Daniele del Friuli in 1814.

Gorghi, now covered. Those houses, later passed as an inheritance to the *House of the derelitte* , were demolished around 1935, and on their area a block of buildings was built in which today, at the center, the Odeon cinema is located. Exactly in the part of the cinema that overlooks *via Rauscedo* stood number 47, where the Scrosoppi family had its new home from 1822 onward.

Udine. Houses in via Rauscedo demolished in 1934.
At number 47 the Scrosoppi family lived from 1822 onward.

But before living there, it was necessary to renovate it adequately. To this end, Papa Scrosoppi took out loans and sold the house in *via Vittorio Veneto* shortly after to the noblewoman Clementina Porcia, daughter of Prince Serafino; at the same time, Father Carlo sold his little houses in *Gemona*. In 1824, Domenico Scrosoppi sold his share in the goldsmith shop to his brother Giuseppe. From 1823 to the beginning of 1825, during the renovation work, he lived in a rented house with the family, first in the parish of *san Nicolò*, then in that of the *Grazie*.

Domenico Scrosoppi, in the management of the goldsmith shop, had gained a reputation for being meticulous to the cent. Precisely for this reason, some jokers went to make purchases from him. After the usual exhausting negotiations over the price, they would end up putting the agreed coin on the counter, but with one cent missing. At that time, the cent still had its value. And Mr. Domenico would infallibly repeat the refrain, in the Friulian dialect:

«*Al mancje un sentesin; pajdilu* — that is: A cent is missing; pay it! — ».

All the fun was there: in hearing him repeat that sentence. From this derived the nickname of «*sior Meni sentésin*». Esteemed by all for his craftsmanship and honesty, they teased him for that pickiness.

And pickiness it may have been. But whoever does not want to rob by keeping prices high must demand the honest price, otherwise they would risk failing.

Mr. Domenico was, without a doubt, a shrewd and precise administrator and our Luigi would inherit the same gift from his father; purified, naturally, of any shadow of earthly interest. He too would be scrupulous to the cent in recording the income and expenditure of his works. And he would demand from the sisters a management scrupulous to the last cent, both for the rigorous observance of the vow of poverty and to sanctify every last cent in the crucible of charity.

Domenico Scrosoppi lived long enough to see his sons turn the wealth he had accumulated or inherited to good works. And he was happy for it. He enjoyed himself very much, in his old age, during the plays that the orphans gave from time to time in the *House of the derelitte* . Without knowing it and perhaps without intending it, he had filled the coffers so that those blessed children could empty them in the name of the Lord.

Don Giovanni Battista priest

The new house was now ready when *don Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi* was ordained a priest on December 17, 1825.

He had a life of his own, different from that of his two brothers; however, because of the profound fraternal charity that united them, it is appropriate to provide a brief summary of it.

From 1826 to 1828 he held the position of vice-director in the municipal college, connected to the city's gymnasium. Later the Bishop sent him as a vice-parish priest to the archpriest of *Sacile*: he remained there for a year and a half, leaving an excellent memory. From Christmas 1829 to the following July he carried out the duties of curate at *Susano*, at that time in turmoil due to local disputes. Then he moved as vice-parish priest to Monsignor Pisolini, parish priest of *Tarcento*; however, he fell ill and had to return to his family.

Once recovered, he dedicated himself to preaching for nine years, both in the diocese and outside it, with notable success. Between one course of popular missions and one of Lenten preaching, he moved everywhere to replace sick clergy and curates, those in need of rest or in difficulty:

«*he assisted more than a hundred of them in this way — writes Blasich* [18] —».

In short, *don Battista* was — on a personal basis — a true diocesan missionary.

[18] Cf. F. BLASICH, Cenni biografici del M.R.D.G. Batta Scrosop Pi, ms. pp. 31, (A.L.S., fasc. Famiglia); L. TINTI, O.C., pp. 132-140.

In 1846 he assumed the position of spiritual director at the seminary of *Zara*, called by that Archbishop, Monsignor Giuseppe Godeassi, originally from *Gorizia*, whose secretary was the Udinese *don* Valentino Liccaro, a very dear friend of Father Carlo and the two *Scrosoppi* brothers. He remained in that seat for only one year, as Father Carlo recalled him to Udine. In the years 1848 and 1849 he led as administrator the city parish of *san Cristoforo*. Finally, after the death from cholera on October 8, 1849, of the archpriest of *Sacile* Monsignor Malisana, at the explicit request of the inhabitants of *Sacile*, Archbishop Monsignor Bricito appointed him titular of that important *pieve* (that is: parish church), which he administered for seventeen years.

But after 1859 the situation worsened for the Holy See and for the Church. It is easy to imagine what *don Battista*'s behavior was. «*He stood firm and strong in the combat — writes Blasich — he suffered bitterly for the growth of evils, he never lost heart, he did not betray his own character, he did not accept unworthy compromises; and when in July 1866 the concrete danger loomed that the new ideas of liberty would degenerate into license and make his ministry useless because of a few wicked men, not by his own will, but forced, not out of fear for himself, but because of the violence of others, he left the parish with the intention of resuming his duties as soon as the arrogance of others had been curbed and the slanders dissipated.*»

In more explicit terms, upon the arrival of the Italian troops in 1866, *don Battista Scrosoppi*, as the faithful Catholic that he was, was accused of being against Italy and a riot organized by nationalists forced him to abandon *Sacile*. A similar fate then befell Monsignor Giovanni Battista Gaspardis, archpriest of *Codroipo*, and *don* Filippo Elti, archpriest of *san Daniele del Friuli*.

He returned, therefore, to Udine beside his brother. And when in 1867 Father Luigi was also removed from the house of the *oratoriana* congregation, they both moved to live at number 1865 in the *Dimesse* area, today *via Luigi Scrosoppi*, in the small house near the *Asilo dell'Immacolata*. There *don Battista* would live for another fifteen years; and Father Luigi would want him to appear as the head of the family in the civil registry of the municipality of Udine.

Don Luigi priest

The dutiful tribute to *don Battista* has pushed us ahead in years. Now it is necessary to go back and resume the story of our Luigi.

After all, it is fascinating this alternating in time to gather all the threads of a plot that is admirably being composed under the paternal guidance of God. And it is beautiful to be able to overcome, at least with these narrative memories, the inexorable passing of time sung by the poet, especially when it is a matter of retracing with devout tenderness the stages of the life of the saints.

Luigi, therefore, was ordained a sub-deacon in the Church of *sant'Antonio abate* on August 14, 1825, the eve of the Assumption, and a deacon in the same church on September 22, 1826 [19]. On this last occasion he took the exam provided by ecclesiastical

[19] Archivio Luigi Scrosoppi (A.L.S.), fascicolo 1, documenti 11-12.

laws before the vicar general Monsignor Mariano Darù, recently appointed, who expressed this judgment:

«*Excellent in everything.*»

Since he had already finished his studies, he immediately began to collaborate in the *House of the derelitte* . He went there to give some lessons to the orphans. Certainly of Christian doctrine, but also of history, geography, and above all of astronomy.

What will those poor girls have understood of the constellations? However, with the typical intuition of children, they caught in the young teacher's enthusiasm for the starry sky the spiritual impulses of his soul. For *don* Luigi was truly, in his own way, a poet: a poet of a song of faith and dedication that had to be intoned until the last note. But, on the other hand, it is not easy to find a man more realistic than he, with his feet planted firmly on the ground, more concrete and pragmatic. The work was in crisis. He, however, carefully avoided interfering, limiting himself to following with humble discretion the indications of Father Carlo and *don* Bearzi.

In the meantime, winter arrived and much snow fell in January 1827.

But spring was now appearing and awakening the grass, the harvests, and the first flowers, when on March 31, the Saturday preceding the Passion, *don* Luigi was ordained a priest in the *Duomo* of Udine [20].

Bishop Monsignor Lodi used to celebrate the sacred rites with a majestic solemnity that was remembered for a long time. His tall and imposing figure was surrounded by a large group of canons, almost all nobles or counts: a royal assembly of the province. Other times. And the floor of the vast baroque presbytery was filled with dozens and dozens of young priests, ready to offer to Christ the purity of their youth. Unfortunately, in this case too, other times.

Don Luigi celebrated his first Mass in the Church of *santa Maria Maddalena* the following day, Passion Sunday: without the Gloria, with purple liturgical vestments, before the sacred images covered by the veil.

But, to make the ceremony special, there were Father Carlo and *don Battista* serving him as assistant ministers. A more than rare case, that trio of priest brothers. We can well imagine the spiritual joy of mother Antonia and the satisfied pride of Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi.

And *don* Luigi thus began his priesthood, under the sign of Jesus crucified. Tall, just under one meter seventy, of thin but robust build, with reddened cheeks on protruding cheekbones. Inside, a burning desire to become a holy priest. A mystery of simplicity and transparency: to be completely different, in feelings and aspirations, from the secular world; to resemble Christ as much as possible in total dedication to the service of the Heavenly Father and of his brothers on earth, especially the humble, the poor, and the suffering.

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[20] A.L.S., fascicolo 1, documento 13.

SECOND PART

In the shadow of Father Carlo (1827-1854)

Chapter 1

THE PRIESTLY DAWN OF *DON* LUIGI (1827-1831)

Saints are all saints, but each in his own way. Grace pervades their nature, leaving it intact; naturally, with the exception of that part of bad seeds — that is: the weeds (*zizzania*) — by which every clod of earth is polluted. No one is less imposing and less of a dreamer than the good God, precisely because He is Love, the source of life and beauty, wonderful in the variety of His creatures. Wonderful, especially, in His saints!

And who does not know it?

Should we perhaps regret that our *don* Luigi did not leave us a diary of the soul, like St. Therese of the Child Jesus? It would still be an element of interest, however devout.

Instead, he left none.

He did so because he was of an almost rudely silent and reserved humility regarding his own self, directed and projected only into activity for God and for souls.

Moreover, if autobiographical documents ever existed among his papers, they were taken by Monsignor Tinti when he set out to write his biography, a few years after his death; and for the most part, as happens, those papers did not return to the base. In the early twentieth century, then, the *Sisters of Provvidenza* donated to the *Stimmatini* religious — or rather to their *house of* Udine — the rich library of Father Carlo Filaferro and the two *Scrosoppi* brothers, from which we could have drawn many indications. It too has now been dispersed and only in some surviving volumes do we find very rare traces of *don* Luigi's writing.

However, some of his early writings have remained; indeed, precisely from the first two or three years of his priesthood, when he had not yet fully dedicated himself to works of charity. For example, two large notebooks organized by topics, which could be respectively titled « *Pensieri* » and « *Esempi* » on the various virtues, drawn from readings, from sermons heard or from conversations, and put together by *don* Luigi to use them in his preaching. Furthermore, some pages with rules of life and spiritual resolutions. And finally, the list of some sermons held by him from 1828 onwards [(1)].

From this triple series of documents, it seems to us that his spirituality in those years emerges in a fairly clear way.

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[1] A.L.S., fasc. 37, mss. 1-2.

The two notebooks organized by topics

We have said that the notebook of *« Pensieri »* (Thoughts) is but a collection of maxims and reflections for preaching to the people, but it is not unreasonable to discern some personal reflection within it.

Well, whoever counts the references to individual virtues glimpses a significant sequence. First place is assigned to charity, including almsgiving, and to humility, evident foundations of Scrosoppi's spirituality. These are followed by abandonment in God, with patience and resignation. Then, at a certain distance, come obedience and chastity.

From this beginning, therefore, two perennial characteristics of our *don* Luigi stand out, both in his own spiritual growth and in his pedagogy toward the orphans and the sisters. He will always give primacy to the impulse of the soul, which springs from love toward God and toward one's neighbor, nourished and gradually increased by feeling oneself a humble servant of both. On the contrary, he will not like to dwell — and even less so with harsh and haughty reproaches — on moral baseness; indeed, with a wisdom that we would like to define as Manzonian and against the customs of the time, he will be particularly discreet on the subject of purity, convinced that it flourishes best if treated with delicate reserve and if interior fervor is intensely cultivated first.

From the notebook of *« Esempi »* (Examples) we like to report this passage:

« *Countess Clementina Porcia tells me that in the Convent of san Vito, with the Salesian sisters, there is a nun known by her on March 1, 1829, who as a young woman had a sinful relationship with a young man to whom she had been promised in marriage, when one night he appeared to her wrapped in flames, telling her to change her conduct of life so that the same fate would not also befall her. Then she went to reconcile with God, asked for entry into that religious order and, after years of trial, was admitted. And another story the same Countess tells me: a young woman who had a passion for having a beautiful head of hair said to the Lord: Lord, if you desire that I give myself to you in a special way, make all my hair fall out; and in a short time it all fell out, and afterwards not a single one ever grew again.* »

Well, in reading these lines a smile arises spontaneously: partly for the uncertain grammar of *don* Luigi, compensated however by a style with an almost ancient flavor; and partly for the candid simplicity with which he welcomes the two episodes. It is sweet to think of that young Priest, future father of so many religious women, who notes those vocations as two victories of penance and humility.

Rules of spiritual life

Even more illuminating are some spiritual slips of that period.

There is, first of all, a «*schedule for personal use*» that undoubtedly dates back to the first years of his priesthood, when *don* Luigi thought of dedicating himself to preaching and the confessional just like his two brothers.

Here it is. «*At 6 o'clock in the morning you will rise and perform a quarter of an hour of vocal prayer and half an hour of interior meditation. The thanksgiving after Holy Mass must last a quarter of an hour and you will ensure that it is not prevented. After lunch you will have two hours of study of sacred oratory art and after the Ave Maria one hour of study of moral theology. At 10 o'clock you will go to sleep.*»

Precise and strong-willed as he was, we can be certain that he scrupulously adhered to this schedule.

Later, commitments and age would cause him to change it in part. We know, for example, that as an adult he rose at five and did not go to bed before eleven. However, that point regarding the thanksgiving would remain until his last Mass, and the time dedicated would no longer be just a quarter of an hour. All witnesses are in agreement in stating that it was an exclusive moment, in which it was not possible to disturb him.

Another of his writings seems very beautiful to us, to which in truth we cannot attribute a certain dating; however, the youthful freshness and the naivety of the text, together with the holily combative fervor — of an Ignatian stamp — by which it is crossed, lead us reasonably to trace it back to this same era. We report it from the work of Tinti, who titles it «*Holy affections and practices*» [2].

«*To give myself a strong encouragement toward holy perseverance I will often say:*

What will everything profit you if you damn yourself, and what will harm you if you are saved?

Every time the practice of poverty, humility, and suffering results heavy for me, I will think of what I would wish to have done at the moment of death and if I found myself in Purgatory.

Ah! I promise, Lord, to suffer anything and death itself rather than offend you with a venial sin, since sin is the true monster of ingratitude toward God, the one who pierces and kills souls and our bodies.

Lord, I do not want to speak, nor even desire that others speak to my esteem and honor; Lord, I will always speak with esteem for others and never with disesteem. I will never have arrogance, o Lord, in my speaking and acting, as I am a mass of putrefaction and disgusting miseries regarding my soul.

I want, Lord, to sanctify myself by also sanctifying others, doing everything possible to prevent sin and to arouse in others the love toward you and the desire to follow Jesus Christ our master.

I want to fight the devil, snatching the prey from him at the cost of any effort, discomfort, and difficulty of mine, and defend the little sheep of Jesus Christ from the assaults of the devil, warning them of his deceits, breaking his chains, rendering his blows vain, strengthening them in attacks and tearing the prey from his fangs, and all this for the glory of my captain Jesus Christ.

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[2] L. TINTI, o.c., pp. 197-198.

I want to often think that I am, together with Jesus Christ, offered to the eternal Father in sacrifice, and that therefore I must glorify him with my wretched person, considering myself as a victim.

I want to be a true son of the Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph and, as a son, depend in everything on them and perform everything with their holy blessing.

I want to be devoted to my guardian angel, always having him before my eyes, and ask him forgiveness for the little devotion had toward him in the past.

I will be devoted in a special way to the saints that the Church gave me as protectors in baptism, that is, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. Dominic, as well as to my holy fathers Philip and Francis.

I do not want to take food during the day without a special necessity or without convenience requiring it.

I will recite short ejaculations (prayers) during the day and I will pray even while walking and in bed, if I am unable to sleep, so as not to lose time and merit of glory for Paradise.»

Nothing strange, then, nothing complicated; on the contrary, they are the same things that we would have written, and that we have probably written many times. However, through the common words, we feel a singular simplicity and a quiet sincerity vibrating, as if the promised things were already within reach. One notes, for example, how he speaks of «*venial sins*», considering them almost as the last shadows to be removed.

It appears evident that these «*Holy affections and practices*» are the conclusion of some days of spiritual exercises. There has remained, in fact, a scheme of exercises performed by *don* Luigi which, due to similarity of the handwriting, are closely linked to the notes of 1829-1830.

Of those exercises we wish to reproduce at least the resolutions formulated after each meditation.

«*To perform no action without first evaluating whether God wants me to do it. To be indifferent to everything, as far as I am concerned. To prefer death rather than commit a single sin, even a minimum one. To exactly satisfy the honor I have of serving him. To think of nothing but God, to want nothing but what God wants. Never any sin. Be mortified in all your senses. Do it (that is: fulfill the divine will: the insistence of the original author is here significant!). To want to go to Him immediately and ask the grace to behave like the Prodigal Son. To suffer everything with joy thanks to that memory of Hell, as everything is a nothing in comparison to that.*»

Let us repeat it again: nothing unusual, but a perfume of candor. The soul that wrote these lines appears, with all evidence, ardent and determined.

And serene. As if it no longer had disturbances nor anxieties nor problems. Or rather, of problems he had one, and only one: to do the will of God.

Apostle of devotion to the Heart of Jesus

Don Luigi began to preach as early as the end of 1827 or at least from the beginning of 1828.

Since he celebrated and served in the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*, under the guidance of the excellent former *oratorians (S.Filippo Neri)*, that church was certainly the testing ground for his first sacred discourses. Indeed, according to the *oratoriana* custom, he must have addressed them to the brothers of the Oratory, among whom he himself had been enrolled for several years.

It seems that the first sermon had humility as its theme [3]; truly the ideal theme for one who would make humility the fundamental virtue of his entire life, practicing it to the point of heroism. The second theme would have been the mercy of God. We know with certainty that he gave his third discourse on April 8, 1828, and spoke there about the Entrance of the Just Soul into Paradise. On August 24 of the same year, he tackled the opposite theme: the Fire of Hell. On November 30, also in 1828, he preached on the «*Love of God*», dealing in the last part with the spirit of the «*Association for the devotion of the Most Holy Heart of Jesus Christ*». One month later, on December 28, he would treat the subject:

«*We must love God, because God loved us*»; this sermon too was addressed to those «*enrolled in the Sacred Heart*».

In this succession of themes, influenced by the teaching methods of that time, we clearly recognize the essential orientation of a solid and profound spiritual life, to which Scrosoppi would always remain faithful: founded on eternal principles and moved by the love of God.

If we wished to define this as an «*essential Christianity*», Father Luigi would be happy with it. Refinements and peculiarities did not please him at all, in any field. In preaching and in spiritual life, then, he would have considered them out of tune.

Even in the reasons he brings to urge the love of God, that manly piety that was dear to him transpires. One must love Him — he said — first of all for justice and for obedience: because He created us to love Him, and not to love Him would mean depriving Him of what is His; because He commands us to love Him as Lord and as Father, and not to love Him would mean disobeying Him. Then comes gratitude: that is — he continued — loving Him for what He has done and does for us and for what He is prepared to do [4].

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[3] Since there remains a numbered series of twenty of his discourses, it is very probable that sermons number 1 and number 2 are to be identified with those on humility and on the mercy of God. In fact, in the files containing his religious writings there are no others, of completed sermons, that can fill those gaps. (A.L.S., folder 12, manuscript 7, pp. 9; folder 9, manuscript 4, pp. 14).

[4] The reasons that Father Scrosoppi brings to incite the love of God reveal his manly piety better if compared with those presented by his friend don Pietro Benedetti, in a discourse given in the church of the filippini of Udine. Our author noted them in one of the indexed notebooks, under the heading « Love of God ». Here are the reasons brought by Benedetti: « One must love God both for the true love that God bears to man, and for the way in which He loves him, because He is lovable in Himself. I. Benefits of nature, general and particular; of grace, general and particular. II. From eternity (ab aeterno), with infinite love, gratuitously. III. For His attributes, because He is perfect ». (A.L.S., folder 37, manuscript 1).

A separate discussion is deserved for his commitment to the devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

For some time, a devout association of such faithful had existed in the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*, perhaps encouraged — as we have mentioned — by Count Alfonso Belgrado, who lived behind the altar area of that church, on the eastern side of the current *via della Prefettura*; we know indeed that he favored the birth of similar associations in various towns of the Diocese of Udine. More or less at the time of Scrosoppi's priestly ordination, Father Antonio Londero, Rector of the church, officially requested that this association be granted the same indulgences enjoyed by the namesake association existing in Rome, in the *Church of santa Maria ad Pineam*, now called *santa Maria della Pace*: indulgences that Pope Leo XII granted on June 26, 1827.

To direct the association, at least from 1828, *don* Luigi himself was chosen. It is to him, in fact, that on July 27, 1829, Antonio Linussio from *Tolmezzo* writes, begging him to «*be pleased to aggregate the persons indicated below to the devout Association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, established in Udine in the Church of santa Maria Maddalena; and this as of the coming Sunday, and to deliver the relative enrollment certificates to Mr. Monticco, bearer of this letter*» [5]; the names of seventeen people from *Tolmezzo*, *Illegio*, and *Gemona* follow, including two Priests.

The devotion to the Heart of Jesus, in which the love of God is transformed into a supreme gift and an urgent request in the deepest reality of the Incarnate Word, was therefore the «*la*» (the fundamental note that gives the start) of the priestly hymn of *don* Scrosoppi.

Don Luigi as a collector of alms

In the meantime, the *House of the derelitte* went from bad to worse.

The help of benefactors, large and small, being reduced to the limit, perhaps Father Carlo, born under Austrian rule, still harbored some illusions about State intervention and addressed petitions to the imperial government in Vienna, to the viceregal one of *Lombardo-Veneto*, and to the prefecture. Not at all! The Austrian bureaucracy was prompt in demanding regulations and contracts, but, as for money, it did not grant even a cent.

However, in the early months of 1829, something new happened. Nothing exceptional. Nothing, except the fact that, since *don* Bearzi had become a Parish Priest, the vice-direction of the house passed into the hands of *don* Luigi.

To the now faded enthusiasms of others, to the diminished offerings, to emperors and viceroys who responded negatively, he opposed his generous heart and his tenacious will.

He was twenty-four and a half years old and had nearly two years of priesthood. A youngster. In whom, however, a decidedly industrious and pragmatic character was joined to fervor.

[5] Archivio Luigi Scrosoppi (A.L.S.), folder 14, document 6.

Don Luigi must have reasoned more or less like this with his brother Father Carlo:

«*It is not practical to wait for offerings whenever they decide to arrive. We need to go and look for them. The girls are hungry every day. Nor should we be satisfied with giving them a piece of bread and a little soup. They have been malnourished since birth and are going through the delicate age of growth — that is: of formation —. It is necessary to put substantial food on the table: a few slices of cheese and, quite often, a little meat. For this, a seeker is needed who puts his whole soul into the collection of alms and who knocks without fear at the doors of private individuals and shops, and of the peasants in the farms on the outskirts. I beg you, Father Carlo, let me go.*»

He certainly addressed him as "*voi*" (that is: the formal "*you*"), because he was eighteen years older and according to the custom of the time.

The fact is that he went. And he must have begun in March 1829, because on the 27th of that month Father Carlo notes, for the first time, among other offerings: «*Eggs no. 22, veal 11 pounds, hens 2.*»

And on April 18, which was Holy Saturday: «*Focaccia 86 pounds, eggs no. 120, pork bones 23 pounds.*»

And in May: «*Small cheeses 30 pounds, kid goat 6 pounds.*»

Never before then had offerings in meat been recorded. This is how the testimony of Sister *Angelica Faccini* becomes singularly vivid:

«*I know* — she says — *that the little girls from three to four years old ran to meet him, clinging to his habit as to that of their lost mother, asking him with innocent freedom: Gigi, dàmi cicìn. That is: Luigi, give me meat — in Friulian child's slang*» [(6)].

It may be that the episode actually happened, since the simplicity and confidence of little ones are not ignorant of such outbursts. But it seems more probable to us that it is an anecdote reported to tease that young Priest who entered the bakers, the deli shops, the butchers to ask for alms for his little orphans. In such a case the testimony would be even more eloquent.

Certainly that wandering of his left an enormous impression if, alluding to him, the liberal journalist *Camillo Giussani* wrote over half a century later:

«*Another priest... consumed his entire patrimony and knocked at every door to maintain three hundred girls and have them instructed in household chores*» [(7)].

It must not have cost him little, especially at the beginning.

He was from a well-to-do family and — as they say — of good social position. He therefore must have felt a certain repugnance himself to presenting himself in public as a beggar. Who knows how many times his father, Mr. Domenico, will have said to him:

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[6] Sr. Teresa Angelica (1818-1900) lived for 62 years among the noble suore dimesse of Udine. She was teacher of the boarders, counselor, vicar and in the last years superior of the community. The convent of the dimesse bordered the House of the *derelitte* . (For the relationship between Father Scrosoppi and the aforementioned sisters cf. part III, chap. 2, The Work for Deaf-mutes; and L. Tinti, o.c., p. 411, let. 92).

[7] C. GIUSSANI, Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo, Udine 1888, vol. I, p. 291.

«*You make me blush before the whole city.*»

And mother Antonia will have asked him:

« *don Luigi, is it really necessary?* »

« *Yes, mother, it is necessary!* »

He knocked at the gates of the noble palaces; he went up to the apartments of the rich merchants. And, while he waited in the hall between embarrassed and ashamed, the maid went to announce him to the mistress:

«*There is that young priest, son of Donna Antonia, come to ask for charity.*»

What moved him and sustained him? Jesus, an infinite love for Jesus. He had taken seriously the words of the Gospel:

«*I was hungry and you gave me to eat.*» He truly saw Jesus in the poor, he saw him in the little orphans. And such a vision repaid him for the bitter salt (that is: the humiliation) of alms denied or given with rudeness and for the hard path of stairs climbed and descended perhaps only to receive a mock.

Papa Domenico in the trap of charity

Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi was undoubtedly a good man. However, because of the nickname « *sior Meni sentesìn* » — that is: Mr. Domenico Cent — however softened, a bit of regret has remained with us.

Well, that regret disappears precisely when the courageous apostolic activity of his sons begins, as the year 1830 does not end without a pleasant testimony of his charity.

A certain Domenico Beltrame, a close friend of Mr. Domenico, had received an assignment from him — probably as an agent or administrator — confirmed with a regular contract on October 6, 1830. This assignment guaranteed him the right to lodging and a daily wage. Shortly after, however, Beltrame had to suffer some serious misfortune; he refers to it with the words « *fatalissime circostanze* » (that is: extremely disastrous circumstances). Following this, he was forced to leave *Udine* and move to *Treviso* with his family.

Precisely from *Treviso* he sent Scrosoppi, on October 28, a declaration in which he affirmed the impossibility of « *providing that work and assistance of mine, to which I was obliged* » and the renunciation of every compensation established by the contract itself, both for himself and for his family, both regarding the lodging and the daily payment.

On November 27, he wrote a further letter in which he stated:

« *I would not know in what way to express the gratitude I feel toward you for the many benefits granted by you to me at all times, and especially in my past difficult circumstances, and for the charity used toward my wife of 100 florins; for so many favors I will not fail to pray to the Lord so that He may grant every desired happiness both to you and to all the members of your family.* »

From this letter, it is understood that charity was by now a custom in the Scrosoppi family. Mr. Domenico himself should have been nicknamed « *fiorino* » (florin) and no longer « *centesimo* »: indeed, a donated florin. This is only a brief portrait. Yet we would have felt guilty if we had omitted it.

Don Luigi would like to become a Capuchin

«*In his first years of priesthood* — writes Tinti — *Father Luigi seriously cultivated the idea of becoming a Capuchin religious*» [8].

Tinti does not specify in which years, but several elements lead one to think of 1830. We have already mentioned the two large volumes organized by topics in which the young Priest loved to note thoughts or examples that would be useful to him in preaching. Here and there one also finds dates; none, however, is later than 1830. Well, in one of those volumes, under the entry «*vocation*», one reads this passage:

«*To make ourselves saints one must not believe that it is necessary to withdraw into a religious order or into isolated places. Saint Augustine, in a sermon addressed to the religious of the desert, had this to say: Behold, we are in solitude; however, it is not prayer and sacred song that make saints, but it is doing good that sanctifies the place and us. If indeed places could sanctify those who dwell there, neither man nor angel would have fallen from their dignity.*»

It is not unreasonable to discern in these lines a personal reflection; and precisely the decision, after that crisis of fervor — that is: a period of intense spiritual questioning — , to remain to do good in the world instead of withdrawing into a convent.

Just then, to the traditional Franciscan inclination inherited from his grandfather and mother, an event was added that must have had a notable influence on his spirit. In Udine, a Capuchin convent was being reopened, after the Napoleonic suppression of 1807. No longer in the old seat in *santa Giustina street*, but in *Ronchi street*, where a monastery of Capuchin nuns once stood.

The new convent was at a very short distance from the *House of the derelitte* .

That *don* Luigi was Franciscan in the depths of his soul there is no doubt. In several of his sermons we find, in conclusion, invocations of entrustment to those whom he considers the spiritual fathers of his soul: St. Philip Neri and St. Francis of Assisi.

In 1839, when St. Veronica Giuliani was declared a saint, he was tasked with delivering the sacred eulogy in the *Church of santa Maria della Neve*, attached to the Capuchin convent; and from some elements, it seems that the discourse was addressed in a particular way to the members of the Third Order. We know that later, at least for a certain time, he used to enroll all his sisters in the Secular Franciscan Order.

Everything, therefore, concurs to demonstrate how much *don* Scrosoppi was devoted to the *Poverello* of Assisi (that is: St. Francis) and linked to his spiritual sons.

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[8] L. Tinti, o.c., p. p.

But, returning to the period 1829-30, how can that «*serious*» thinking about becoming a Capuchin be explained? Are the natural Franciscan fervor of the moment, or the proximity to the reconstituted convent and its religious, perhaps enough? And for what reason did he not realize his aspiration? Let us not forget that he had been a Priest for only a short time.

To souls who give themselves generously to God, it sometimes happens to feel an ineffable dissatisfaction, as if they had not granted enough of themselves. «*I became a priest — don* Luigi must have said to himself — *to become holy and to sanctify. After three years, who am I and what good have I done? Is it not better that I withdraw into a convent, to live in total recollection and prayer?*»

Moreover, he was not a man to do things by halves or to yield to compromises. He spent a large part of his days among very poor girls; but then he returned home, where they lived in discreet comfort, as was the custom of families of the good middle class. That he felt he was out of place, and not by his own fault, is certain. As soon as Father Carlo dies, he will hasten to sell the paternal house to choose the path of absolute poverty.

There is then another aspect: it is natural for the Christian soul to have a certain desire to flee from the world and its dangers. At that time the Christian rebirth, hoped for and believed in 1814, was already giving way to a progressive decay of faith and customs. Everything, therefore, seemed to push toward the «*blessed solitude, sole beatitude*» (*beata solitudo, sola beatitudo*). The inner dilemma was renewed in him that had faced his brother Father Carlo when, in 1813, he had thought of becoming a Jesuit, but in a diametrically opposite climate.

Why did he not become a Capuchin? Yet he was not at all of an undecided or inconstant nature.

It may be that his mother, by then elderly, held him back. Certainly his spiritual director must have advised against it, pointing out how his strong-willed and industrious character was already a divine indication for an active apostolate in society: the reflection cited previously would be proof of this. Perhaps he himself thought that in the convent he sought primarily his own peace, not without a certain spiritual selfishness.

But other motives must have appeared to him as a response from Heaven.

First of all, the thought that enclosing himself in a convent seemed almost like abandoning the front-line trench, while faith and the Church were becoming objects of increasingly violent attacks. And it was not something that could please him.

Don Luigi had started 1830 with a sermon on the name of Jesus. It may have been a purely accidental circumstance that suggested that theme to him, but perhaps Providence had its part. What is certain is that the young Priest clothed himself in that name — according to the very words of his discourse — as in an «*impenetrable armor*» and enclosed himself in it as in an «*impregnable fortress*».

On July 27, 1830, the revolution broke out in Paris, followed on August 2 by the abdication of Charles X. A revolution whose breath passed near *Friuli*, as Charles X, under the name of Count of Ponthieu, took refuge as an exile in *Gorizia*, where he would die in 1836.

On October 4, the Belgians, after a bloody revolt, proclaimed their independence from the Netherlands. And in November, Poland rose up against Russia, with a revolution as heroic as it was desperate, which would be repressed only in September 1831, when a French Minister would assure that «*order reigns in Warsaw*»; on this occasion too *Friuli* was able to have direct testimony of the Polish tragedy through some exiles sheltered in its territory.

Italy was by now traversed by the *Risorgimento* (that is: the movement for national unification) thrill that in 1831 provoked the uprisings in *Emilia* and the *Romagne*. In *Lombardo-Veneto* this feeling manifested as a movement for liberation from Austrian rule. Contrary to what was stated by some, dissatisfaction was present in large strata of the population, even if only a few and in special circumstances could dedicate themselves to insurrectional activism. Many factors, including the harsh military draft and later the inequitable distribution of communal assets, contributed to increasing people's discontent. *Friuli*, remembering the firm attitude of Monsignor Capellari, together with the *Brescia* territory, was considered by the Austrian police to be one of the most obstinately restless, if not openly rebellious, areas.

Unfortunately, the just desire for freedom was polluted by less pure sentiments: we refer to the growing anti-religious and anti-clerical spirit. Udine too had its 1831. But the hidden rebellion vented itself on the weakest target. Some unknown agitators, taking as a pretext a firm pastoral letter from Bishop Lodi against the indecent dressing of women and incorrect behavior during sacred functions, on the morning of June 18, the feast of the Heart of Jesus, offered the city the spectacle of the facades of the churches and the episcopal coats of arms ignobly defaced.

But a grave event of another nature must have had a decisive influence on *don* Luigi. Already in the tormented July of 1830 he had held a sermon on the characteristics of charity. And charity would call him with force throughout 1831.

That year, in fact, a first cholera epidemic also broke out in *Friuli*. The needs increased, the orphans multiplied. They asked for bread and there was no one to break it for them.

And so it was that *don* Luigi, before the lament of the poor and on the arduous path of sacrifice for the love of neighbor, sacrificed his desired monastic aspirations.

A singular coincidence: both motives resonated from the top of the bell tower of the Cathedral of Udine. When on September 8, 1833, the new bells were blessed, on the largest one protection from cholera was implored from God and on the middle one mention was made of the «*extremely difficult time for religion*» [(9)].

[9] Atti del Capitolo, vol. IX (1828.1838), c. 137r. (A.C.U.).

Chapter 2

THE NEW *HOUSE OF THE DERELITTE*, NOW *ISTITUTO DELLA PROVVIDENZA* (1831-1839)

Don Luigi therefore said goodbye to the dreamed peace of the convent. And as at the time of his St. Dominic the knights, after a prayer vigil, consecrated themselves to the protection of the humble and the ransom of the oppressed, so he felt himself from then on consecrated a knight of charity.

Many, many years later, he would host in his house that holy man Father *Biagio Verri* [1], laden with lice (parasites), while he traveled the world collecting alms to ransom young African female slaves in African markets. Perhaps he thought that he too had begun like that, but to save wretched girls from a world defined as Christian.

Once the decision was made, he must have said to Father Carlo:

«*Behold, brother, I remain at your side. But let us get to work. The current house is too small. A walnut shell* (an environment too narrow) *where a ship is needed. You have experience and prestige. Make therefore a great project, the project that is needed. Providence will help us. And count on me, for I will be a good manual laborer for you* (an tireless worker)».

Purchase of the *casa Florenzis*

Everything was ready for action: an unpaid rent will suffice to trigger the initiative.

My God, how influenced we are by military language! War-like similes emerge even when speaking of works of good.

From 1815 to 1822 the lease for the *casa Florenzis* was the responsibility of Mr. Fantini, administrator of Count *Alvise Ottelio*, so much so that the *House of the derelitte* was called, even in the circulars of Bishop Lodi, «*Ottelio work*».

Subsequently the burden of the rent had been personally assumed by Father Carlo, but with a simple verbal agreement. The rent was to be paid in advance, in two semi-annual installments, on January 31 and July 31.

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[1] Born in Barni (Como) in 1819, he was an apostolic missionary. He collaborated with and was the heir of don Olivieri in the pious work for the ransom of the «morette» (that is: young black girls), for whom he lavished himself with tireless zeal. He helped the Ven. Ludovico Casoria, founder in Naples of a college for «negretti» (that is: young black boys) aspiring to the priesthood. He died at the Cottolengo of Torino in 1884 where he had retired, consumed by fatigue. (Cf. I grandi del Cattolicesimo, encyclop. biograf., Rome 1958, vol. II, pp. 589-590). Two letters from Olivieri (2-6-1856, 18-2-1860), a report and procedural depositions deal with the relationship between Father Scrosoppi and the two supporters of the aforementioned work (A.L.S., folder 14, docs. 25-26; Summarium, pp. 706, 110, 137 in Positio super virtutibus, Rome 1975).

January 31, 1831 passed without Father Carlo having paid the installment. Therefore, on February 6, the administrator of the *House of the Convertite* — which was the owner —, Mr. *Giovanni Battista Pagavini*, urged him to make «*the payment of the new semester just begun, and to negotiate, if necessary, a formal lease contract*».

Father Carlo replied only on April 11. He believed that the premises, too narrow, poorly distributed and even worse preserved, required significant renovation work which the *House of the Convertite* would certainly not undertake, and that the rent paid until then was excessive. «*Therefore* — he concluded — *I propose the purchase of the house itself*».

The management of the *Convertite* accepted the proposal and tasked *Pagavini* with making a fair valuation of the building, which was fixed at 4,606.18 Austrian lire.

Naturally, that... blessed bureaucracy intervened. Among other things, the prefecture wanted to know how Father Filaferro would face the payment. He replied that he would transfer a legacy of 2,500 lire, intended for the benefit of abandoned girls by the French Abbot *Lodovico Maria Berruyer* [2], who arrived as a refugee in Udine during the French Revolution, and that, for the remaining part, he pledged all his assets and mortgaged the house to be purchased.

On April 15, 1832, the Viceroy's approval for the «*private treaty sale*» was communicated; but some other hitch must have arisen, perhaps of a local nature. The fact remains that only on October 31, 1833, the notary *Nicolò Cassacco* drew up the deed of sale, in the house of the Canon Monsignor *Giuseppe Gallici*, Director of the *Convertite*, in the presence of *don* Pietro Benedetti and *don* Pietro Comessatti as witnesses.

The project for the new house

The former *casa Florenzis* measured at that time seventeen meters along the street, was five meters and sixty centimeters high at the eaves, and eight meters deep toward the vegetable garden. A small nest, compared with the current dimensions. The dormitory for the orphans had been created in the granary (that is: the loft space under the roof). There was truly a need to enlarge the spaces. But by how much? But how?

Two projects have remained for us: one of very simple realization, which limited itself to giving a better shape to the existing buildings; and one of accurate design, drawn up by a certain Rossi, which instead provided for the demolition of the previous building and the construction from scratch of a block, more than twice as large in all dimensions.

Father Carlo and *don* Luigi will have reasoned at length on the decision to be taken. And it can well be believed that *don* Luigi, partly due to the enthusiasm of youth — he was almost thirty years old and his brother forty-eight —, partly due to his more decisive and courageous character, must have supported the more wide-ranging project. All the more so as he would have taken upon himself the weight and toil of the execution, since Father Carlo was far too busy in the spiritual guidance of his numerous penitents.

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[2] Born in 1764 in Contigny near Bourg in the Lyonnais, having come to Udine, to live he had turned to teaching French. He died in 1825 at about 62 years of age.

In the end, the executive project was chosen that bears the signature of the master mason Marco Bernardis: forty-eight meters of facade, fourteen and a half meters of depth and three floors. Indeed, a floor of habitable attics was then added, reaching a height of twelve meters.

On June 10, 1834, having received the favorable opinion of the building commission of that time, the *podestà* Count Colloredo granted authorization *(podestà: the municipal mayor under Austrian rule)*. But the works had already begun. The first blow of the pickaxe had been given on January 30, which that year fell on a Thursday.

For what reason specifically on January 30?

The previous day, the 29th, was the feast of St. Francis de Sales, the most solemn among those celebrated in *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*. Partly because Father Carlo and *don* Luigi were heavily engaged in priestly duties for that solemnity, and above all to put the new house under the protection of the saint very dear to both, the works were undertaken the day after.

God only knows how much the two brothers will have prayed and had people pray before setting to work. And January 29 was entirely a vigil of holy and fervent invocations. The house was born therefore from prayer and under the benevolent gaze of the holy Bishop of Geneva.

And how did they manage the expenses?

Unfortunately, no documentation regarding the works has remained. We do not possess a detailed list of expenditures, nor do we know the names of the donors.

All that remains for us is a brief note on the voluntary donations collected from August 27 to September 2, 1836, in the city parish of *san Quirino*, for an amount of 666.32 lire: a note signed by Mr. Giuseppe Cernazai [3], who was the collector. Alongside this, there is a specific list for 1,705.29 lire of timber and hardware, purchased in the shop of aunt Rosa Lazzarini from June 12, 1834, to December 30, 1837; at the bottom of this list, aunt Rosa wrote « *settled* » on January 20, 1854, just ten days before Father Carlo Filaferro died.

In a memorial by Father Carlo dated March 20, 1841, we read that « *the building cost 62,472.54 lire* » (and the precision of the figure suggests meticulous accounting, as was the custom of both brothers); « *but if one wishes* — observes Father Carlo — *to consider the careful supervision of the works, the foresighted economy in the purchase of materials, the appropriateness of their placement, I am persuaded that a technical valuation of the premises in its current state would far exceed the sum actually spent* ».

[3] He was born in Udine in 1773 to a wealthy family with probably Magyar origins. A Christian father who left his children a testimony of charity and missionary apostolate, he was a naturalist and agronomist, a collector and arranger of mineral samples and a collection of flowerless plants (namely cryptogams), he was interested in the improvement of agricultural production and wrote scientific works. He was an associate member of the chamber of commerce of the Venetian region and a member of the Accademia aquileiese agraria of Udine. (Cf. M. TOLLER, Pietro Cernazai - Dall'Epistolario, Udine 1974, pp. 5-10).

In another undated memorial, but from shortly thereafter, he says:

« *The methods followed to collect these funds clearly attest that this work is a daughter of Providence. Apart from some donations of significant magnitude, the whole was almost entirely the fruit of two lotteries, of modest monthly contributions, of the support received from the nearby countryside and of some meager proceeds deriving from the workshops and manufacturing activities... And the aspect that most highlights the intervention of Providence* — he adds with touching humility — *is the trust that the people placed in two priests devoid of titles or obvious merits that could justify it, delivering into their hands and entrusting to their management such a significant sum...* ».

The monthly subscriptions

We are, on the contrary, better informed about the « *small monthly donations* ».

The construction had already reached the first floor in July 1834 « *thanks to the proceeds* — writes Father Carlo — *of a wager between private individuals proposed for that purpose, and to another sum left by two devout persons* ».

On the 17th of that month, Father Carlo had a printed appeal of his distributed throughout the city, reported in full by Tinti; a similar sheet was circulated on August 24, 1836.

In both, this method was proposed: some appointees would collect, on booklets or cards, the voluntary subscription for a daily offering not exceeding ten cents — that is, thirty-six lire a year — and not less than two. Subsequently, « *another appointee designated for this* » would pass by monthly to collect the contributions.

We believe that this « *other appointee* » was *don* Luigi, who had already practiced in the collection of alms; this would be confirmed by the previously cited passage by Camillo Giussani.

Certainly, he did not go to the houses empty-handed. To facilitate the gesture of charity, he will have distributed sacred images, especially to children. It seems obvious to us that precisely for this circumstance a small pamphlet on almsgiving was printed, also reproduced by Tinti, titled: *Word of God concerning almsgiving*. In twenty-four short paragraphs, the words of Jesus and the apostles on the duty of charity are reported.

Perhaps, according to the light of human prudence, a concrete discourse on the plague of abandoned girls or an explanation of the goodness of the work they were being asked to help would have seemed more appropriate and more effective. Therefore, it seems to us a very indicative sign of the spirit of the two brothers that they relied solely on the holiness and power of the divine word.

Father Carlo Filaferro, half-brother of Father Luigi; portrait by an unknown Author.

Udine. Church of san Antonio and archiepiscopal palace; next to it the seat of the ancient seminary, today the courthouse building. 19th-century engraving.

The offerings of the peasants

Father Carlo, in his memorial, also alludes to « *help from the rural areas* ».

To this end, the circulars that the Bishop Monsignor Lodi sent at that time — as he had sent previously — certainly proved useful; on November 9, 1836, he sent one to all the clergy of the diocese, and on the 18th a second one « *to every class of inhabitants of the devout and royal city of Udine* ». In both, however — since by then the works were already almost completed —, Monsignor Lodi urged above all offerings in material goods and provisions for the maintenance of the orphans and the furnishing of the house. In the one addressed to the Udinese, after stating that the *House of the derelitte* — through a hundred difficulties... flourishes currently, and stands out as a perennial testimony to the priestly zeal and the tireless charity of many good Udinese — he especially recommends an annual subscription for the board of an orphan, calculated at one hundred and eighty Austrian lire, or at least « *for a half, a third, a fourth, a fifth, and up to the twentieth part of that amount* ».

Father Carlo had a receipt and thank-you form printed for the offerings sent by the parishes. And indeed, they arrived from many parts. *Don* Della Rovere, Parish Priest of *Cussignacco*, distinguished himself particularly; and the Parish Priest of *Fagagna* was no less so. Furthermore, notes are found for *Dignano*, *Torre di Zuino*, and *Flambro*.

As happens in such cases, not many towns must have responded spontaneously. Many, however, were the needs. What to do then? « *If Mohammed does not go to the mountain, it will be the mountain that goes to Mohammed* ». *Don* Luigi perhaps did not say it this way, but he acted in such a manner.

Five kilometers east of Udine flows — when it flows, as it is usually dry — the torrent *Torre*, the great reserve of gravel and sand for the city. Who knows how many times the young Priest will have traveled to the nearby towns, begging the numerous transporters and peasants to bring him a few carts of it! A heartfelt thanks and the traditional glass of wine will have been enough for him, because the humble are always ready and generous toward initiatives of charity. Especially then when, if there was far more misery than now, in return there was greater faith and disinterestedness.

With the little donkey through *Friuli*

But he was not satisfied.

« *He* — writes Tinti — *following the example of Saint Frances of Rome, went out and traveled through the city or through the surrounding countryside on a rough cart, leading the donkey, to collect from house to house offerings in money or in kind; and when it came to the construction site, he sought those who would offer their work or materials for free. He encouraged the good country folk to help his orphans, or as he used to gracefully call them, "the innocent little souls of the Lord," so that, abandoned in the world, they should not follow the path of dishonor and ruin. And although the charitable Priest Scrosoppi often found generous hearts who bestowed alms on him or agreed to provide free help for the works, he did not lack frequent refusals, rude behavior, even to*

the point of setting the guard dog on him; slights that the humble Minister of God tolerated with joy, calling them his dear reward, which would earn him the fulfillment of his holy undertaking. »

And he did not go only to the nearby towns, but sometimes fifteen or twenty or more kilometers from Udine, and he was forced, naturally — with the means of transport that served him (that is: the donkey) —, to ask for hospitality for the night in the parish houses. Nor did they set only dogs on him.

« *I heard that the good Father* — narrates Sister Donata Cocetta [4] — *once went with his little donkey to my native town; and there was a person who, after having heavily insulted him, slapped the venerable Father. And he without losing his composure said: Yes, many thanks, this does me good; now I beg you for charity something for my little orphans. These humble but firm words won over that wicked individual, who not only gave him an abundant alms, but was instantly converted and later became a fervent Catholic.* »

Poor Sister Donata! One can well understand how she later became a fervent promoter of devotion toward Father Luigi, to make amends — she said — for that slap. After all, it is not difficult to imagine how many offenses they directed at that young Priest who went around asking for alms for poor girls. They will have shouted at him to go to work, instead of being a vagabond. They will have covered him with more or less malicious scorns.

He will certainly have taken into account all these rudeness's before leaving. And when it was his turn to suffer them, he surely offered them to the Lord. However, he possessed a rather impetuous character and it must have cost him much to endure in silence. If that experience benefited the house economically, it also served much to temper him in patience and humility.

Probably in these charitable excursions *don* Luigi must have widely diffused in *Friuli* the devotion to the Saint of Providence, St. Cajetan *da Thiene*. And perhaps it can also be attributed to him that among the families of the common people a devout custom spread that lasted until the end of the nineteenth century.

At evening, the head of the family led the rosary by the flickering glow of the wood on the hearth; and ended it with this invocation:

« *O great Saint Cajetan, provide us the bread for today and for tomorrow.* »

Let us forget for a moment every devout or romantic finesse and imagine Scrosoppi realistically on that cart, on the roads of that time, while he urges on the donkey that from time to time is stubborn and emits its sonorous brays into the air. And allow us, please, to turn an affectionate thought to the unknown companion of those adventures of charity.

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[4] Cocetta Bianca (Sister Maria Donata di Rosa Mistica) born in Gris (Udine) on September 13, 1903, entered the congregation on May 3, 1922, donned the habit on May 3, 1923, professed on May 7, 1924, died in Cormons on June 28, 1976.

A dear and good peasant girl

In his travels to collect offerings, *don* Luigi did not only obtain sacks of grain, eggs, chickens, or salamis, nor only gravel and beams, but he also obtained a splendid vocation.

One day he found himself in *Buja* and was the target of heavy insults. He remained almost stunned by them. But right there he met a young woman who, facing with peasant vigor those who offended that poor Priest, leaped onto the carriage, took the reins of the little donkey, and guided *don* Luigi in the continuation of the collection. Indeed, at that moment or shortly after, she moved to Udine and became one of the first nine Sisters, foundresses of the congregation.

Her name was Orsola Baldasso [5] and she had been born in *Buja* on January 2, 1808. Tinti writes of her:

«*She considered herself the little donkey of the convent. In the eyes of the world she appeared as a poor ignorant woman, but it was not so before God, who granted her special gifts. Although she had not learned to read, it is said that, instructed by the Divine Mother herself, she recited every day the office of the Blessed Virgin. Untiring in work, she was insatiable in sacrifices. She was seen several times drinking the water where the dishes had been washed. After having worked in the humblest tasks all day, she spent entire nights before the Blessed Sacrament and then, with energy, began to work again. She even offered herself as a helper for the masons of the institute and, although she died on May 7, 1852, precisely during work, she affirmed to the revered Founder to have already seen completed both the church and the choir, describing to him every detail just as it currently is. Her precious death was the faithful echo of a holy life and, at the moment of expiring, she intoned a joyful song to the Most Holy Virgin Mary.*»

Sister Giacinta De Monte, almost her fellow countrywoman because she was from nearby *Artegna*, affirmed that she died in the fame of great sanctity. It is fitting to recall the splendid maxim:

«*The ignorant shall rise up and conquer the kingdom of God.*»

Don Luigi as a laborer

Together with the holy initiatives to collect money and materials, the two zealous brothers joined a scrupulous attention so that everything would be used in the best possible way. For both, whatever had been offered by charity became sacred. And so here they are dedicating themselves, as Father Carlo writes, to the «*scrupulous supervision of the works.*» A task that fell especially on *don* Luigi, who had the opportunity to put into practice his extremely concrete character and his attention to savings.

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[5] Baldasso Orsola (Sister Maria Orsola, lay sister) belonged to the group of the nine young women who on February 1, 1837, fixed their stable residence in the House of the *derelitte* , thus giving a first start to the congregation of the Sisters of Providence. She donned the habit and professed her vows on Christmas 1845, and died on May 7, 1852. Erroneously in the registers of the congregation her surname is indicated as Baldassi or Baldassar.

He, however, was not content with supervising, but materially offered his own arm. Was there material arriving to be unloaded? Was it necessary to prepare the cement mixture? Were the helpers not enough to supply the masons? *don* Luigi had an eye for everything. That poor habit, dirty with mud and torn! And, with his education founded on prayer and work, and aimed at forming the orphans as working women, he organized the girls and their assistants so that they would give some help. It has been seen, in fact, how Sister Orsola Baldasso «*even offered herself as a mason's helper.*»

In this method he would always continue. Sister Giacinta De Monte, who entered the congregation on July 15, 1846, spoke in this way of the extraordinary period of formation — that is: the novitiate — that the Founder made her complete: «*Listen, Angela, listen* — he had told her — *I do not have a teacher to assign to you so that you may be guided and encouraged; I will be your teacher.*» «*And indeed* — continues Sister Giacinta with a hint of pleasant irony — *Father Luigi knew how to perform his task very well. Now he would send me into the vegetable garden to pull up weeds, now to help the masons in the construction of the choir; and in that place the dear Father transformed me into a new mason's helper and ordered me to hand them the bricks or other things.*»

In this regard, we wish to recount a pleasant episode which refers, however, to several years later. At the *House of the derelitte* there worked for a long time as a mason a certain Giovanni Battista Marangone from *Santa Maria di Sclaunicco*. He himself used to tell, toward ninety years of age, that sometimes it happened that he had to raise his voice so that someone would run to bring him material or give him a hand. The Sisters, perhaps busy with other tasks, were not always ready. And he, when they were late, would beat with the hammer on the wall saying: «*At least you answer me!*» But if Father Luigi was present, he added, he would run immediately.

The death of the mother

The works continued also during 1836, despite the raging of a new cholera epidemic. The epidemic began in the first days of June and lasted until the beginning of September. In his appeal of August 24, 1836, Father Carlo had declared, among other things:

« *If you, excellent citizens of Udine, wish it, the House of the derelitte within three months, and therefore before the start of the harsh winter, will be in a position to be able to welcome about a hundred orphans due to cholera.* »

He would certainly have kept the promise, if the Scrosoppi family had not been struck by a grave bereavement.

On January 8, 1837, at two in the afternoon, mother Antonia died at the age of 74. The registers of the *Duomo* of Udine report that she was then buried in her family's tomb. At that time, the great colonnade for family burials was still under construction. On February 14, 1844, her mortal remains would be transferred to the tomb that had been built by Countess Clementina Porcia, where, seven and ten years later respectively, her husband and Father Carlo would join her. The good lady had therefore lived long enough to see the house built by her two sons completed; she did not, however, have the joy of being present at the inauguration.

We know nothing of the details of her death, but it is not difficult to imagine her comforted and sustained by the constant presence of the three Priest sons, ready for her every need, kneeling around the bed of their dying mother. Undoubtedly, the concern for the mother's illness and the grief for her loss delayed the opening of the new institute for some time.

The inauguration of the house

From the registers compiled later by Father Luigi, it appears that the teachers and the first orphans settled in the new house on Tuesday, February 1, 1837. Perhaps that same day, or more probably the following day, on the occasion of the feast of the *Madonna della Candelora* (that is: Candlemas), the blessing of the premises took place. We can almost see them, Father Carlo and *don* Luigi, together with the nine « *maestre* » (teachers) and the small group of orphans, walking with lit candles through the corridors and rooms, reciting the liturgical formula and intoning sacred hymns.

However, the solemn ceremony of the inauguration must have been celebrated a little later, since on February 1 were welcomed only four little girls, thirty on February 4, and twelve on March 1. It is not improbable that the ceremony was postponed until after Easter, which that year fell on March 26. Not even of this solemn circumstance has any detail remained to us, except for the official speech, of which a copy is preserved in the library of the archiepiscopal seminary of Udine.

Udine. General view of the original House of the *derelitte*

A likeable surgeon

There lived in Udine at that time a singular figure of a surgeon, Dr. Giacomo Zambelli. Upon his death, it was said of him: « *He had a true devotion to everything that was good, noble and high. He loved his country with profound affection, adored his family; he always sought to do good; he was industrious and attentive to savings, not so much for himself as for his beloved children; he constantly cultivated his own mind, so much so that he distinguished himself in both medicine and literature. Alighieri's divine poem was his continuous study, his comfort, a great love of his...* » [(6)].

The obituary does not lie. He was indeed a sincere patriot who frequented the famous secret circle of the *Pletti tavern*, where he had meetings with political emissaries coming from other regions of Italy; he also wrote some treatises on medicine and *Dantean* studies (*Dante Alghieri*), in addition to numerous articles.

But he was above all a man of great heart and very lively interest in social problems. Suffice it to say that he chose to have himself locked in prison for some time, with the aim of studying the psychology of detainees and the prison methods then in force. In 1846, on the occasion of the arrival in Udine of the new Archbishop Monsignor *Zaccaria Bricito*, he presented him with a memoir of his, very important and which would be useful to read even today, in which he suggested a method of home visits for the poor, in order to relieve misery and favor their moral and civil redemption.

Extremely close to Father Carlo and *don* Luigi, he had already been providing his work as a surgeon for years in the old initial cottage.

To him, the two founders entrusted the task of delivering the inaugural speech. The fact that he was a somewhat eccentric type, rather emotional and emphatic, and that he used an artificial and refined style, takes nothing away, in our opinion, from the value of his exposition; it remains a precious document of the social conditions of that era. We regret that, due to evident needs for brevity, it is not possible to report the full text.

Zambelli recounts having delivered the speech before many « *illustrious and gentle women, who deigned to make such a graceful and envied crown for me* » and many « *honorable gentlemen* ». However, when Father Carlo and *don* Luigi addressed the honorable invitation to him, they must have recommended that he not speak of them, as the text contains only two brief mentions of the two zealous Priests, without even mentioning their names. « *It will not therefore be my task* — he says — *to weave crowns of praise for those generous souls who, exposing themselves to the will of so many passions, to the hardness of so many refusals, to the trial of so many oppositions, inflamed by an unstoppable charity, were building a refuge where poor, despised innocence, beset or offended by the wicked, might finally find shelter* ».

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[6] "*Il Giornale di Udine*", March 3, 1879. Zambelli, born in Udine in 1800, distinguished himself by capacity and commitment in his profession and in public offices; he demonstrated singular zeal in the cholera epidemics of 1836 and 1855. A lover of every progress in medical sciences, he preferred hygiene and wrote very useful articles on it; two of his books, the Catechismo della buona Madre and Memorie sulla pellagra were appreciated by Italian hygienists. He was one of the « founders of the Infant Asylum of Udine, which he always loved with special affection and helped with advice and medical assistance ». He died in Udine on March 1, 1879.

These are more than clear words to hint at the significant difficulties encountered by the two brothers; and it is evident that the most bitter morsels — that is: the refusals and hostilities — had to be endured precisely by our *don* Luigi during his collections of alms from house to house. Two pages further on, Zambelli recalls again « *those blessed ones who laid the first stones of the hospitable refuge and with so much care, with so much love helped it, encouraging in all of you the desire to help them, so that the completion of this work is not entrusted solely to their meager forces* ».

The speech contains very touching passages about the orphans internal to the house and about the « *externals whom you see in a long line setting out happily every day to the hospitable dwelling* », bringing his testimony as a doctor on the positive results already achieved. He devotes as many as seven pages to refuting four objections raised against the work and its promoters.

Toward the end, he addresses a fervent appeal to the ladies of the city, « *to you as well, scholars of letters, to you students of fine arts* », so that they may support « *this poor family* ». Finally, he closes with the romantic account of the illness and death, which occurred in the city hospital, of a thirteen-year-old victim of corruption and a serious infection — that is: a syphilitic facial gangrene —, assisted by him with love. Precisely to her the good surgeon addresses the final invocation:

« *Oh! from the height of the Heavens, where you, little new angel, reside, happy for the joys of the celestial world, turn a gaze to me and to these men that advises us to love well and to work well, and pray for us to the eternal Father, so that He may kindle in all of us the desire to save innocence, and that what I have said and prayed on this memorable day may not be in vain at all* ».

Was it not perhaps dutiful to pay tribute to Zambelli with these lines?

Don Luigi on a journey?

The audacity in charity of Father Carlo and *don* Luigi also had this advantage: it kindled in other generous souls a holy desire to perform good works. *Don* Francesco Tomadini [7] felt driven to do the same for children left orphaned by cholera and opened for this purpose the institute that today bears his name. Other citizens, including the two Venerio brothers [8], felt encouraged to promote that *House of Invalidity and Old Age* which arose

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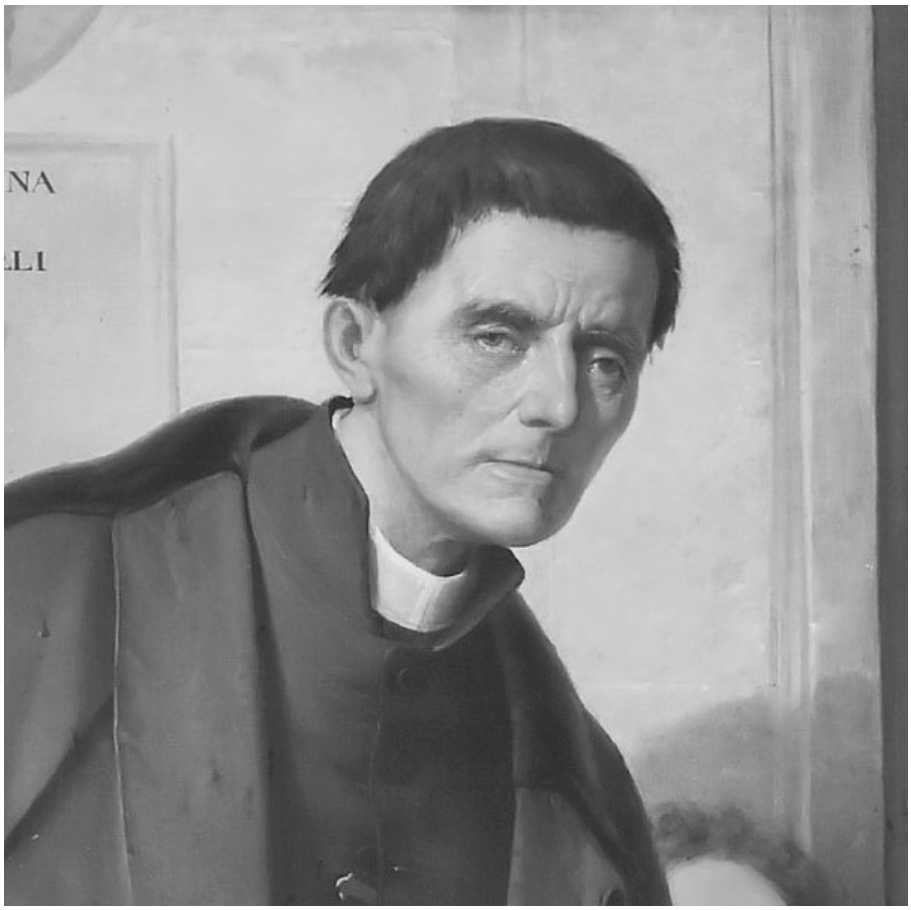
[7] Udinese (1782-1862) from a wealthy family. He led for almost 50 years the small Church of the Cristo which he restored; he was the architect of the return of the Capuchins to Udine. After the cholera of 1836 he dedicated his whole self to orphans for whom he founded in 1856 an institute that took its name from him. He was elected canon of the cathedral, obtained the decoration of knight. A Priest distinguished for holiness, charity shone in him above all, not only for orphans but toward all those in need. (Cf. L. BELLINA-I. DONATO, Il Tomadini e la sua opera, Udine 1957, pp. 1-54).

[8] Girolamo (1778-1844) and Antonio (1783-1857) Udinese, from an honest and wealthy family; the first was an excellent meteorologist whose 40 years of recordings led to the publication of the « Observations », by his disciple G.B. Bassi; the second dedicated himself to the family and to the administration of the assets. Religious and charitable, they benefited all the pious works of the city; in practice they can be considered the founders of the rest home. They have an illustrious place in the history of charity in Friuli. (Cf. GB. BASSI, Elogio di Girolamo Venerio, Udine 1844, pp. 32; V. LICCARO, Elogio funebre di A. Venerio udincse, Udine 1857, pp. 28).

in 1846, of which Zambelli already speaks in his discourse. Zambelli himself hints at the fact that « *some* » among the promoters of the *House of the derelitte* would soon have undertaken a journey to visit the works of Ferrante Aporti [9], the famous founder of infant asylums. The asylum, in fact, would arise in Udine the following year.



Don Francesco Tomadini, diocesan Priest (1782-1862), was such a close collaborator of Father Luigi as to be considered an integral part of the filippini "*family*" of santa Maria Maddalena. While Luigi looked after the female orphans, Francesco Tomadini was the operational arm for the assistance to boys and was called: the worker of Charity.

Among those « *some* » there was certainly *don* Pietro Benedetti [10], founder and animator of the asylum for thirty years, who was fraternally close to the two founders.

[9] Born in S. Martino dell'Argine (Mantova) in 1791, a Priest, he was professor of Sacred Scripture in the seminary of Cremona, director of elementary schools, founder in 1827 of the first infant asylum, the erection of which was permitted in Lombardo-Veneto. Suspected by Austria because he was too popular and a lover of novelties, he went into exile in Torino where his initiative had great development; professor of pedagogy at the university, he was appointed senator, and received the applause of foreign admirers. He died in 1857. (Cf. A. BENEDETTI, Commemorazione aportiana, Udine 1927, pp. 8-12).

[10] Born in Oltris di Ampezzo (Udine) in 1790, he was a catechist in the gymnasium of Udine and always lived in the sphere of the filippini: he served in their church until the confiscation, succeeded Father Filaferro as Rector and Provost of the congregation to be reconstructed. « With an awake and very prompt intellect... he was a burning soul of a very faithful priest and an untiring apostle. Strong and frank in character, he fought against Josephinism under the Austrians and against anti-papism later, deserving the label of illiberal ». As founder of the asylum he suffered through « contradictions, scorns and wrong judgments; however he continued in his work of charity, so much so that he could be called the second father of poor children ». He died in 1869. (G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti dell'arcidiocesi di Udine defunti dal 1836 al 1884, Udine 1958, pp. 10-11).

But everything leads one to believe that, together with him, Father Carlo and *don* Luigi also moved from Udine.

Perhaps it was *don* Luigi who departed.

It is pleasant to imagine that Father Carlo urged him to grant himself a brief rest after the great toils faced for the construction of the house. Perhaps he sent him so that he might personally seek to convince Sister Angela Bragato, Superior General of the Canossians, to take charge of the work. He had already been to *Verona* several times for this purpose, the last time in the autumn of 1835.

Of this hypothetical journey of Scrosoppi we have, however, no certain indication. Nor, if he actually performed it, did he obtain a better result. On the contrary, he convinced himself once more, concrete and trusting as he was, that it was preferable to proceed with effort with one's own strength, rather than dreaming of relying on external institutions.

He decided to entrust the work, therefore, to those nine creatures gathered by chance (that is: a heterogeneous group of humble women), whom Providence had sent into the house.

Bureaucratic obstacles

When, after the annexation of *Friuli* to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866, the municipal council of Udine, the provincial administration, and the Ministry of the Interior sought in every way to transform the house into a « *moral entity* » (that is: a public legal personality), and Father Luigi opposed a resistance that we could define as tormented and obstinate, there were those who raised this objection to him: why do you oppose it so much today, under the Kingdom of Italy, while once, under the Austrian Empire, you accepted medals from the Emperor and sought legal recognition from his government?

The malice of such criticism was all too obvious. In a climate of exasperated anti-clericalism, for the purpose of humiliating the clergy and casting doubt on their honor, the easy and absurd accusation of partisanship toward Austria was hurled against Priests.

More than malicious, the objection, in our case, was fundamentally false. Father Luigi could have replied: it is not true! We have always worked to obtain the maximum Christian freedom. Precisely under Austria, we made enormous efforts so that the house would be declared « *private and exempt* ». And, albeit gracefully, he actually replied in this way, for those who wished to understand, in his introductory declaration to the *Statute of the Secular House of the derelitte in Udine* of 1880.

We certainly do not wish to affirm — but neither to deny — that in the opposition of Father Carlo and *don* Luigi to Austrian government interference there was also a patriotic motivation, since both were clearly close to what would be called the neo-Guelph movement (that is: a Catholic political current favoring a confederation of Italian states under the papacy).

The main reasons derived from the theological and legal principle of religious freedom and from the rejection of *jurisdictionalism* (that is: the interference of the State in the internal affairs of the Church). Whether it was the Venetian Republic or the Austrian

Empire or any other government, the issue was of only secondary importance. What mattered was that no government should hinder the free initiative of Christian charity.

Added to this was the psychological motivation of the widespread public distrust toward the excessive intrusiveness of bureaucracy.

There were, however, two points of principle in which it seemed the government had good reasons.

One was the requirement that every institute provide guarantees, on an administrative level, of its own vitality and capacity to maintain itself. In this matter, the Austrian bureaucracy was extremely meticulous. But how could such guarantees be provided by an institute that lived only on alms? How could someone who relied primarily on Providence accept that criterion? Providence could certainly not be registered in the police archives.

The other point was the government's desire to control the teaching programs, the educational and disciplinary methods, the educational qualifications of the teachers, and the hygienic conditions of the institutes. For this purpose, laws were enacted and model institutions founded. However, both the laws and those institutions had a schematic and abstract character, which ill-adapted to the various local realities. At times they demanded, perhaps, a level of perfection that was not possible to implement everywhere. Was it not perhaps wiser — the two founders thought — to allow that little which could be concretely realized to be done?

In conclusion, Father Carlo and *don* Luigi must have felt that in the educational field the intervention of emperors and kings, of the government and authorities, was welcome if it manifested in concrete funding. Instead, it was accustomed to exhausting itself only in paper documents, full of investigations and conditions, to which it was exhausting or even impossible to respond in a positive way.

We spare here the tedious list of such bureaucratic hindrances. One must, however, remember one that risked causing the work to cease even before the house was completed.

A government note of September 27, 1836, posed two restrictive conditions: that only orphans due to cholera be welcomed in the new institute and that these should not be over twelve years of age.

But how is that possible!

Let us even admit precedence to cholera orphans. But could there not be children in need of acceptance for other misfortunes as well? And, once the effects of the epidemic ended, was the institute perhaps to be closed? What was the use of having built such a large building? Furthermore, if they were over twelve years old, was the door to be closed to them and were they to be left in danger? And, once that age was reached, was it perhaps necessary to put them out in the street?

Here a curious fact occurred, which deserves to be told.

On January 28, 1837, the Bishop Monsignor Lodi — in his capacity as president of the charity commission — wrote a severe letter to Mr. *Giovanni Battista Fabris*, a member

of the commission itself, who had been tasked with verifying, together with the clergy of the city, the number and conditions of the girls to be welcomed at the *derelitte*: if orphans not due to cholera or over twelve years of age were welcomed — he said —, they had to be sent away, and the expense of the period of stay would be charged to whoever had collaborated in the deception.

The ironic aspect lies in the fact that the age limitation imposed by the government was not respected at all. Monsignor Lodi himself, who in appearance had shown himself very rigid, had had a sixteen-year-old girl welcomed on January 15 and had committed to paying for her maintenance, paying 90 lire for a semester in advance. Two other orphans, one of whom was reported by Count Pietro Mattioli, were sixteen years old. And even among the forty-two welcomed at the expense of the public charity commission, there were actually eleven who exceeded the officially permitted age. It is well understood that they pretended to obey bureaucratic norms, but then sought to do the good that circumstances required.

The two founders, however, encountered obstacles every day that pushed them to seek exemption from the suffocating government controls. And finally, the right opportunity arrived for them to obtain it.

The visit of the Empress

On September 6, 1838, Ferdinand I was crowned King of *Lombardo-Veneto*, having succeeded Francis I to the Austrian imperial throne in 1835. Partly because it was customary in such circumstances, partly to calm hidden tensions, the new Emperor was generous with concessions and honors. To Father Carlo himself, in his capacity as founder and director of the *House of the derelitte*, the « *medium gold medal with ribbon* » for civil merit was awarded.

On October 19, the court arrived in Udine. On the 20th, while the Emperor visited the seminary, the city hospital, and the pawnshop, the Empress visited several women's institutes, including the *House of the derelitte*. The Empress was Maria Anna (Anna Maria Carolina Pia) of Savoy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel I and sister of the very devout Maria Christina, wife of Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies.

For this occasion, *don* Francesco Fantoni prepared two compositions of six verses that were perhaps sung. Even *don* Luigi composed four quatrains, which would have been recited by some young guests. Here they are:

« *Oh! wonder! the humble refuge of the orphans honors the Empress, and with them she shows herself affable. The tenderness and joy that are born in our breast, who can ever express our grateful affection?*

Augusta, you who make piety your glory, ah, you will always be our hope and our love. Lord, preserve in us such a beautiful image of yourself: Lord, fill the heart of Augusta with your gifts. »

And Father Carlo addressed a welcoming speech to the sovereign, inviting her to inspect the schools as well: « *perhaps* — he said — *seeing the activities that Christian charity*

knows how to devise and carry out for the benefit of the orphans, your maternal heart will feel a new pleasure. »

But what was really desired as a result of the visit appears clearly from the petition presented to the Empress, so that she might support it before the Emperor. It was signed by the Bishop, the *podestà*, the protectors and patronesses of the house, and the two founders. It requested — we report some phrases — that the Emperor « *by decree on this day wish to recognize and approve with the utmost benevolence this private establishment, of which we respectfully present the statute, authorizing it by grace to manage itself autonomously with exemption from dependency on the guardianship authority, and to perform within legal terms acquisitions of all kinds, even for donations between living persons or due to death (that is: gifts made during life or by inheritance), just like any private individual.* »

That they hoped to obtain such a decree immediately « *on this day* » may seem quite naive. It is evident, however, that they wanted to bypass the bureaucracy, from which no favor was expected. In any case, the reader understands for themselves the spirit of the request and can judge if it was honest to accuse it, about thirty years later, of being a servile begging for legal recognition.

The Empress made a donation of nine hundred lire to the house. But the petition had to follow, as was predictable, the mandatory bureaucratic process. The matter dragged on. However, both due to the high patronage of the good Empress and the constant support of a court Monsignor, on July 6, 1839, a sovereign resolution accepted a large part of the founders' request and sanctioned the legal existence of the house as a « *private and exempt institute* »; however, the bureaucracy obtained its share with the appointment of a government commissioner, which took place on November 5, 1839, in the person of Count Fabio *di Colloredo* [(11)].

This appointment was, on the contrary, a bitter pill for the two brothers. Father Carlo tried to define his duties in a very limited sense, but in the end he resigned himself. *Don* Luigi did not adapt to it at all.

We do not have much news on how Count *Colloredo* carried out his duties; only a letter dated March 8, 1847, remains, with a rather authoritarian tone, in which he provides instructions regarding the health of the residents. It is, however, quite significant that he submitted his resignation « *for health reasons* » immediately after the death of Father Carlo. The provincial prefecture then had the wisdom to replace him, on February 5, 1854, with Count Federico Trento [(12)], who would be a devoted collaborator — rather than a controller — of Father Luigi until his death.

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[11] He was a descendant of an ancient feudal family transplanted to Friuli in the first half of the 12th century. This family, through investments and rents, at the beginning of the 14th century erected the castle in the village of Colloredo, from which the descendants took their name, divided into three lines, called after their progenitors the line of Asquino, of Vicardo, and of Bernardo. Count Fabio, of the Vicardo line, was born in Colloredo di Monte Albano in 1777, was chamberlain, *podestà* of Udine and died there in 1855. (Genealogies, Fondo A. Joppi, Bibl. Com. Udine).

[12] He was born in Udine in 1806, a descendant of a family from Val di Non in the Trentino, from which the surname derived and which at the end of the 18th century obtained the jurisdiction of Masarota near Dolegnano and the noble title. He held with undisputed probity various offices under the two governments, Austrian and Italian,

Portrait of Count Federico Trento, government commissioner
and great supporter of the works of Father Luigi

Udine. External facade of the current Provvidenza college, which preserves the same structure
as the House of the *derelitte* inaugurated in 1837

retiring to private life when he saw the establishment of a new order of things contrary to religion and the papacy. He always supported the charitable institutes of the city; at his death, in 1885, all the city press spoke of him with esteem and respect. (Ibid.; dr. F. BLASICH, Note Cronologiche Ecclesiastiche, ms., p. 259).

Chapter 3

A STOP INSIDE THE NEW *HOUSE OF THE DERELITTE*

Organization and purposes of the *House of the derelitte*

It has been said that Father Carlo would have liked to open the new house in October or November 1836. For this reason, he must have drafted as early as then that *Regulations for the private House of the derelitte*, which — perhaps with some modifications — was presented to the Empress during her visit on October 20, 1838, and subsequently printed in 1840.

Here is the structure and objectives of the work according to these regulations. The house had an « *internal direction* », composed of the Superior and four sisters called « *elders* ». The « *external direction* », instead, was constituted by the President — who by statute had to be the Bishop of the diocese —, by the Vice-President — by statute the *podestà* of Udine —, by the Secretary and by six male protectors and six female protectors: the latter were to be replaced in part every two years. However, the guidance and responsibility of the house were primarily entrusted to two Priests: the Director, appointed by the Bishop, and the Vice-Director, chosen by the Director and confirmed by the Bishop in his capacity as President.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the plague of street boys and girls represented an open wound for the city of Udine, in the face of which the local Church could not remain indifferent. Concrete responses to this emergency were offered first by the filippini Fathers, who dedicated themselves to the assistance of the girls, and later by don Francesco Tomadini, who directed his work toward the boys.

However, we are interested above all in what is established regarding the purpose, education, and discipline of the pupils. In this way, we can get a fairly precise idea of how life was inside the house. We report some passages, highlighting the phrases that define the institute:

« *To collect the poor orphaned and abandoned girls, or daughters of very poor and ignorant parents, or those neglected and led toward vice, in order to remove them from the wrong path; to educate them and make them suitable for service with honest families; or for marriage with good artisans; or to become themselves educators of other young women in difficulty, is the general purpose of the institute* ».

The « *internals* » (resident pupils) are described in this way:

« *The poorest and totally abandoned are educated and maintained entirely at the expense of the house, of which they become daughters, and they do not leave it except after having completed their education and having received a placement* ».

Regarding the « *externals* » (day pupils), we read:

« *Those girls who, although poor, have parents and who, due to the reaching of the maximum number of permanent admissions, cannot become daughters of the institute, are welcomed into the structure during the day; there they receive lunch and are educated like the former, although in a separate manner* ».

These external pupils were to gather every morning in the churches of their respective parishes and from there some women chosen specifically for this purpose accompanied them to the house.

Both internal and external pupils were taught first of all the foundations of the Christian faith and also the first elements of reading, writing, and calculation; « *not to all, however, but to the most deserving for goodness and commitment, and this during hours of leisure and on festive days, almost as a form of recreation* ».

It should not surprise us that the first rudiments of knowledge were reserved only for the best and most active, since at that time public opinion was anything but favorable to popular female education. The situation would change in a few decades and the *House of the derelitte* would soon find itself on the front line in the education sector as well.

For the moment, the regulations gave precedence to domestic economy: understood, obviously, in a practical sense.

One read there:

« *The girls are trained in all works typical of the female gender, beginning with knitting, the use of the needle and the spindle, progressing in all the activities of which women can become capable, such as preparing yarns, transforming them into linens and these into shirts, dresses and so on, up to embroidery; furthermore to manage the breeding of silkworms, to work the cocoons at the heat of the stove, to wind the silk... They also practice preparing bread and doing the laundry, in all the duties proper to service personnel, in all the even humblest chores of kitchen and room, and in the care of livestock* ».

How they lived in the House

In the House, therefore, the following laboratories were active: one for knitting and hosiery, naturally performed with needles; a spinning and weaving department, with traditional tools such as distaffs, spindles, noisy bobbins, small spinning wheels, and hand looms; a school for cutting, sewing, and embroidery; for a certain period, a glove factory and, finally, a silk mill.

The raw material for the latter was provided by the farm connected to the house and managed by some sisters and girls. It was located just outside *porta Ronchi*, on the east side of the current *via XXIII Marzo*, and already in 1840 it comprised about five hectares, partly cultivated as meadow — for the stable, from which milk was obtained — and partly as cereals, with many rows of mulberry trees necessary precisely for the breeding of silkworms.

And for all these initiatives of social value, created to instruct and not to make a profit, do you perhaps believe that the founders received praise and help from the government authorities? Absolutely not! They received only taxes, especially because of that blessed silk mill, as if they were ordinary industrialists. It is incredible, and it would be tedious to recount it, the tiring journey of the two poor Priests from one office to another to convince the bureaucrats to renounce their fiscal rigor.

The bedding (bed) of the orphans and the sisters was constituted, over time, by humble mattresses filled with straw or corn husks. Later, the girls' mattresses were significantly improved; for the sick, whether they were young guests or sisters, they became made of wool. However, the sisters in good health maintained for a long time the privilege of the *paglericcio* (that is: the poor straw mattress).

As for clothing, the 1840 regulations establish that the « *internals* » (resident pupils) wear an extremely sober uniform, that is, simple, in a popular style. We know that their dress was made of a mixed wool fabric, while that of the teachers — the future sisters — was brown. Naturally, it was the dress for special occasions, to be used especially on feast days or when leaving the house. On other days, and especially for certain tasks, they covered themselves as best they could.

The likeable Dr. Zambelli, speaking of the food and clothing of the orphans in the cited discourse, offers us a more vivid picture:

« *It is true, they do not know the comforts and riches of the affluent life of citizens; a rough garment covers their delicate limbs, they sleep the sleep of innocence on a Spartan bed, a very frugal (simple) food placates their hunger... It is true that many still wear worn-out clothes, it is true that many, even in the rigor of winter, show a bare foot.* »

Shoes or slippers were available for the internals, but they were used exclusively on feast days.

In short, the two brothers did not want to yield to superfluous needs or fuel pretensions, but preferred to keep the girls in the social condition of their origin; not even the prestige of the institute ever induced them to abandon a rigid criterion of simplicity and poverty. And in this we believe we recognize the concrete and, let us say, rather straightforward

approach of Luigi, since the noble Father Filaferro must have been more inclined toward greater refinement.

In this style of poverty, for example, Father Luigi did not want the house to be plastered externally: it remained with exposed bricks until after his death.

Fervor of consensus and salty bitterness

Two aspects deeply struck contemporaries: the rapid construction of the building, which seemed to have something prodigious about it, and the excellent organization of the new institute from every point of view.

Monsignor Lodi himself dedicated two passages of great praise to the house in his reports on the state of the diocese sent to the Holy See: « *Such a house* — he said — *is celebrated by general praise and by the manifestation of public gratitude* ».

However, the heart feeds on good words because they offer comfort and encouragement, but these are not enough to feed and clothe anyone.

There were, however, generous souls who understood the need for material support. If we were writing the complete history of the house, we should remember them all, one by one. We will limit ourselves to saying that, already for the furnishing of the building and for the clothes of the orphans, the women's convents of the city competed with holy competition, especially the *Dimesse*, the *Rosarie*, and the *Zitelle*; among the donors of this category we also find the names of some future sisters, such as Gaspardis and the two Borghese sisters.

Significant help came from those who in the registers are indicated as « *protectors* » of this or that girl, as they had favored their acceptance by taking on the commitment to pay the board. We cite, for example, the Countesses Cecilia Ottelio Brazzà and Teresa Bartolini Dragoni, the doctor Giacomo Zambelli, the Monsignors Bearzi, Someda, and Cernazai, *don* Fantoni, the various members of the Feruglio-Tinìn family [(1)] of *Feletto* and, later, of the Costantini family of *Cividale*, in addition to the famous composer of sacred music Monsignor Jacopo Tomadini [(2)].

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[1] Among the dearest lay friends of Father Scrosoppi there were two exemplary fathers of families, of fervent Christian feeling: one was Mr. Giovanni Feruglio (1807-1882), of the family nicknamed Tinìn, since in Feletto (Udine) the Feruglio were very many, father of at least 11 children, of whom three were priests and one of these three a bishop: Monsignor Antonio (1841-1911) Bishop of Vicenza, don Stefano (1842-1885) and Monsignor Domenico (1850-1932), all three linked to the works of Father Scrosoppi. The other was Mr. Cristoforo Costantini (1804-1890), father of seven children, the last of whom, Luigi (1846-1918), was a priest. (On Monsignor A. Feruglio and don L. Costantini and for their relations with Father Scrosoppi cf. part III, chap. 9, note 8; chap. 7, note 7 and chap. 13).

[2] Born in Cividale del Friuli in 1820 he was the « prince » of the reform of sacred music, so much so as to deserve the title of « Palestrina of the 19th century ». He composed 316 works and, despite vast recognition, honors from various academies and philharmonic institutes and the invitation to illustrious positions, he remained a simple organist in Cividale, where, appointed canon, he died in 1883, leaving the example of a life of goodness, prayer and fidelity to the Church. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti..., pp. 58-61).

Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, Bishop of Vicenza, director of the House of the *derelitte* after the death of Father Luigi. Monsignor Jacopo Tomadini was the « prince » of the reform of sacred music and composed as many as 316 works.

Gradually, legacies also began to arrive, both single payments and perpetual donations. We provide a brief list: in 1836 Count Vittorio Mattioli and the nobleman Francesco Boiani; in 1837 Domenico Giuliani Lessani; in 1839 Maria Visentini widow Piani and Gian Daniele Marsoni; in 1840 Count Pietro Mattioli, by far the most important benefactor [3]; in 1842 the Canon Monsignor Antonio De Vit — who donated as much as ten thousand lire —; in 1843 Girolamo Venerio; in 1844 Bartolini and Count Francesco Brazzacco, husband of Countess Giulia Piccoli.

To encourage the necessary influx of help, the two founders distributed, as soon as the house opened, a flyer titled:

« *Words of the poor abandoned girls to their good fellow citizens and Udinese benefactors* », in which among other things it was said: « *We ask that each of you who can and feels compassion for us, performs the charity of taking on the task of maintaining for a single day a month, for the duration of a year, only one of us unhappy ones. The expense is minimal, only 50 cents a month* ».

The adjective « *only* », repeated three times in the phrase, while emphasizing the modesty of the request, clearly shows the humility of the petition and allows a glimpse of the fear of being intrusive.

Bishop Monsignor Lodi also continued to send circular letters for collections to the clergy of the diocese. We know of several: of November 8, 1837, October 25, 1838, November 1, 1839, October 15, 1840, and September 29, 1841; one was sent at the end of each agricultural season. In the last one, he pointed out once again how holy such an

[3] After having benefited the House of the *derelitte* in life, he left to it 30,000 lire.

establishment was in its purpose and very useful in its result; he further declared that the numerous girls were educated and instructed so well as to be an example to others and an extreme consolation to his heart. Particularly significant is the circular of December 16, 1839, to the clergy of the city: the official news of the legal recognition of the house and its exemption from government controls had just arrived; the Bishop hastened to express his participation in the joy of the two founders and to take the opportunity to encourage a subscription.

The moments of glory lasted as long as flowers: the space of a morning, like the morning of Palm Sunday.

We certainly do not mean to say that the hour of triumph was followed immediately, for Father Carlo, by the hour of definitive condemnation; however, from that moment on he was surrounded by malicious oppositions, which were still present at his death, as *don* Valentino Liccaro [4] publicly mentioned in the funeral eulogy. The causes were many and of a different nature.

In addition to the predictable decline in enthusiasm and that terrible engine of poisonous thoughts and bad words that is envy — created at the dawn of humanity —, the very perfect organization of the house led some to believe that there was no longer a need for help. As if feeding two hundred girls every day were a small thing! Something occurred roughly like what is told in the anecdote of a devout lady who grumbled to a beggar:

« *But you are always underfoot; I already gave you a lira last week!* »

Furthermore, testamentary legacies sometimes aroused ill humor or open hostility in the relatives of the deceased; in such cases, it is extremely easy for the Priest to be accused of being a legacy hunter. It was an entirely unjust accusation toward Father Carlo, but such is the bitter misery of life. There was no lack of misunderstandings on the part of the authorities either, perhaps a little displeased also because of the « *exemption* » from controls obtained. We provide a brief example.

On February 3, 1837, the charity commission had signed an agreement with Father Carlo, by which it committed to providing the kit for the girls admitted in its name and to paying a daily fee of 50 cents for each, but for one year only. Subsequently, they would be entirely at the expense of the house. Some articles of a health and disciplinary nature followed. Among other things, in Article 5, it was established that if a resident were found to be suffering from a chronic or contagious disease, by decision of the commission she would have to leave the institute and it would be up to the commission itself to provide for her recovery. As often happens, the commission did not deal with it later; however, the piety of the two brothers never used that article to put sick orphans on the street. From this derived the previously cited reproach of the government commissioner

[4] He was born in San Pietro al Natisone (Udine) in 1806 and died in Udine in 1880. Private tutor, vice-parish priest, bishop's secretary and chancellor in Spalato and then in Zara, teacher in the Udinese seminary of Greek, Hebrew and biblical studies, he served in the church of the filippini, dedicated himself to preaching and the confessional. The Austrian police first removed him from Zara for his defense of the rights of the Church and then expelled him from the seminary. He clearly opposed the prevailing anti-ecclesiastical attitudes deserving to be called a « Jesuit, filippino papista ». In addition to some funeral eulogies, he published the Manuale di predicazione in 10 volumes. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, o.c., pp. 46-47).

in 1847. This is proof of how things go when commissions and commissioners intervene; so certainly *don* Luigi thought and said!

Another episode is almost incredible. In 1839 there still existed, deposited at the city hospital, a large number of articles and objects intended for the relief of cholera patients from 1836. Father Carlo asked for a part of them, undertaking to pay their estimated value in three semi-annual installments. These were goods valued at 1,418.62 lire. Subsequently, as he was unable to pay, he asked for the debt to be cancelled. Well, the matter dragged on for over four years: after many appeals and refusals, on June 24, 1843, he was invited to pay immediately without waiting for further postponements. Obviously, he had to yield. But in a petition to the Viceroy of June 29, 1840, Father Carlo had pointed out without too many words:

« *Blessed God has wished to send me a painful source of humiliation, and unfortunately I received it from where I could least suspect it, since the city council against all expectations has rejected the proposal. And I say against all expectations because, in the end, who did the purchased furniture serve? Did it perhaps serve strangers? No: it served and serves innocent orphans of our fellow citizens, it served and serves the daughters of Udinese parents who remained victims of cholera* ».

The third problem is a little more understandable. We have already mentioned that, shortly after the *House of the derelitte*, Monsignor Tomadini's institute for children orphaned by cholera arose, in 1838 the *Infant Asylum of Charity* and in 1840 the *Rest Home*.

The *House of the derelitte* was therefore prohibited, in 1839, from collecting the usual subscriptions in the city; but the strange aspect was that it was even excluded from public funding. « *It has been four years* — wrote Father Carlo in 1844 — *since particular circumstances do not allow the pious house to receive the constant generosity of benefactors. For four years, participation in extraordinary public subsidies has ceased for it, and it has not even obtained subscriptions in its favor, deemed inopportune, while the wider charity had turned to other works of assistance* ».

Father Filaferro's bitterness is evident. Interesting is the strategy to which the two founders resorted to support the house in its difficult position: they offered citizens the purchase of a print (lithograph) of the *Madonna Addolorata*, based on the drawing by the well-known Udinese artist Filippo Giuseppini [(5)], at the price of twelve lire, payable within a year. We do not know how much they earned; certainly very little.

Don Luigi was the soul of the house

Father Carlo made a daily visit to the house from eleven to noon; for the rest of the time he remained in the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*, of which he was appointed Rector in 1840.

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[5] Udinese, (1811-1862) neoclassical painter trained in the climate of Vienna and Munich. He was the author especially of historical and sacred paintings, of prized lithographic drawings and was successful in Friuli. In the museum of Udine there is his work « Diluvio » (Deluge), in the parish church of Tricesimo (Udine) the altarpiece of St. Philomena. (Cf. G. MARCHETTI, o.c., p. 758).

From him, however, came the general directives; he assumed representation in contracts and before the authorities; and he appeared as the founder and head of the *House of the derelitte*, so much so that the people, abandoning that difficult name, called it simply « *Father Carlo's house* ».

But the soul of everything was our *don* Luigi. He, however, being very humble, liked to be ignored or to appear at most as a poor Priest, executor of his brother's orders.

At the request of Father Carlo, the school inspector for the *District of Moggio*, *don* Filippo Micoli [6], had sent him on October 20, 1839, an article in which he summarized, starting from the origins, the history of the *House of the derelitte*. We do not know if and where it was published, but we like to report a passage from it:

« *We owe such a useful work of charity to two of our priests... They are the most reverend Father Carlo Filaferro, an Oratorian, and his brother don Luigi Scrosoppi; the former the head and the latter the arm.* »

Almost in the same period, even the famous Niccolò Tommaseo [7] spoke of the work in one of his writings which should be an extract from a newspaper. Here *don* Luigi is not even mentioned. All the credit is attributed to Father Carlo, whom Tommaseo defines as a « *worthy heir of Neri, a sweet and frank soul* ». The illustrious writer provides us with two interesting pieces of information: the internal girls were sixty and « *the teachers* — he writes — *are engaged as in a free religious order, which invokes the name of Saint Cajetan* ».

Vibrant with enthusiasm is the article that the famous Francesco Dall'Ongaro [8] published on January 3, 1841, in the *Trieste* periodical *La Favilla*, in which the well-known Udinese journalist Pacifico Valussi served as director. No names are mentioned, but, since it is certain that it was *don* Luigi who supervised the construction of the house, we believe that the following passage refers to him:

« *A poor priest supervised the work and hastened it toward conclusion. The walls rose day by day and the workers were punctually rewarded for their labors. From what sources the poor priest drew his means, everyone asked; he alone knew: the Providence of God will not fail, he said, to him who proposes an excellent end; and Providence was his treasurer.* »

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6 From Muina (Udine) 1801-1857. He was Archpriest of Moggio Udinese, district school inspector and Canon of the Chapter of Udine.

7 Cf. N. TOMMASEO, Della carità educatrice nelle scuole infantili di Venezia e d'altre città, Venice 1841, pp. 21-25.

8 He was born in Mansuè (Treviso) in 1808. Former priest, journalist, he fought in the revolutionary uprisings and, after the fall of the Roman Republic, went into exile. He returned to his homeland on the eve of the 1859 war and supported Savoyard policy with his writings. Appointed professor of dramatic literature, he taught in Florence and Naples where he died in 1873. He wrote much: worth remembering are the patriotic stornelli, Dantean studies and those on art and dramatic literature. (Cf. Enciclopedia italiana, vol. XII, p. 242). Regarding the trust in Providence of which Dall'Ongaro speaks in his article, many years later the Abbot and professor Lorenzo Schiavi (born in Pordenone 1829, died in Udine 1911) in the review of the biography of Father Scrosoppi written by L. Tinti appeared in Il Cittadino Italiano, December 2, 1896, praising the House of the *derelitte*, recalled that Father Scrosoppi told him that they had « set out with debts (he together with Father Filaferro) to do all this; yet Saint Cajetan always obtains for us the grace to overcome enormous difficulties ». (Summarium, p. 390, in Positio...).

Moreover, Father Carlo himself confirms the predominant role of his brother. In the conclusion to the 1840 regulations, alluding to him, he says: « *No longer will a single person stimulate the citizens to this charity and collect it, as has been done until now.* » And in a letter of September 1843 to the Abbot Antonio Rosmini he is even more explicit; he introduces his brother *don* Luigi to him, « *to whose tireless commitment* — he writes — *the House of the derelitte largely owes its existence and the maintenance of a satisfactory progress.* »

The chapel of the house

A small chapel already existed in the old dwelling. In the new large house, a room was immediately used as a chapel, waiting to build a specific seat for it later. On February 17, 1837, the Bishop Monsignor Lodi granted that one or more Masses could be celebrated there every day, even on feast days. And eight days later he authorized the institution of the *Via Crucis* (Station of the Cross), which was performed by the Guardian (Superior) of the nearby *Convent of cappuccini*, Father Silvestro *da San Daniele del Friuli*.

don Luigi made that chapel the beating heart of the House. For two reasons. One very practical: what was to be done when bread or side food was missing, or when some creditor pressured to be paid and the money was not there? Nothing else but going to church to pray. To pray to St. Cajetan, the saint of extraordinary faith in Providence, under whose patronage the institute had been placed since its birth; to pray to St. Joseph, with whom *don* Luigi was deeply in love and whom he considered as the sure resolver of every difficult case; to pray to the Madonna, whom he called and had called « *the mother* ». To pray: here is the great secret of miracles!

A series of testimonies tells us how he, then and always, sent the orphans to the chapel to ask for help in moments of need; and how he sent them back to give thanks once the grace was obtained — because the grace arrived! He went there himself, whenever it was at all possible for him. And when the Lord seemed to put them to the test, making the help delay somewhat, he sometimes climbed the steps of the altar and knocked on the small door of the tabernacle. Then, when he passed in front of the chapel, he never forgot to make a deep genuflection outside the door to greet Jesus.

But the chapel was above all the place where those « *animucce* » (that is: little souls or little girls) were given a solid Christian formation and temper.

The knowledge of the female soul and its inclinations did not make him at all a stranger to either the quantity or the variety of practices of devotion. He was solicitous, indeed, in suggesting and having them perform those small gestures and « *fioretti* » (spiritual sacrifices), which are so suitable to arouse a movement of love toward God, to fix the changeable imagination upon a thought of faith, to exercise this or that virtue. And he was a master in the use of short ejaculatory prayers (*giaculatorie*), just as he inspired a vivid desire to obtain all possible indulgences, especially in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.

However, his education in piety and virtue was founded on a few fundamental points: the presence of God, the awareness that we are His servants, the will to do everything for His glory. Here is a handwritten slip of his, which must have been the spiritual code of the house in those early times:

« *Upon rising one will think that God is present, that that day may be the last of our life... Lord, everything I do this day I intend to do for your glory, since you are my Master and I am your servant. Resolutions to serve God well, ask Him for grace. Repeat often during the day: Lord, I am your servant. Everything therefore I want to do for your glory, o Lord. For your glory, o Lord, I intend to perform this action. God sees me* ».

A very simple code: nothing else than the first concepts of the catechism, but made to be assimilated until they became the basis of a precise interior harmony. The very repetition of the same concepts strongly emphasizes which directives were the dearest to *don* Luigi: twice the presence of God is recalled, twice the duty to serve Him, three times the necessity of doing everything for His glory.

A dear devotion

Sometimes, certain apparently secondary descriptions reveal, better than anything else, the authentic spiritual tension of a soul.

Here is one concerning *don* Luigi.

The house had been open for a very short time when death also entered it. The first little deceased was Maria Duri, who died at only seven years of age on November 6, 1837. Seven other girls followed her to heaven in the next five years, until May 1842.

By then those girls were his daughters. To them, while they were alive, *don* Luigi dedicated his every care; for them, once deceased, he wanted to offer all his prayers. For this reason, in that very month of May, he sent a petition to the Pope to obtain the special concession of the Privileged Altar for six times a week. Six times: that is, every day except Sunday. At the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences they considered the request excessive; therefore, on May 31, he was granted the indult for the entire duration of his life, but limited to four days a week.

There were not only the orphans for whom to offer prayers of suffrage: souls often entirely innocent, on a rapid flight toward Paradise. There was, however, the duty of gratitude toward benefactors, and a debt of piety toward his unforgettable mother, relatives, and friends. Furthermore, his heart, entirely turned toward charity on earth, desired to exercise charity even beyond the boundaries of this world. *Don* Luigi's intention to celebrate all his Masses in suffrage leads us to believe that he recited them — as is habitually said — « *on the missal* », that is: solely for his own devotion, without receiving the monetary offering (the equivalent of the alms that usually accompanies the celebration). Not infrequently such an offering will have been delivered to him, and he always destined it for charity. He felt himself an Oratorian (*filippino*) in his soul, and it was a characteristic of the followers of St. Philip Neri to exercise the priestly ministry in an entirely disinterested manner.

The devotion to the souls in Purgatory would remain a distinctive trait of his piety. Sister Brigida Dorigo, who entered the congregation in 1869, would provide a pleasant testimony of it:

« *I envied* — she said — *the fortune of those who died before him, for the great prayers of suffrage they received from him: Masses, Way of the Cross, rosaries, penances, in addition to what he ordered to be done in the community.* »

All together on the paths of the Lord in this life; all together in the house of the Lord in eternal life: here is the very simple program that *don* Luigi strove in every way to realize.

Prodigious grain?

It has been seen how since 1839 it had been forbidden to collect offerings in the city for the *House of the derelitte*, and how Father Carlo and *don* Luigi, in 1844, had bypassed the obstacle by starting to sell a print (lithograph) of the *Addolorata* to support the house, which found itself in serious difficulty.

If the two holy Priests had many reasons to lose faith in men, they had one more to abandon themselves with increased trust in the Lord. And Providence intervened, sometimes in ways that appeared prodigious.

There was in the house a certain Caterina Cortelazzis, who had been a Dominican nun until the closure of the orders imposed by Napoleon (that is: the Napoleonic suppression), with the name of Sister Giovanna. She had entered among the abandoned girls in 1840, at sixty-two years of age, happy to dedicate the final phase of her existence to the service of the orphans. She died on December 7, 1850, and went to celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception in heaven. The episode concerning her must have happened in those critical years between 1841 and 1843; in any case, when she was still in physical conditions strong enough to be able to move sacks of wheat.

One day, therefore, Sister Giovanna « *went to the granary to take the grain and deliver it to the miller, but there was no more. Sister Giovanna ran to Father Luigi to tell him that the grain was finished. The Father said: Go to the granary and fill the sacks. And the sister replied: Father, there is no more. And he shot back at her: Go and see and you will find it. The sister obeyed and went there. Opening the door, to her great wonder, she saw a large quantity of grain. She filled the sacks and much still remained* » [9].

The « *poor priest* », regarding whom Dall'Ongaro had written that Providence was his treasurer, could have added that it also kept the key to the granary. And perhaps he will have repeated to the astonished Sister Giovanna, quoting the Manzonian Fra Galdino from the story of the walnuts: « *Divine Providence is there.* »

[9] Cf. folder 28, doc. 5, p. 31 (A.L.S.)

Chapter 4

DAWN OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF *SAN GAETANO* OR OF *PROVVIDENZA* (1837-1848)

From a writing of Father Carlo of January 3, 1835, we learn that « *two or three teachers and two domestic collaborators* » resided in the house at that time.

Two of the teachers were surely the previously mentioned Margherita Gaspardis and Teresa Fabris of Udine, who owned a house near *Treppo street*. The third must have been Lucia De Giorgio, also Udinese from the *neighborhood of santa Lucia*, but from a family originally from *Plasencis*: she was only sixteen years old and therefore, at least due to her age, could be considered barely a half-teacher.

Throughout 1836, while the building was moving toward completion, the two founders thought of recruiting other good young women to whom to entrust the future guests of the structure.

The Lord did not choose a single apostle among the so-called « *respectable people* ». Not one among the scholars of the law (that is: the scribes) and the observant religious (that is: the Pharisees), not one among the cultured and high-ranking people. They were all fishermen and peasants; one was even a tax collector (that is: a publican).

In the same way, the two brothers did not look for their collaborators among the young ladies of the aristocracy or the middle class, but among the humble daughters of the people: they preferred young working women — dressmakers, milliners, embroiderers — to make them teachers of cutting and sewing, or peasant women for the more strenuous tasks. They were undoubtedly driven to this choice by a practical criterion: those were the people needed. But there was also a deeper reason: it is much easier to find among the poor the two inestimable treasures of the spirit of humility and the spirit of sacrifice.

Towards the end of the year the group of teachers must have already been formed; so much so that on December 30, 1836, Gaspardis donated her own credit toward the house as a dowry for the new community, defined by Tommaseo as a « *free order placed under the protection of Saint Cajetan* ».

February 1, 1837

Father Scrosoppi left us, in a file written in his own hand, five accurate lists of the *Sisters of Provvidenza* from their birth until almost his death: those of the aspirants, the novices, those admitted to the donning of the habit, the professed, and the deceased sisters.

He is extremely precise in fixing February 1, 1837 (the beginning of the community journey) as the start date of the new community: and from that day he begins the period of trial and the novitiate of the first religious women.

They were nine, like the nine choirs of angels.

Here are their names, according to the chronological order of joining: Margherita Gaspardis, Teresa Fabris, Lucia De Giorgio, Orsola Baldasso, Felicita Calligaris, Rosa Molinis, Caterina Bros, and the two sisters Cristina and Amalia Borghese. Of these, seven were teachers and two were assigned to domestic services, namely Baldasso — the one who led the little donkey — and Bros.

We believe that some religious ceremony was celebrated, almost to place a sacred seal on that group of generous souls; perhaps a promise of dedication to the glory of God and the well-being of the orphans, along with docile obedience to the Director of the house. However, we know nothing certain about it.

Only two things are sure.

Namely, that the nine foundresses renounced the gold jewelry they wore to embrace simplicity, defined as « *straightforwardness* » in the regulations. In the early times, the small chains were only left as security at the pawnshop (*monte di pietà*), because someone might have decided to withdraw from the Institute. Later they were sold: from that of Gaspardis, for example, 60 lire were obtained and from that of Fabris 42.18 lire.

The other detail is that from the beginning a habit was adopted, sometimes called « *of brown color* », at other times « *of dark coffee color* », as we have already mentioned.

The story of the « *cospettina* »

Among the first nine was therefore also Sister Cristina Borghese [(1)], destined to become a pillar of the congregation. She was later superior, from 1858 to 1890, of the sisters engaged at the hospital of *Portogruaro*: there Tinti knew her, and he left us a testimony of her full of admiration.

Sister Cristina loved to enrich her speeches with a smiling interjection: « *cospettina* » here and « *cospettina* » there.

Here is how she herself handed down to us the account of her entry into the community on that February 1, 1837; a narration she gave in old age to the younger sisters.

[1] Borghese Cristina (1805-1891) and Borghese Amalia (1809-1855) sisters from Udine, belonged to the group of the first nine young women. The former donned the habit and professed her vows on Christmas 1845 and took the name of Sister Cristina of the Crucifix, died in Udine; the second, probably having returned to her family for caregiving reasons, donned the habit on December 25, 1848, professed on April 11, 1852 and became Sister Gioseffa of Jesus Crucified. She died in Udine on July 31, 1855. For notes on Sister Cristina see Cenni biografici della vita edificante delle nostre amate Consorelle, manuscript, volume I, pp. 216-276 (A.L.S.).

She and her sister were going up from their home in *via Aquileia* toward the *House of the derelitte*, both laden with their few things. Along the way they had a brief dialogue between them that Mother Cristina, by then elderly, took pleasure in recounting.

« *What do you think* — she said to her sister — *what do you think, dear Amalia, of the kind of life we have voluntarily chosen to embrace?* »

And Amalia, all pouting, replied:

« *For God's sake, what a life is ours! Living all day with those little devils of girls seems impossible to me. Oh, I fear I will not be able to resist* ».

« *And did not the teacher Margherita tell us on the first day* — Cristina repeated — *that inside there it is a true place of suffering (that is: a purgatory)? We did not want to believe it, but truly I too fear not resisting an entire year* ».

And the good Mother Cristina concluded her story saying:

« *Truly, we had just finished those complaints when Father Carlo arrived behind us, following us without our knowledge. Cospettina* — it was Mother Borghese's interjection — , *cospettina, what a surprise that was for us. As soon as he reached us, he greeted us and then addressed these precise words to us:*

Oh sisters, let us go to Calvary! » (that is: toward a path of sacrifice and suffering).

« *I believe* — continued Mother Cristina — *that the good God, showing us mercy, placed those holy words on the lips of the excellent Father, because they reached our hearts directly; and from that moment our decision to follow Jesus to Calvary, remaining in the institute, was made with joy and without other regrets* ».

In reality, Mother Cristina was constant, because she always remained in the congregation until her holy death, which occurred on September 5, 1891. What importance and meaning she, and with her the first sisters, attributed to February 1, 1837, is clearly demonstrated by the fact that on February 1, 1887, the fiftieth anniversary of her religious life was celebrated. And Tinti recounts that she still carefully preserved her first religious habit from half a century before. Her sister Amalia, instead, either for family reasons or for health reasons, left the congregation for some years, since she would receive the donning of the habit only in 1848 and the profession in 1852, dying at almost forty-six years of age, due to cholera, on July 31, 1855.

Negotiations with the Canossians

When the construction of the house had only just begun, Father Carlo had held meetings with the Blessed Maddalena Gabriella, Marchioness of *Canossa* [2], foundress of the *Daughters of Charity* in *Verona*; she had promised him to take on the management of the

[2] Veronese (1774-1835), distant descendant of Countess Matilda of Canossa who in the 11th century was at the center of the struggle between papacy and empire. In 1801 she began her tireless and luminous apostolate among poor and abandoned girls in danger and, for this purpose, founded the Daughters of Charity. She was declared blessed in 1941. (Cf. Bibliotheca Sanctorum, Rome 1963, vol. III, pp. 751-753).

work, assuring indeed that she would come in person to Udine to inaugurate it. However, the Blessed died on April 10, 1835, and from that moment every initiative remained suspended.

Later, around the two brothers, that small group of devout girls had gathered. One could certainly not doubt their generosity, but how could one hope to be able to constitute a religious community with elements so different in age? In 1837 the eldest, Gaspardis, was fifty-one years old and the youngest, De Giorgio, had not yet reached eighteen. They were certainly all excellent women but — so to speak — devoid of formation. In common they had only a certain skill in domestic work and a great desire to do good.

Above all Father Carlo must have nurtured higher requirements. And *don* Luigi, who at that time was only thirty-three years old, certainly adhered for a certain period to his brother's criteria. We must admire the prudence and spirit of sacrifice of the two founders, who turned to already existing congregations in order to guarantee the functioning and duration of their initiative of charity.

There existed in *San Vito al Tagliamento* since the early eighteenth century — and it still exists — a monastery of Sisters of the Visitation, of which Mother Marianna Teresa, daughter of Count Domenico Cossali of *Verona* and of Teresa of the Counts Ridolfi, was then Superior. Father Carlo was linked to that monastery by the common devotion to St. Francis de Sales and certainly had preached and exercised there his known capacity in spiritual guidance, since it is written of him that « *he was often sent to nuns or religious women, both of our Udinese diocese and of others, as an extraordinary confessor* ».

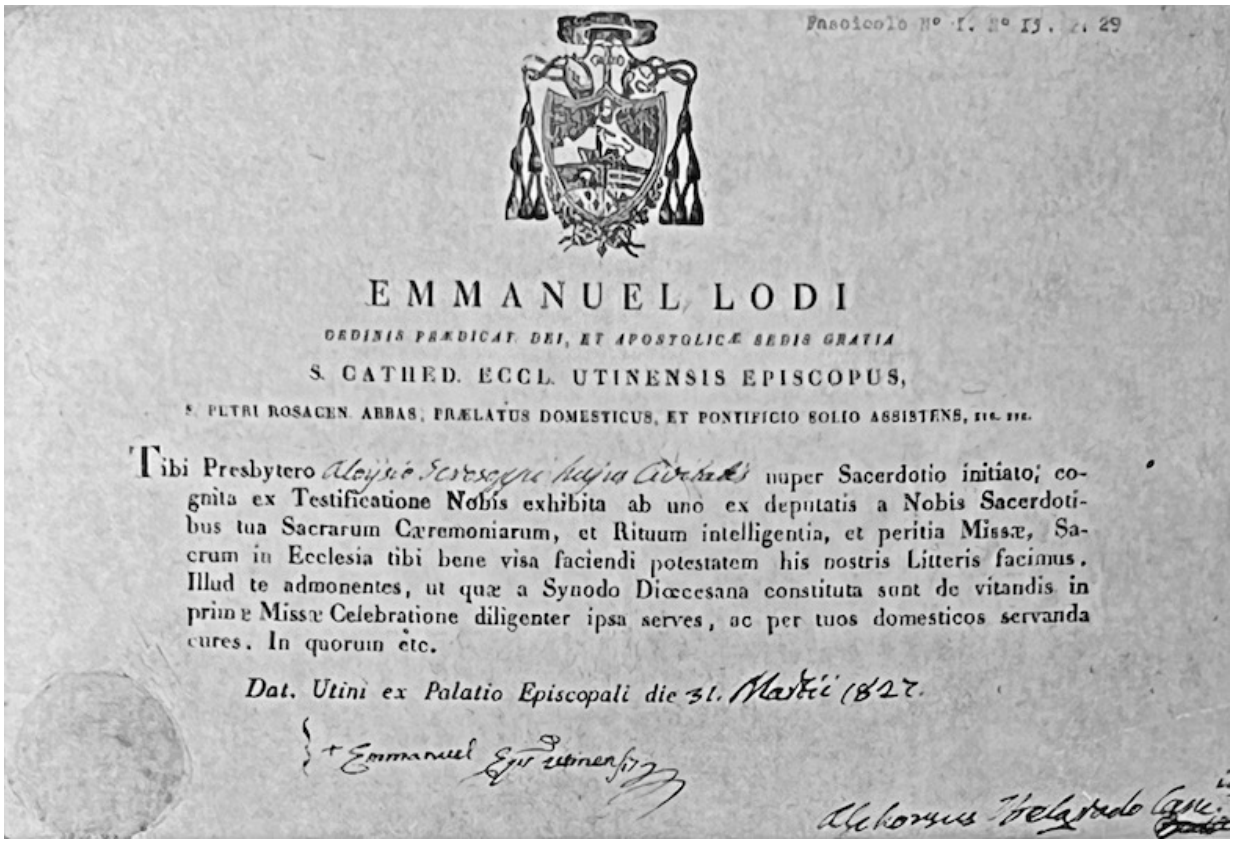
From a letter sent to him by Sister Cossali on October 11, 1836, we know that Father Carlo was then negotiating with two congregations. We do not know the name of one; it, however, must have made excessive requests and, on the other hand, did not correspond to the aims that Filaferro proposed to himself. « *It does not surprise me at all* — Cossali wrote to him — *that the information received did not satisfy you, since I myself did not consider it suitable for your ideas. If foundations must be so easy in their principles, few certainly will be realized. Those of Saint Teresa were very different, and equally ours* ».

the institute of such sisters, Cossali added, was « *dedicated internally to the not only careful but complete education of girls from good and aristocratic families... The educators are religious women with solemn vows and subject to cloister* ».

There was nothing to be done, therefore, in that direction.

Father Carlo had simultaneously resumed negotiations with Mother Angela Bragato, Superior of the *Daughters of Charity*, who succeeded the Blessed Maddalena *di Canossa*. Bragato had written to him on October 2, 1836, submitting nine conditions to him. Once again Mother Cossali intervened, helped by the Veronese Priest Zamboni, in the hope of obtaining some concession. However, the attempt did not succeed. Perhaps because, as Bragato had written, « *negotiations and offers for new foundations are so numerous that I do not know how to face them all* ». In her letter, Mother Bragato hints at the fact that Father Carlo himself had gone to *Verona* and, not having found her, had left a writing in which he requested information on the congregation of the *Daughters of Charity* in the

name of a « *most zealous priest* », namely *don* Scrosoppi, and of other « *most devout persons* », that is: the male and female protectors of the house.



Fascicolo N° I. N° 13. 2. 29

EMMANUEL LODI

ORDINIS PRÆDICAT. DEI, ET APOSTOLICÆ SEDIS GRATIA

S. CATHED. ECCL. UTINENSIS EPISCOPUS,

S. PETRI ROSACEN. ABBAS, PRÆLATUS DOMESTICUS, ET PONTIFICIO SOLIO ASSISTENS, etc. etc.

Tibi Presbytero Aloysio Scrosoppi huius Civitatis nuper Sacerdotio initiato; cognita ex Testificatione Nobis exhibita ab uno ex deputatis a Nobis Sacerdotibus tua Sacrarum Cæremoniarum, et Rituum intelligentia, et peritia Missæ, Sacrum in Ecclesia tibi bene visa faciendi potestatem his nostris Litteris facimus. Illud te admonentes, ut quæ a Synodo Diœcesana constituta sunt de vitandis in primæ Missæ Celebratione diligenter ipsa serves, ac per tuos domesticos servanda cures. In quorum etc.

Dat. Utini ex Palatio Episcopali die 31. Martii 1827.

† Emmanuel Epus Utinensis

Alchomus Delegatus Cancellarius

Certificate of promotion to the priesthood of the deacon Luigi

Udine Cathedral: Luigi received Holy Orders here from the hands of the Bishop Emmanuele Lodi

Don Luigi also visited some convents of the Canossians and remained admired by the spirit that reigned there, especially regarding poverty. He remained always very linked to the *Daughters of Charity*. Some twenty years later he sent two sisters to the Canossians to learn the art of educating deaf persons (that is: the deaf-mutes); and when the houses of the congregation increased and his religious women were forced to travel, he wanted them to stop in the Canossian convents to learn from their example — he said — the perfect way of living poverty.

A new superior

Those attempts having failed, the two brothers resigned themselves to opening the house and continuing with their small group of teachers, of whom Margherita Gaspardis was the Superior from February 1, 1837.

The life of the small community continued serenely for four years, regulated by the regulations presented to the Empress in 1838. Furthermore, in those years no desire for expansion or search for new followers is noted, since only three other aspirants joined the first nine, as collaborators or tertiaries, all three in the period between June 1837 and March 1838.

However, the need to give the community a better structure and a deeper formation was clearly felt. It was therefore appropriate for someone who already had experience of religious life to take its lead.

On October 17, 1824, Countess Giulia *di Colloredo*, who had taken the name of Sister Giovanna Francesca, had entered the nearby *convent of the noble Dimesse sisters*. Toward the end of 1840 or in early 1841, she manifested the desire to transfer to the *House of the derelitte*. Perhaps Father Carlo had set his eyes on her and will have been assisted by his friend *don* Ongaro from *Gemona*[3], who was the confessor of the *Dimesse*: it is possible that the government commissioner of the *House of the derelitte*, Count Fabio Colloredo [4], also exercised his influence there.

The transition did not occur without strong contrasts, both on the part of the Superior of the *Dimesse*, the noble Sister Regina Rinoldi, and on the part of the Bishop Monsignor Lodi himself. Finally, the difficulties were overcome and Sister Giovanna Colloredo entered among the young women of the institute on October 27, 1841.

The new Superior was thus ready, and Margherita Gaspardis hastened to present her resignation with admirable simplicity.

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[3] Native of Gemona del Friuli (1778-1857), he was a teacher in Udine in the Toppo college (originally founded by Count Francesco di Toppo to help poor young students), confessor of the Dimesse sisters from 1832 to 1855, when, by then elderly and sick, he retired to his native Gemona.

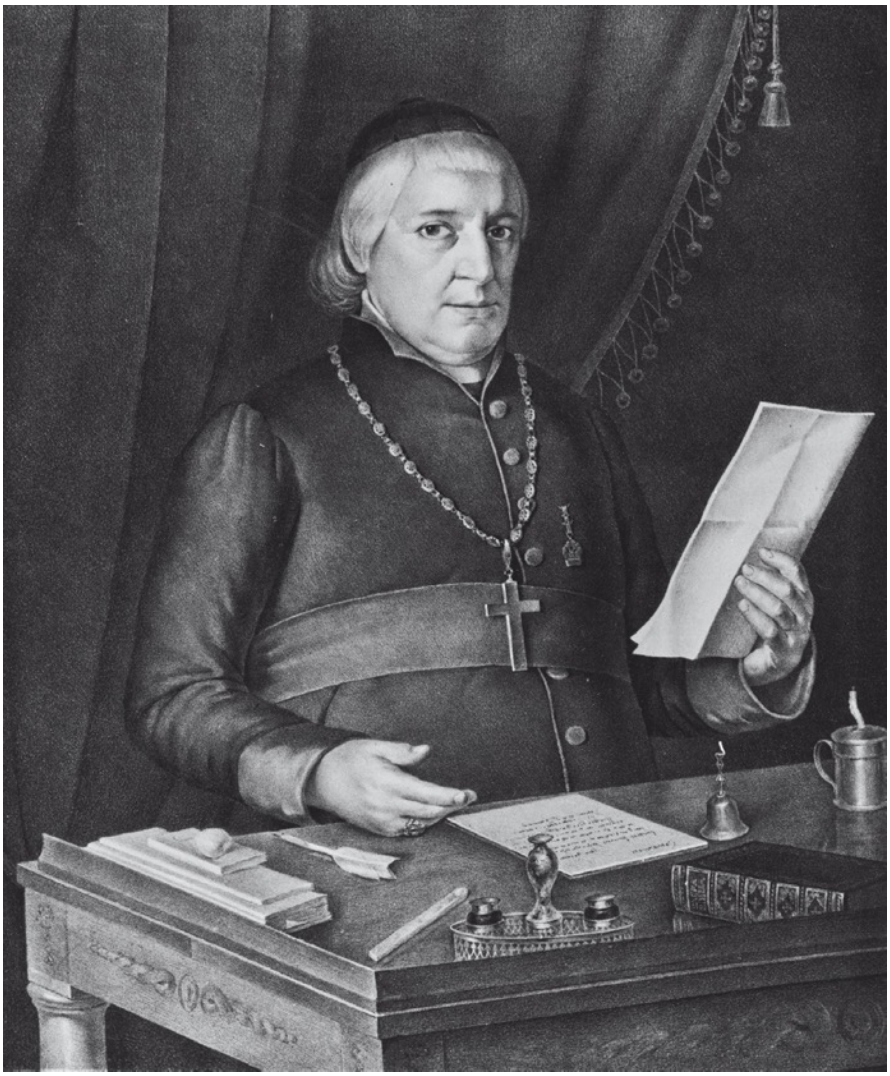
[4] The hypothesis that Count Fabio Colloredo influenced the transition of Sister Giovanna Francesca Colloredo from the Dimesse sisters to the House of the *derelitte* is probable: the sister descended from the same family as the count, that is, from a secondary line of the branch of Bernardo (brother of Vicardo, from whom Count Fabio came). She was born in Udine in January 1803, daughter of Filippo Angelo (1776-1853), a contemporary of his relative Fabio, and of Laura Countess Belgrado; she died in Portogruaro on October 4, 1871, while assisting smallpox patients. (Genealogies, Fondo Joppi, Municipal Library of Udine).

Monsignor Lodi wrote, however, on December 10, 1841, this beautiful letter to Father Filaferro:

« *The renunciation of the office of superior by the teacher Mrs. Margherita Gaspardis, if it adds a new merit to that untiring and exemplary zeal with which she has carried out the task from the foundation of this praiseworthy institute until today, nevertheless imposes on me the duty to carefully evaluate the cessation from the rank of superior of a person so worthy of praise, and to carefully seek someone who can worthily replace her.*

And it is for such a delicate and important objective that I deem it appropriate that the formal appointment of the new superior, to be elected and instituted according to the regulations of the institute, be postponed at least until the first week of Lent in 1842, invoking in the meantime the special guidance of the Holy Spirit so as not to err in the choice. »

This document is precious for praising Gaspardis, but in it we seem to discern a certain hesitation on the part of the Bishop, and perhaps not only his, in the choice of the new Superior.



Bishop Emmanuele Lodi (1770-1845), Bishop of Udine from 1819 to 1845.
Author of the portrait: Giuseppe Malignani
(Photographic archive of the Civic Museums of Udine).

The Bishop's will was fully respected. Indeed, the election was held on March 18, 1842, the eve of St. Joseph and — in that year — two days before Palm Sunday. Colloredo was elected unanimously, and Monsignor Lodi confirmed her appointment on the same day. On the Tuesday after *Dominica in Albis* (that is: the first Sunday after Easter), April 5, 1842, Father Carlo proposed that Gaspardis be declared « *elder for life* » and the proposal was accepted unanimously. They then proceeded to the election of the four elder counselors for the next three-year period, and among them Cristina Borghese (1) was appointed assistant or vice-superior.

Everything seemed resolved; however, in the course of 1842 and 1843 difficulties arose. Perhaps the very difference in social class and formation of the new Superior was not helpful, but rather represented a negative factor. It is certain, indeed, that the two brothers decided to resume negotiations with an already consolidated religious order.

Humble and industrious Sisters

At this point, an episode of vocation that is as opportune as it is sweet is inserted. It is opportune to interrupt the austere narration of the complicated toils linked to the internal organization of the house. It is happy because, in our opinion, it allows us to understand concretely what kind of man *don* Luigi was and what his vision of religious life was.

Only two weeks had passed since the election of Colloredo when *don* Luigi brought into the congregation a poor girl of about twenty-two years, daughter of unknown parents. He called her as he was descending from *Ronchi street* to go to the farm of the house.

Tinti recounts: « *Wonderful was the way in which the Lord attracted the young Giovanna Maria to the institute as a sister assigned to manual labor. Father Luigi, passing one day through a street and meeting this girl who, sitting at the door of her house, was intent on carding wool, without other words said to her:*

Good young woman, if you wished to lend your work in the House of the derelitte you would not lack work; come then and you will not repent it. To the sudden invitation, Giovanna replies that it is impossible for her to set foot in the institute, alluding to her own origins, but since Father Luigi insisted that she should not hesitate, she yielded out of pure respect toward the estimable Priest. She accepted for a few days only, with the aim of working for free for the benefit of the orphans, but with the firm intention of returning shortly after to civil life.

Those few days, by an extraordinary divine disposition, were transformed into forty long years of exemplary religious conduct, lived in the community with the admiration of all, until in January 1885 Giovanna Maria went up to receive from the celestial Spouse the prize of so many of her virtues. »

Maria entered as an aspirant on April 3, 1842. Probably *don* Luigi invited her because the silkworm breeding season was near and arms were needed; perhaps he then imposed on her the name of Sister Giovanna Maria of *Saint Isidore* precisely because she remained assigned to agricultural labor. In any case, from that day the Superior Countess

Giovanna, of illustrious origins, was well balanced in the house by Sister Giovanna, of humble origins and assigned to material services.

At that time, inviting a person born out of wedlock to be part of a religious congregation was a gesture of courageous charity. *Don* Scrosoppi did it because he possessed the intuition of hearts. That poor daughter thus knew the incomparable warmth of a holy family and could serve the Heavenly Father with joy.

The episode has a deeper meaning. It was undoubtedly Father Carlo who called the teachers; *don* Luigi reserved for himself the joy of calling the humble sisters, the untiring workers of the house. He thought that everyone must and can serve the good God and that simple people often succeed better. To serve the poor, moreover, who is more suitable than the poor themselves? Do you remember how he had called that dear and simple woman of Sister Orsola? Now it is the turn of poor Sister Giovanna.

And they were not the only ones. On June 12, 1837, a certain Giovanna Ariis had arrived from *Raveo*, in *Carnia*, who died as a lay sister — that is: a tertiary — in 1849 [5].

On March 15, 1838, another woman from *Carnia*, Maria Maddalena Morassi [6] from *Zovello*, had entered the congregation and became the lively and joyful soul of the house.

Tinti traces of her this pleasant profile: « *She left a most grateful memory of herself in the institute. Untiring in toils, she felt all inflamed with divine love and gave herself over to sacred songs on every occasion. Although Father Luigi had imposed a ban on her, she, with her simplicity and confidence, continued to sing in front of the Father's door; he corrected her and imposed penances, humbling her adequately, while she, happy for the love of Jesus, accepted every trial with joy.* »

Can you imagine that woman from *Carnia* walking and singing through the house as if she were on her native mountains? Let's hope she had a beautiful voice!

« *Oh, stop it, Maddalena, I told you so many times. For penance you will go to the chapel to pray on your knees on the floor for half an hour.* »

« *Yes, Father, immediately.* »

And maybe she would start singing there too. She died of lymph node tuberculosis, which at that time was very widespread, on September 29, 1852, at only forty-three years of age.

Another young woman arrived from *Buia* on June 2, 1844, driven probably by the example of Sister Orsola.

Her name was Domenica Batigello and she received the habit on December 25, 1845, but later the Founder wanted her to remain a simple lay sister — that is: a tertiary —, so that she could dedicate herself to the collection of alms for the orphans. Her brother

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[5] For the category of « tertiaries » see part III, chap. 4, paragraph "*The Roman amendments*". Currently no division exists.

[6] Sister Maria Maddalena, sister assigned to manual labor (lay sister), born on January 18, 1808, entered the congregation on March 15, 1838, received the habit and professed her vows on December 25, 1845, died in Udine on September 29, 1852.

Angelo did not have the means to pay for her entry dowry into the convent. What did he do then? He sold an ox and delivered to the Father the eighty lire he had earned from it. How generous the honest poor are! Of Sister Domenica the *Biographical Sketches* [7] write thus:

« *The years were scarce of harvests and, having to maintain so many orphans for free and for love, as they say, it often happened that the poor sisters, in order not to let the girls lack anything, had to reduce their own food, already poor and coarse. Then the meal of the sisters usually consisted of barley soup, flours, polenta, few side dishes and little bread. At times even the bread was collected by Domenica Batigello, a devout and charitable person considered by Father Luigi as visible providence, because going often through the noble houses, she asked for what was most necessary for the orphans, in addition to some appropriate refreshment for the sick.* »

Sister Domenica died at 68 years of age on April 11, 1881. The Founder, on the same day, gave news of it to the various houses with these words:

« *I come from the bedside of the good sister Maria Domenica, who just now has been called to Himself by the Lord. She endured the illness with exemplary patience, she had such a quiet and peaceful death, truly enviable. She was always admirable in the practices of piety and devotion, untiring in her duties and so solicitous for the good of the congregation. May the Lord make her a participant in His happiness. It is up to us, however, to offer her the prayers of suffrage provided by the holy rules.* »

From these humble fragments of modest lives could true religious women ever be formed? *don* Luigi was convinced they could. However, he did not oppose his brother Father Carlo when the latter turned to the famous philosopher from *Rovereto* and most pious Priest, the Abbot Antonio Rosmini, so that he might send to Udine some of the *Sisters of Providence* organized by him in the *Kingdom of Sardinia*.

Negotiations with the Abbot Antonio Rosmini

Father Carlo had a first interview with the Abbot Rosmini in *Benaglio* in September 1843. Once back in Udine, he asked for and obtained the authorization of the Bishop, who « *showed himself to be completely convinced* », as Filaferro wrote to Rosmini, while requesting more detailed information on those Sisters.

For this purpose *don* Luigi immediately went to *Stresa*, accompanied on the journey by *don* Andrea Casasola, at the time a professor in the seminary of Udine and later Bishop of *Concordia* and Archbishop of the Friulian city.

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[7] The "*Biographical sketches of the edifying life of our beloved Sisters*," manuscripts, are two volumes reproduced in multiple copies (polygraph) of 390 and 442 pages, anonymous, but the author is Sister Maria Gonzaga di Rosa Mistica (1878-1951), born Rosa Maria Fabrizio of Oderzo (Treviso). Although their purpose was to contribute to the sanctification of present and future sisters, critical examination allows us to affirm that the author is attentive to chronological accuracy and, in general, is reliable, as she drew from direct testimonies and addressed readers (the sisters), many of whom could confirm or deny what she wrote.

Portrait of the philosopher Abbot Antonio Rosmini with whom Father Carlo and the Scrosoppi brothers had frequent contacts.

The negotiations to obtain the collaboration of the Rosminian Sisters lasted for over three years; it would be long and superfluous to retrace here every difficult passage of that period. We report only the essential traits.

On December 18, 1843 — immediately after the return of *don* Scrosoppi from *Stresa* — Father Carlo wrote to Monsignor Bragato, the court prelate to whom he relied as an intermediary, so that he might support the request with the Empress Maria Anna (Anna Maria Carolina). To the letter he added this interesting final note:

« *Oh, if it were possible, given that the House of the derelitte of Udine is an entirely private institution, free by sovereign grace from the control of the administrative authority, to obtain these good religious women without the always long and complicated interference of those bureaucratic offices! You, Monsignor, understand the situation well. Please excuse me!* »

Naturally, Filaferro's wish remained entirely unfulfilled.

In a note of February 7, 1845, prepared for a letter from the government commissioner Count Fabio Colloredo which was to accompany a long informative report on the house

intended for the government, the reason why the Rosminians were desired in Udine is clearly explained.

« *I take the liberty of adding* — Count Colloredo wrote — *that I fully agree with the opinions expressed by the directors regarding the Sisters of Providence; I consider these religious women, recently established but now very famous, extremely suitable for perfecting our institute of the derelitte. In fact, however much the current teachers are excellent of heart and very capable, having been gathered from different backgrounds and lacking a uniform education, they end up differing in principles and manners. They cannot therefore guarantee those results that would undoubtedly derive from a union of persons prepared by the same vocation and instruction for every type of charitable work, especially for the assistance and instruction of the daughters of the poor.* »

Only on September 22, 1846, was the Emperor's permission granted for the introduction of the Rosminians in Udine, but in a form that appeared rather ambiguous to the two brothers.

Father Carlo immediately sent the text of the sovereign decree — which we do not know today — to the Abbot Rosmini. The latter replied from *Stresa* on December 22:

« *I have examined the imperial decree regarding our sisters and I too find some obscurities in it. These uncertainties can perhaps be clarified in the future with further contacts.* »

Thus, more time wasted, new negotiations, and administrative delays.

Rosmini continued at length, explaining his own ideas on the organization of the Sisters in Udine. Substantially, it appeared clear that his main interest was the creation of a new training center (a novitiate) for his religious women.

« *One could separate* — he said — *the work of the derelitte from that of the novitiate; in this way the novitiate would remain subject to the authority of the government, from which I foresee it will be very difficult to free oneself, while on the contrary the House of the derelitte could maintain the privileges it currently enjoys and remain exempt from the control of the guardianship authority.* »

Father Carlo and especially *don* Luigi certainly thought: — How? Return under government control after so much effort made to be independent of it?

And it was precisely this, one can believe, one of the main reasons that pushed them to abandon the negotiations with Rosmini. Probably the troubled personal events of the Abbot of *Rovereto* also influenced it. His philosophical doctrines were already starting to be the subject of harsh polemics and immediately after he was deeply involved in the political events of the time. Moreover, with the winds that were blowing, it was neither easy nor advisable to transfer to Austrian territory a congregation coming from the *Kingdom of Sardinia* and led by Rosmini, a figure unwelcome to Austria.

To the Rosminians, therefore, the two brothers thought no more. The Austrian bureaucracy, however, did not forget the file. It requested new information on February 22, 1847, and January 10, 1848; and — having received no response — returned to the question in extremis on October 12, 1865!

On October 19 of that year, a declaration signed by the Archbishop Casasola, the government commissioner Count Federico Trento, and the Director Father Luigi Scrosoppi was sent to the prefecture. In it, it was stated that, « *given the many difficulties raised by Rosmini in joining his own religious women to those already present in the house and noting, on the other hand, how ours were already profitably dedicating themselves to the regular management of the institute, the direction and the presidency decided to interrupt any further exchange of documents and negotiation with the Abbot Rosmini.* »

Lest the Austrian government should again seek to interfere, they insisted on declaring that the *Sisters of Providence* of Udine were the same religious women who had given life to the *House of the derelitte* from the beginning and who had been approved, together with the regulations, by the sovereign resolution of July 6, 1839; finally, they did not fail to list, with vibrant style, the merits by now acquired by these Sisters starting from 1848.

Towards a congregation of their own

Whoever reflects on the ten years of negotiations with the Canossian Sisters and with the Abbot Rosmini will certainly share Tinti's reflection:

« *It is certain that in this way divine Providence acted in an admirable and gentle manner, so that the congregation of the Sisters of Providence of Udine should not be a derivation of another motherhouse, but should have its own origin and perfect autonomy.*

This was the thought of Father Luigi Scrosoppi — Tinti continues — *and, although out of respect for his older brother, who surpassed him by many years, he never opposed his projects, yet he could not convince himself of the necessity of subjecting the institute to the government of another pious congregation, firm in the idea, or rather in a strong inspiration, of founding a religious congregation of his own. Despite this, perfect harmony was always maintained between the two brothers, because where charity reigns, difference of opinion does not divide hearts nor take away peace of mind: all the more so since Father Carlo himself, a man of living faith, recognized in these failed projects of his the truth of the proverb that says: man proposes and God disposes, always understood for the best.* »

Tinti draws this information and these impressions from the living voice of sisters contemporary to the founder, in particular from Sister Giacinta De Monte [8], an admirable religious woman in many respects, but inclined to give much emphasis to her own account.

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[8] De Monte Angela (Sister Maria Giacinta di san Michele) born in Artegna (Udine) on July 22, 1814, entered the congregation on July 15, 1846, donned the habit on August 7, 1847, professed her vows on August 6, 1851, died in Udine on December 27, 1896. She is the first in the history of the congregation to assume a new name at the investment. In "*Memories of the Servant of God Father Luigi*", narrated by Sister Giacinta to an anonymous writer, it appears that she was at the center of some events; alone among her companions she had been willing to join the Rosminian sisters who were to come to manage the House of the *derelitte*; based on an answer of hers, given while assisting a sick person, the title of the congregation arose; she was made to wear what was to be the habit of the sisters. (Cf. folder 29, document 7, pp. 38-46, A.L.S.; L. TINTI, o.c., pp. 46, 59-60). For notes on Sister Giacinta, see Biographical Sketches..., manuscript, volume I, pp. 277-282).

In our opinion, in the context of the facts and of the spiritual figure of *don* Luigi, the attribution of « *a strong inspiration to constitute his own religious congregation* » must be downsized.

He, being very humble and most devoted to his brother, fully shared his directives and worked to realize them as long as their implementation seemed possible.

Even on his deathbed he would refuse the title of founder, defining himself as a simple executor of Father Carlo's intentions.

However, towards the end of 1844 and the beginning of 1845, his clear and decisive realism and his great confidence took the upper hand in him.

When he saw that matters were dragging on and indeed becoming more complicated along the way; when he saw that at every step the fear of government interference reappeared; when he saw that dealing with others, especially with Rosmini, led to problems and troubles greater than those already present in the house; when he saw all this, his character must have pushed him to say to his brother:

« *Why do we seek complications? Let us go forward with simplicity as we have done so far. Instead of seeking the ideal solution, difficult and uncertain to reach, let us be satisfied with improving the little we already have in our hands...* ».

A tender human and Christian feeling toward the first generous teachers, together with the confidence that God's grace would perform wonders with poor means, certainly pushed him to say:

« *God sent us these souls. They may be uneducated and simple, but they love God and have already sacrificed much for the orphans. Let us have faith in God and confidence in them...* ».

At a certain point, clarity came from the teachers themselves. Already in the report of February 7, 1845, it was said that a part of them intended to return to lay life if the Rosminians arrived, while another part was willing to join the novices. Tinti reports that only one accepted the fusion with the Rosminians — and De Monte assures that it was precisely her —, while all the others, together with *don* Luigi, were displeased by it.

If there was a momentary divergence of views between the two brothers, it is certain, however, that Father Carlo willingly accepted the opinion of *don* Luigi and the teachers; indeed, he set himself with commitment to writing the rules of the new community.

The congregation is born beside the cradle of the Child Jesus

Having finished her three-year term as Superior months prior, Sister Giovanna Colloredo presented her resignation to the Vicar of the diocese during the period of vacancy of the see (that is: the Capitular Vicar *sede vacante*), Monsignor Mariano Darù [(9)], who communicated it to Father Carlo on September 10, 1845.

[9] Born in Pozzale di Cadore in 1772, died in Udine in 1853. Teacher in the lower classes of the Udinese seminary, professor of moral and dogmatic theology, rapporteur, with his gentle and zealous regime he made discipline lovable;

« *I have decided to accept them* — he wrote to him — *as of today's date, given that motives of conscience, which do honor to her great virtue, have prompted her to this step.* »

Monsignor Darù charged Filaferro to provide for the temporary guidance of the house in the best way, reserving the appointment of the new Superior to the future Bishop.

On December 25, 1845, Christmas Day, « *authorized by the diocesan superior* », fifteen Sisters received the religious habit. Of these, eight were the foundresses of February 1, 1837 — only Amalia Borghese was missing, who re-entered the congregation shortly after — and seven were those who had joined between 1837 and 1844.

On the same day, eleven out of fifteen « *without committing themselves with formal vows, firmly proposed to observe with all commitment the three virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience* ».

Although they did not pronounce solemn vows, that December 25 was later considered by Father Luigi as the date of their religious profession. Of the eleven, eight were the « *coriste* » (that is: Sisters dedicated to the divine office and teaching): De Giorgio, Cortelazzis, Gaspardis, Colloredo, Fabris, Molinis and Cristina Borghese; three were the « *converse* » (that is: Sisters assigned to manual labor): Baldasso, Morassi and Maria (6). Lucia De Giorgio was appointed « *provisional* » Superior and held the office until 1848, while Cortelazzis was chosen as Assistant or Vice-Superior.

The provisional nature of the office of Superior is due to the fact that the new congregation was established, for that moment, only as an experiment. The experiment succeeded excellently. An increased fervor spread through the small group and a strong spirit of union made it compact.

This happy result is to be attributed in large part to *don* Scrosoppi, who — as we have already said — spent the entire day dealing with spiritual matters to form the Sisters according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. However, a good part of the merit belonged to the new Superior Sister Lucia De Giorgio [(10)].

She was the youngest among all the teachers; at Christmas 1845 she was only twenty-six and a half years old. We do not know much about her, but she must certainly have possessed exceptional qualities, if she remained Superior for ten years until her death, which occurred while assisting the sick during the cholera epidemic of 1855; if together with Father Luigi she gave life and form to the nascent congregation; if she, although being the youngest, was capable of uniting in a single heart the older Sisters so different in age, social background and formation; and if her memory remained indelible and almost surrounded by an aura of sanctity.

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for a few years Parish Priest of Valle di Cadore and Archdeacon. Having returned to Udine, he was Canon theologian, Vicar General for a quarter of a century, twice Capitular Vicar. Much doctrine and great charity gave his action of government an incomparable prestige. (Cf. Atti del Capitolo, volume X (1839-1858), e. 204, A.C.U.).

[10] Born in Udine on January 24, 1819, she belonged to the group of the first nine young women, died on July 28, 1855. She does not belong to the branch of the De Giorgio family coming from Plasencis. On Sister Lucia see part III, chapter 2, paragraph "*The superior mother Lucia De Giorgio...*".

Objections to the rules by Abbot Pirona

Throughout 1847 the drafting of the rules was now concluded. Without doubt the new Archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Zaccaria Bricito [(11)], approved them before they were presented — as was mandatory — to the revision of the Imperial Royal Provincial Censor to authorize their printing.

In that period the censor was the famous Abbot Jacopo Pirona [(12)], a teacher at the classical high school of Udine: a man of profound culture and author of a vast literary production, whose fame is linked mainly to the *Vocabolario Friulano*, published after his death in 1870 and later, with content more than doubled, re-edited in 1935 with the title of *"Il nuovo Pirona"*.

He returned Father Filaferro's manuscript to the Archbishop on January 12, 1848, accompanying it with a letter in which the secular orientation and hostility toward religious life of the ancient style, sentiments then very widespread, clearly emerge.

« *All these rules* — he observed among other things — *which, judging by the title, would seem to aim at training teachers for the poor pupils, instead aim at transforming the teachers into a female monastic congregation under the absolute power of a visible superior and an invisible director. The spirit and customs of cloistered life, suitable only for particular vocations, will never form good mothers of families* ».

« *The poor girls, raised by such teachers and modeled by the influence of such rules, will one day emerge incapable of facing contact with the world with virtue; since they will know no middle ground between exasperated mysticism and corruption! Woe to those who raise walls of separation between the world and God!* »

« *The rules in question are undoubtedly dictated by a great desire for perfection; but if this desire, instead of sanctifying the institute, should by chance overturn and destroy it by changing its purpose, the benefactors who financed it and the city that awaits its fruits would find themselves painfully disappointed* ».

What there was to agree with in this synthetic judgment was totally annulled by Pirona's dramatic and catastrophic perspective on religious life and its presumed educational effects.

Father Carlo replied with a five-page writing to clarify some articles that had been marked with a red pencil, marks indicating that those passages were not to the full liking of the Imperial Royal official. Pirona had shown himself particularly hostile to the

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[11] Born in Bassano (Vicenza), died in Udine (1802-1851). Teacher of Greek philology and letters, of sacred eloquence, Archpriest of Bassano, Archbishop of Udine, he fulfilled his mission in full self-dedication. During political upheavals he suspended episcopal revenues, pledged precious items to the pawnshop, reduced his table to penitent treatment to succor the people. At his death the little remaining to him was for the poor of the House of Rest. (Cf. U. MASOTTI, L'Arcivescovo Bricito e l'assedio di Udine nel 1848, pp. 14-19, in Il 1848 in Friuli, Udine 1948).

[12] He was born in Dignano sul Tagliamento in 1789, died in Udine in 1870. The creation of a historical, artistic and scientific museum of Friuli was the aspiration of his whole life. When in 1866 it was officially established, he was appointed curator; but dissatisfied with its precarious arrangement, he abandoned the office. He was a diligent secretary of the Infant Asylum of Charity, patron of the Tomadini Orphanage, ready helper of every good work. (Cf. G. MARCHETTI, o. c., pp. 505-509).

articles regarding chastity and the so-called « *congregation of faults* » (that is: the assembly for the public accusation of failings).

Filaferro retorted that:

« *The founders and legislators of the rules always had the goal that the respective laws should serve to help the members in carrying out the work of charity provided for by their institute, and should be for them a protection against the uncertainties of the human heart, which easily grows bored with a predefined activity and often is distracted by the illusion of a better good* ».

Regarding his own rules, he declared:

« *I must furthermore premise that in the drafting of these norms I have kept in mind what other founders had established for the benefit of their institutes, such as the Salesians (of St. Francis de Sales), the Sisters of Providence (of Rosmini), the Dimesse ladies, the fathers of the Oratory, etc.; from those I drew the rules that seemed to me most suitable and appropriate for the general end of the sanctification of the teachers of the Institute of the derelitte and for the particular purpose of carrying out their specific work of charity* ».

In a previous draft he also mentioned the Jesuits, but in the final text he made no mention of them, since in that period a violent political storm was blowing again against the Society of Jesus.

The articles criticized by Pirona remained unchanged in the printed text, in which only a few corrections of minimal importance suggested by him were accepted.

The rules of 1848

Thus were sent to the press the « *General Rules for the teachers of the institute of abandoned girls* »: the result was a booklet of sixty pages, divided into 67 articles, instead of the 64 present in the original manuscript.

At first glance we remain surprised by the fact that the pamphlet does not bear the formal indications of the city, the printing house and the year of publication. This is explained by assuming that Abbot Jacopo Pirona did not grant official authorization and that, to avoid complications, the path of private printing was chosen to replace the manuscript.

The rules were divided into six chapters: chastity, poverty, obedience, submission toward all, instruments for exact and faithful observance, reasons for removal from the community.

Particularly significant is the chapter regarding the instruments, indicated as: the frequent reading of the rules, the chapter of faults (that is: the public accusation of failings to which the Superior herself was bound), correction between sisters, prayer, the exercise of the presence of God and the three comparisons. The latter consisted in contrasting every suffering or temptation with the thought of Hell, the passion of the Lord and the reward of Paradise.

A passage of the text indicates to us what was considered the pivot of the Sisters' formation:

« *Of the presence of God and the three comparisons let the sisters speak often among themselves; with these thoughts let them comfort each other and help each other in difficulties; let them use these to admonish each other; let them think of this continually, both when they are in health and when they are sick; thus they will obtain the grace to easily fulfill their duties and to observe the rules with true spirit and great merit during life...* »

In these words we find fully reflected that simple and essential spiritual discipline that was so dear to Father Scrosoppi.

This was, therefore, the first spiritual code of the congregation.

The «*Convocato a Capitolo* » of December 23, 1848

At Christmas 1848 the three-year trial period of the new congregation ended, lived with an ever-increasing enthusiasm.

Once the rules were established, nothing remained but to give legal recognition to the small community. But which path to choose?

Here we are faced with a small enigma which, however, is easily solved for us today.

It is evident that the two brothers never acted without the consent of the Bishop; all the more so since the prelate was, by statute, the president of the house. Yet no trace remains of any decree that authorized the three-year trial in 1845 or that sanctioned the stable birth of the new congregation in 1848. For what reason? Should we perhaps think that the document has been lost? Certainly not. We would find at least one reference to it in the registers where all the acts of the curia of Udine are noted. Furthermore, if it had existed, there would have been a thousand later occasions to cite that decree. Instead, only and always the imperial resolution of 1839 will be mentioned, which approved the *House of the derelitte* as an entirely private institute, in the words of Father Carlo.

The approval of the Church was granted, but only verbally.

And for a clear reason: at that time it was not possible to open a new religious house, and even less to found a congregation, without the permission of the Austrian imperial court. The curia could not have issued a decree in conflict with civil laws. If one wanted to avoid the interference of the political authority, only one way remained: to found the congregation in facts, but to avoid any handle or suspicion in the watchful eyes of the bureaucracy. For this reason, in the rules the terms « *congregation* » and « *sisters* » were never used, but only those of « *house* » and « *teachers* » or « *sisters* ».

One is surprised therefore that Father Carlo and *don* Luigi were later accused of having insistently sought legal recognition from Austria. Whether it was Austria or Italy, the matter was quite different. The critics were obviously people accustomed to distorting reality.

Yet a legal recognition was necessary to protect oneself, as Father Carlo said, from the uncertainties of the human heart.

Recourse was made, therefore, to a private notarized contract between the members of the community, which would bind them in a *de facto* association, especially regarding the common ownership of assets.

The contract was drawn up by the notary Dr. Andrea Bassi on Saturday, December 23, 1848, in twelve articles; it was signed by thirteen Sisters — nine dedicated to teaching and four to manual labor. It bears the title of « *Convocato a Capitolo* » (that is: Summoned to Chapter).

« *These ladies, chosen by Providence to assist this pious work in the education of poor abandoned girls of this royal city, have considered how by the grace of God this institute is consolidating and increasing, so that its duration over time no longer seems doubtful, and they have therefore united in fraternal charity in a single body under the protection of their patron Saint Cajetan* ».

Even if Sisters and congregation are not explicitly mentioned in this document either, the definition of « *Sisters of Saint Cajetan* » nevertheless recurs several times in the text.

From the list of names it appears that the prefix « *Maria* » had by then been adopted, perhaps since 1845; all, however, kept the name they had in the world, except for Cortelazzis and Colloredo, who appear with the religious name assumed among the Dominicans and the *Dimesse* respectively. Only in 1851 — with Sister Maria Giacinta De Monte and Sister Luigia Dario — was the custom of taking a new name for religious life introduced.

To the « *Convocato a Capitolo* » of December 23, 1848, the Sisters will always refer as the act of foundation of their community, until the Pope's approval in 1862.

Two days later, at Christmas, the election of the Superior and the other offices took place. Sister Lucia De Giorgio was confirmed, who had been provisional in the previous three-year period and will remain Superior until her death.

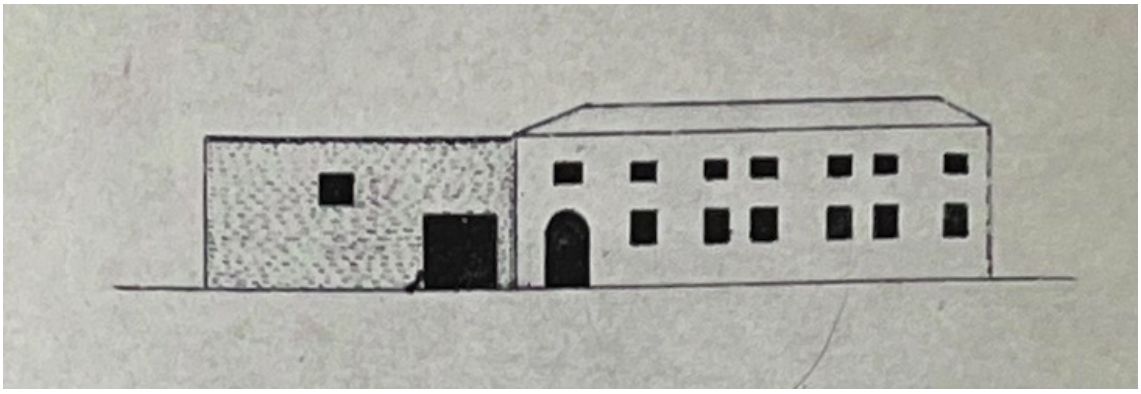
Thus the small ship of the congregation was by then spreading its sails to the wind of the good God: sails that had already been pushed by a breath of heroism in that tormented 1848.

A title and a habit

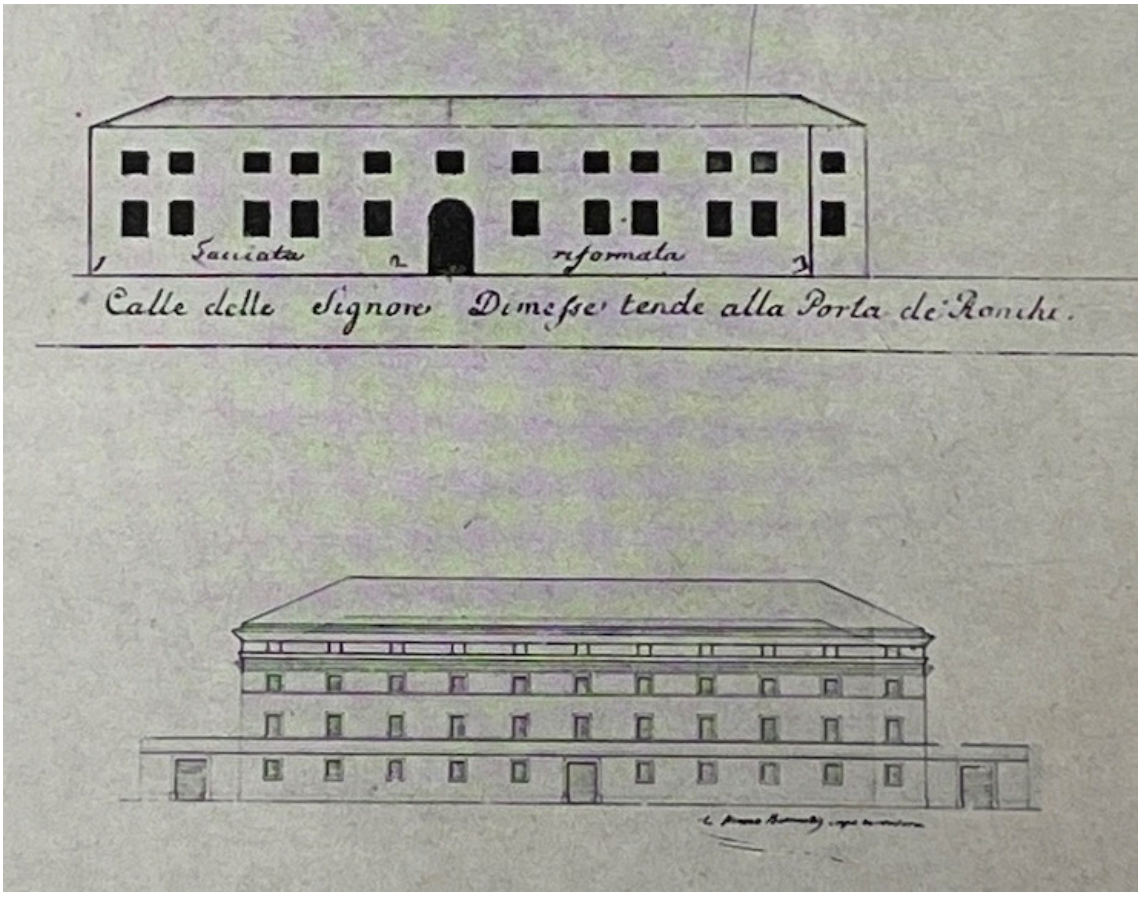
« *... of Saint Cajetan* » the Sisters are called in the document of December 23, 1848, but are they not perhaps « *of Providence* »? In reality, in the early times they were known as « *sisters of the poor little ones* », because they dedicated their care to the poor daughters of the people. For this reason, faced with the question of some Priests who asked her to which congregation she belonged, Sister Giacinta De Monte felt a bit embarrassed. « *We are under the protection of Saint Cajetan* » she replied after a moment of hesitation. She hastened to report the incident as soon as she returned home. The Father and the Sisters

immediately discussed the denomination and the title of « *Sisters of Providence* » was established.

Sister Giacinta was also the protagonist of another episode regarding the habit, as there was a bit of disagreement between the founder and the Sisters. She arrived from *Orzano* to Udine and, having been informed of the problem, she agreed to wear the habit chosen by her fellow Sisters. Thus dressed she was brought to the Father who, as soon as he saw her, approved the new habit with a smile.



Drawing of the « casetta », first seat of the House of the *derelitte*.



Projects for the renovation of the House of the *derelitte*.
The second, more daring and more functional, was realized.

Chapter 5

FATHER LUIGI AND THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE REVOLUTION OF 1848

The popular jubilation of March 17, 1848

The forty days of the revolution in Udine of 1848 have been treated in chronicles or diaries, often drafted later; however, a critical history of that period still remains to be written. This is not the place to do so.

We believe it is necessary, however, to restore the climate of the city in those turbulent days. To this end, we rely on the notes of Monsignor Valentino Pajani [(1)], secretary of the metropolitan chapter of Udine, inserted in the chapter acts. They are notes with an uncertain linguistic form, but precious because they are unpublished, alive with the freshness of immediate feeling and drafted by a priest, indeed, by a Canon.

On March 18 Pajani writes:

« *Unexpected and beyond all imagination, consoling and applauded by all of Italy, was the event that happened in the first days of March in Vienna. The entire capital, having risen up against the most hated Prime Minister Metternich, invaded his palace and set it on fire, demolished the stables of the magnificent horses and rushed to the imperial palace to urge his majesty to reconcile with his people; there were assaults on the arsenal and mortal risks. All this happened on the 12th of the current month.*

Having reached Udine in the darkness of the night (of March 17) this most happy news, immediately, all the citizens crowded together, kissing, hugging, and shouting throughout the city so that the lights at the palace windows would be lit. In every neighborhood the cries resounded: "Long live Pius IX", "Long live Italy proclaimed free from foreign sovereigns".

This ferment, free of disorders, lasted all night and the entire following day, despite the rainy weather. The authorities immediately arranged to gather the national guard, to arm it and have it patrol the city in military order, without insulting the Austrian soldiers or the officers, respecting each other mutually. Around 11 o'clock, in the Cathedral, the Lord Archbishop celebrated a solemn Mass with the attendance of the Royal Delegate Pascottini and the municipality, which had removed the imperial eagle from the guardhouse to raise its own. The crowd in the Cathedral was immense and incident-free; the ceremony concluded with the Ambrosian chant.

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[1] From Sclaunicco (Udine), born in 1769, he was a Priest of integral ecclesiastical and patriotic feeling; for several decades parish priest of the Udinese parish of the Ss. Redentore, then Canon and chapter secretary, he died in his native Sclaunicco on June 25, 1848.

The people continued throughout the day with "Long live Pius IX", although it continued to rain; night lighting was ordered, a tricolor cockade (red, green and white) was adopted and the bodies of the national guard were being formed, which will receive pay on the days of service...

However, in the midst of such exuberant jubilation, not a few fear disastrous consequences, according to the proverb: "Extrema gaudii luctus occupant" [2]*, that is: great joy is followed by weeping* ».

Don **Luigi with the large cockade**

don Luigi was, an exemplary degree, a Priest according to the Pauline definition:

« *chosen from among men, he is ordained for the good of men in things pertaining to God* ».

He was not a politician, therefore, and even less an agitator. He was too firmly anchored to the sphere of eternal values to attribute an importance that was not purely relative to the changing events of contingent politics.

And yet, he adhered with all his heart to the national cause. He was driven to it, among other things, by that love for justice that we might define as uncompromising to indicate its fullness, and which always guided his every feeling and every action, even in the smallest matters. It seemed to him a clear requirement of reason, as well as a necessary condition for peace, that the Austrians should stay in Austria and the Italians in Italy. Indeed, he saw in it a true moral duty, following the popular proverb: « *To each his own, and thus nothing is left to the devil* ».

In the first moments, he certainly sinned from that naivety that emerges from Pajani's notes: he hoped, that is, that freedom could be conquered without disorder and with mutual respect.

At the time, the parish priest (*pievano*) of *Osoppo* was *don* Pasquale Della Stua [3], who shortly after — during the Austrian siege of that fortress — would distinguish himself to the point of deserving the solemn applause of Archbishop Bricito, earning a prominent place among the « *patriotic* » priests of *Friuli*.

Della Stua himself, who later became a Canon in Udine, tells us about Father Luigi's attitude in those days. It is appropriate to report a passage from his diary in full:

« *It was March 19, a Sunday, when two individuals presented themselves at the rectory, Angelo Venturini and another whose name I do not remember, with tricolor cockades on their hats, armed with rifles and sabers. They were festive and exultant and invited me to celebrate a solemn Mass for the following day followed by the Te Deum. I asked them*

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[2] Cf. Atti del Capitolo, vol. X (1839-1858), c. 165 (A.C.U.).

[3] Born in Ampezzo (Udine) in 1815 and died in Udine in 1893. He was a district school inspector, then Canon of the chapter of Udine of which he was secretary and administrator and assistant of the Society of Christian Mothers. During the political upheavals concerning the fortress of Osoppo he gave proof of much prudence, dexterity and charity. (Cf. F. BLASICH, Note cronologiche ecclesiastiche, ms., pp. 445-447).

the reason for such an extraordinary function and they replied: "*Because the Emperor has granted the constitution*".

Being in the dark about any news, I replied that without an order from the authorities I would do nothing, so as not to expose myself and the village to serious problems, especially from the fortress; this, in fact, already alarmed by the turmoil, had barred the gates and was said to be keeping the cannons aimed at us.

They retorted: "*Do not fear, this very morning the Lord Archbishop (Zaccaria Bricito) sang the Te Deum in the Cathedral, in the presence of all the authorities*". *I added then that, if the local authority had no instructions on the matter, I would go to Udine myself the next day to inform myself.*

That unexpected announcement disturbed me greatly and that night I slept very little.

Having risen early and celebrated Mass alone, I set out on the journey toward Udine, wondering what was happening. Having reached Artegna, I saw everyone with the cockade on their hat or chest; armed men shouted toward me: "*Long live Pius IX, Long live Italy!*". *The same happened passing through Tricesimo.*

Toward 10 o'clock I reached Udine at Gemona gate (the current piazzale Osoppo) and the first Priest I met was the Reverend don Luigi Scrosoppi, who was walking with much gravity wearing a coccardone (large cockade or badge) pinned on the front of his habit.

At that sight I remained surprised, almost stunned, and I thought: "*Goodness, if the Scrosoppi family, who are so serious and attentive to their own decorum, wear the cockade, one must really say that there is something new and serious*" [(4)]. »

The testimony of Monsignor Della Stua is of great value. Father Luigi appears there as a model Priest, and the esteem extends also to Father Carlo and to *don* Giovanni Battista. That large cockade did not seem at all like a discordant note compared to his habitual seriousness; on the contrary, precisely from that priestly demeanor his patriotic choice drew greater value.

Many years later, Della Stua would be celebrated as a « *patriot* », while Father Luigi was looked upon with suspicion as an enemy of national institutions because he was considered an « *intransigent ultramontane papalist*». Such is life! However, Monsignor Della Stua, who knew well the value of the founder, was in 1884 the president of the committee for the funeral honors dedicated to Father Luigi on the thirtieth day after his death.

A necessary parenthesis

It is not our intention to narrate the events of those forty days in full: it would fill an entire volume.

[4] Memorie sulle vicende di Osoppo nel 1848, written by the late Canon Pasquale della Stua, in Pagine Friulane, May 5, 1898, p. 2.

It is enough to evoke the ranks of volunteers led by Gustavo Modena [5], carried by an impulse between the romantic, the patriotic, and the mystical, who kneel to receive the blessing of Archbishop Bricito before going to the defense of *Palmanova*. Think of Archbishop Bricito who, flanked by Count Antigono Frangipane and Domenico Barnaba [6], both with rifles on their shoulders, goes to bless the barricades.

In the same way, we do not wish to dwell on the criticisms that followed the failure of the revolution [7].

There were, for example, those who accused the city of Udine of having surrendered with too little resistance. Monsignor Pajani himself writes:

« *The people, irritated by this plan, declared they wanted to resist...; a reinforcement of volunteers from Treviso arrived who protested against this resolution* ».

There was non-stop talk against the disorderly and incapable leadership of the struggle, amid fanciful tales of betrayals and spies. Again Pajani summarizes his judgment with these bitter words: « *...unhappy peoples, governed by inexperienced, timid, shortsighted persons, etc. etc.* ». Poor Canon! This was almost his spiritual testament, as shortly after he retired to his native *Sclaunicco*, where he died on June 25, 1848, at seventy-nine years of age.

We must, however, dedicate some space to a question that later also involved Father Scrosoppi.

A certain biased historiography has persisted in portraying the clergy as enemies of the homeland and in favor of Austria. We could ignore such accusations especially because none of these presumed historians has taken the trouble to consult the ecclesiastical

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[5] Great Venetian tragic actor (1803-1861) and fervent Mazzinian. He had an adventurous life and participated in the uprisings of 1848. He arrived in Udine with the « Venetian crusaders » on April 8, 1848, and enthused the people with his speeches. After which he reportedly said: « These villages of Friuli are electrified with patriotic love and a spirit of independence when I did not hope for it ». Driven out of the Lombardo-Veneto, he took refuge in Turin where he died. (Cf. A. FALESCHINI, Gustavo Modena nel 1848 in Friuli, in Giornale di Trieste, 4-3-1948). Chaplain of the « crusaders » in Palmanova was the Priest Antonio Coiz from Faedis (Udine), (1824-1886). He emigrated to Piedmont to participate in the war of 1859, then to Milan until 1866 and there he wrote to help the emigrated patriots. Having returned to Udine, he wore secular clothes, taught in various cities of Italy and died in Bergamo. « It does not seem exaggerated to us to say that Coiz was, in his apostasy, in some way a victim of the Risorgimento and of the "*question*" that it posed between the Church and the unity of Italy; he is a "*victim*" in part also of entirely personal coincidences ». A figure to be considered with « a breath of Christian emotion and reverent piety ». (Cf. G. COPOLUTTI, Riflessi della « Questione romana » nel clero udinese durante il pontificato di Pio IX, (degree thesis) Rome 1963, pp. 102-107, Bibl. Sem. Arciv. Udine).

[6] Count Antigono (1813-1877), descendant of a Friulian family to whom this surname was attributed after the 15th century, was a knight of the iron crown, chamberlain, mayor (*podestà*) of Udine from 1855 to 1860. (Cf. Encicl. storico-nobiliare italiana, vol. III, Milan 1930, p. 267). Barnaba (1818-1901) born in Buja (Udine) and died in S. Vito al Tagliamento, was a lawyer and prized writer. With his words and writings, he kept the thought of freedom alive in Friuli; he played a very notable part in the defense of the fortress of Osoppo in 1848. In the various offices he held, he worked with interest and love. (Cf. C. FATTORELLO, Un illustre friulano - Domenico Barnaba, Udine 1890, pp. 26). For the fact cf. D. BARNABA, Da 17 marzo a 14 ottobre 1848, Udine 1890, p. 42.

[7] On the surrender of Udine in 1848 see P. ANTONINI, Il Friuli Orientale - Studi, Milan 1865, pp. 486-511; D. BARNABA, o.c., p. 50; PIERI CORVATT [P. Michelini], El Quarantevott - Sonetti friulani, Udine 1903 (see preface by G. Marcotti); P., Le vicende dell'originale del « Patto di Udine », pp. 27-28; U. MASOTTI, L'arcivescovo Bricito e l'assedio di Udine nel 1848, pp. 16-19, and T. TESSITORI, Sintesi del 48, pp. 73-77. Il 1848 in Friuli, Udine 1948, pp. 77; G. MARCHETTI, o.c., p. 573.

archives to document their theses; and they should have done so, precisely to make them valid. Only fairy tales do not need documents.

The accusation of being supporters of Austria was leveled at all the Venetian clergy: « pro-Austrianism — Giovanni Mantese [8] rightly writes — always reaffirmed, and never demonstrated ». Nor can it be said, more than a century later, that the partisan climate in which it was born has entirely disappeared.

We limit ourselves to the Udinese clergy. And since we have examined one by one the documents of all the available archives, we affirm that it is a gross slander. We provide only a few elements of proof.

We could list the numerous Priests imprisoned, investigated or warned by the Austrian police, or removed from their posts. We could cite a Venetian flyer of April 4, 1848, signed by « *Some Citizens* », in which, lamenting that certain clergy of Venice remained silent, they are exhorted to imitate, among others, « *the clergy of Friuli* ». We could recall that in the *Giornale Politico del Friuli*, published in Udine during the revolution, the clergy even had to be defended from the criticisms of those who judged them too patriotic and wanted them less committed or absent.

But we prefer more specific testimonies.

And in the first place those of Priests very close to Scrosoppi. For example, his dear friend *don* Domenico Someda [9], then assistant chancellor in the curia of Udine, dared to mark this note in the curial register on August 16, 1849, almost a year and a half after the revolution and a week before the fall of Venice:

« *To the metropolitan chapter, inviting it by order of the civil authorities to give the due arrangements for a solemn Mass with the Te Deum, in order to solemnize the anniversary of the birth of his majesty the Emperor Franz Joseph I and last* » [10].

We repeat: the note is found in the register of the curia, which could fall under the eyes of many. Someda with that *last* thought he was a simple short-term prophet; he was, but many years later.

On August 8, 1848, Monsignor Giuseppe Gortani — an old friend of Father Carlo and Father Luigi — wrote from *Piano d'Arta* to the famous composer of sacred music *don* Giovanni Battista Candotti:

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[8] G. MANTESE, Monsignor Giov. Giuseppe Cappellari vescovo di Vicenza, Vicenza 1960, p. 101.

[9] Udinese (1810-1885), for fifty years he worked in the curia, alongside four bishops, with zeal, obedience and humility. Bishop's Chancellor, pro-vicar and vicar, he revealed in such roles singular prudence, paternal mildness and noble sweetness of manner. He served in the church of the filippini, attended to preaching and the ministry of the confessional. Learned and pious, a great benefactor of the poor, he left the example of an unstained and hardworking priestly life. (Cf. F. BLASICH, Serie cronologica dei Vicari Generali di Aquileia e di Udine, Udine 1883, pp. 5-8).

[10] Prot. Cancelleria arciv. 1846-1849, (A.C.A.U.).

« Our affair, which has kept us in anxious expectation for so long, from what is said, is desperately worsening, and if this is so, nothing remains for us but, resigned, to recommend it to the protection of Providence » [(11)].

Here is what the freedom of the homeland was for them: an « *personal matter*», which distressed their souls!

don Andrea Casasola — who was Archbishop of Udine for over twenty years and the target of the fierce ire of the patriots — was among the first to embrace the national cause. Even the liberal newspapers had to recognize this after his death. A very close friend of *don* Luigi, he had been his companion on the journey to *Stresa* in 1843 and it would be he who promoted the first expansion of the religious congregation, having it called to the hospital of *Portogruaro*.

What to say then of the spiritual brother of *don* Luigi, *don* Francesco Fantoni? He was one of the most notable victims of Marshal Radetzky, when the latter wanted to give a severe lesson to the Priests who had participated in the uprisings of 1848.

Of this cloth were made the proclaimed pro-Austrian priests of *Friuli*! And mind you: we have spoken only of Priests in intimacy with the founder of the *Sisters of Providence*, of Priests who were all, like him, fervent supporters of the Pope.

The political adversaries themselves had to recognize the coherent behavior of the Udinese clergy toward the *Risorgimento* movement.

The Senator Count Prospero Antonini, anything but suspect of clericalism, wrote that the clergy of the Archdiocese of Udine « *showed themselves before the Austrian concordat of 1855 more favorable than contrary to the Italian cause* » [(12)].

Naturally such a propensity was part of a very clear picture:

« *In the city of Udine — the liberal journalist Camillo Giussani left written — in 1846-48 Neoguelfism had taken possession not only of the notables, but also of the common people* » [(13)].

It could have been added that that current had been born, about thirty years earlier, precisely within the clergy and from there it had expanded into the other social classes. In few places did the revolution of 1848 have such a marked Neoguelf character as in the Udinese territory. The director himself of *Il Giornale Politico del Friuli* during the revolution, the future deputy Giovanni Battista Castellani and Count of *Montalcino*, came from the seminary, where he had studied until the second course of theology; and he remained always faithful to Catholic feeling. Several years before 1848 he participated, together with the already mentioned Abbot Candotti, in a secret movement

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11 G. BIASUTTI, Giovanni Battista Castellani redattore del « Giornale politico del Friuli », in III Congresso Nazionale di storia del giornalismo, Udine 1971, p. 124.

12 P. ANTONINI, Il Friuli orientale, Milan 1865, p. 526, note 1.

13 C. GIUSSANI, Mondo vecchio e mondo nuovo, Udine 1889, vol. II - fasc. I, p. 42.

for national liberation. The Senator Gabriele Pecile [(14)], also educated for some time in the seminary but who then passed to the opposite front, will not fail to hint with contemptuous irony at the times of clerical dominance in 1848. Pecile had become the nephew by marriage of aunt Rosa Lazzarini and therefore, according to the customs of the time and only in a broad sense, a cousin of Father Luigi.

Should these testimonies not be sufficient, here comes an Austrian voice as definitive confirmation: none other than that of the governor of *Veneto*, Puchner. In a harsh letter sent to the Archbishop Monsignor Bricito on December 20, 1849, he invites him to severely rebuke the clergy, especially « *those who distinguished themselves for their fanaticism and who I do not doubt will be well known to you* », since — he writes — « *I regret to have to say it, precisely in the province of Udine more than elsewhere an atmosphere hostile to the current order of things reigns...* ». Even two years after the revolution, on February 19, 1850, the military command of Udine will protest to the Archbishop because in some parishes the prescribed prayers for the Emperor were not recited and the preachers did not invoke the ritual blessings on the monarch. In 1851 the Abbot Stefano Dalla Ca', who held an applauded cycle of Lenten sermons in the Udine Cathedral, intentionally omitted that invocation in the closing sermon; he would pay for such audacity with several months of imprisonment in the jails of the city castle.

The so-called involution, according to which the clergy reportedly later changed orientation, did indeed occur. However, it had already begun before 1848. A famous document of this is the pastoral letter of November 8, 1847, in which Monsignor Bricito raised a heartfelt protest against the exploitation of the name of Pius IX to fuel hatred and instigate riots; a letter that was harshly criticized by Niccolò Tommaseo.

The causes of such involution were many and this is not the place to analyze them. In any case, it is entirely unjust and unhistorical to reduce it to the partisan and superficial formula of opposition to Italian freedom and servility toward the foreigner. Why not define it, with sincerity, as an opposition to the manner and the spirit with which the much-desired national unity was being realized?

This parenthesis — which we admit was long — was necessary, and we consider it such to understand with accuracy the attitudes of that time and of the subsequent times of Father Scrosoppi. Of him, however, we know of no other public gesture besides that large cockade exhibited with pride. The subtleties of politics were not his field; his field was instead, and always was, perfect fidelity to the Church and the Holy See.

Undoubtedly he prayed and had prayers offered so that everything might proceed for the best, but during the revolution of 1848 he also performed something else, which amazed — just as it amazed his contemporaries — for its realism and courage.

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[14] Born in Fagagna (Udine) in 1826 and died in Udine in 1902. With his son Domenico he was the greatest Friulian agronomist. He graduated in law, was part of the Friulian Agrarian Association, a gathering center for liberals and conspirators. Under the Italian government he was a deputy in various legislatures, was long the mayor of Udine and in 1880 a senator of the kingdom. His writings reveal his participation in the issues of those years in the political and social field. (Cf. G. MARCHETTI, o.c., pp. 618-622).

Under the cannon fire

don Luigi was nine years old when, in the surroundings of Udine, the last rounds of the Napoleonic wars were heard. Perhaps he did not hear them or perhaps he did not keep memory of them; however, it is a characteristic of strong souls to know how to draw upon all their own resources in the moment of need.

It happens not infrequently that men, in other respects remarkable and sublime, lose their way in difficult hours; the saint, on the contrary, maintains his firmness. If divine grace finds in his personality the natural qualities necessary to face the trial, it strengthens and elevates them to a supernatural level; if it does not find them, it creates them, as happened in the solemn example of the first Christian Pentecost.

When, on Good Friday, April 21, 1848, the shells began to fall on the city, the small family of the *House of the derelitte* — sixty orphans and about twenty Sisters — was obviously shaken as if by a sudden burst of storm. What did Father Luigi do then?

« *It was while the fray was raging — a Sister recounts with simplicity — that, to hearten the frightened girls, he hung a picture of the Madonna of the Rosary from the button of his habit. That was the most powerful shield which, united with the most fervent prayer of his burning heart, prevented the deadly projectiles from hitting or damaging the house. Indeed... no bomb fell anywhere but outside the institute, so that everything and everyone remained unharmed* ».

The house stood a short distance from the city walls, at that time still intact, in the lower part of the city, precisely where the Austrian troops of General Nugent were pressing with greater force. Father Luigi, fearing fires, he immediately had mattresses and furnishings thrown from the windows into the small courtyard, concerning himself with providing for the spiritual and physical health of those poor daughters.

« *It was the afternoon of Good Friday — recounts Sister Giacinta De Monte, then a mere novice — around four o'clock, when at the sound of the bell we were all called, sisters and girls, into the small church, where the venerated Father imparted absolution to us* ».

Subsequently, a group of orphans was sent to the *Dimesse* Sisters, another to the *Rosarie*, while others remained in the house with some religious women. Among these was a girl with a physical disability, whom it had not been possible to move.

« *The good Father — Sister Angelica Gervasoni relates — always had his eyes on her, so that nothing could frighten her or make her already difficult condition even sadder. He therefore had her transported into the middle of the garden and tasked three or four of the oldest and most courageous ones to keep her company and console her* ».

A gesture of exquisite attention that pushes Gervasoni to conclude: « *A tender mother would not have done more for her daughter* ».

But even before that Good Friday, Father Luigi's intuition had suggested to him a providential initiative. Having overcome the first days of romantic illusions, he had understood that the situation would deteriorate. He had therefore invited the surgeon Dr. Giacomo Zambelli to briefly instruct the Sisters on how to dress wounds. And, what is

even more significant to demonstrate his formative capacity, he knew how to transmit to those simple and inexperienced women a heroic spirit of dedication. Or rather, he had already instilled that spirit; a single sign was enough for those generous souls to set to work.

The Sisters among the wounded

« *Between the Angelus and the first hour of the night — Sister Giacinta continues — he led eight of us to the main door and said to us, moved: The Lord bless you, see you in Paradise* ».

The Sisters headed partly toward the *liceo* (secondary school) — located near the current *piazza Garibaldi* — where a field hospital had been set up, and partly toward the civil hospital, near the *Church of san Francesco*.

« *On the street* — Tinti writes — *they found a certain Passero, who had a leg mutilated by the explosion of a bomb; after having lifted him, four of them carried him carefully to the hospital, and thus, one after another, they gathered the poor wounded* ».

Imagine those Sisters walking through the deserted streets at twilight, while the population took refuge in the cellars; imagine their inexperience in the face of the violence of war, the feminine tremor at the sight of blood, as they carried the wounded in their arms, with their hands and habits stained with blood. The Abbot Jacopo Pirona must have thought about it too, as he realized that religious life did not make them at all incapable or useless, as he had initially feared.

Precisely in the periodical "*Lo Spettatore Friulan"o*, of which Pirona was a prominent figure, a significant testimony from the hospital management appeared a month later, on May 25. On the night of April 21, twelve people, both civilians and military, had been admitted to the facility, almost all seriously wounded.

« *While on the one hand the management was distressed by the painful spectacle of the sufferers, on the other it was heartened by the immediate and spontaneous appearance of some Sisters of Charity, known as* "*derelitte,*" *from the meritorious establishment of Father Carlo Filaferro. To describe the extraordinary utility of their services, which still continue, the management confesses to not having adequate expressions; it leaves the judgment to those who know the works inspired by the pure charity of the Gospel and relies on the fame that will be spread, once discharged from the hospital, by anyone who has experienced their affectionate and incomparable assistance* ».

It is appropriate to note that the hospital at that time was served only by paid male and female nurses; the director, Dr. Trombini, would later have occasion to highlight their shortcomings, especially regarding the female staff.

An article by Dr. Zambelli

A few days before, on May 20, a letter from Dr. Zambelli dated May 12 appeared in the same periodical, addressed «*To the most courteous Dr. Formiggini - Trieste*»; a letter that we report in its entirety.

« *When last autumn we met on the steamboat that was carrying the sages of the Venetian congress to Chioggia, and serene and secure, discussing scientific topics, we crossed the calm waters of the Adriatic, I certainly did not imagine that after a few months I would have to write to you to recall the misfortunes that have recently struck my poor homeland, and to reward with blessings those noble souls whom Heaven has sent to sweeten its bitterness and suffering. Yet all this has happened, my friend!*

I will not stop to describe to you the trials of war that my native city has endured, because I prefer to speak to you of the merciful works of those who, without caring for their own safety, have aided with comfort and help the victims of such a scourge.

These words of mine refer to the derelitte Sisters of Udine, who, in the terrible night of April 21, 1848, earned the right to eternal gratitude among those who value pious works more than glorious ones.

Know then, distinguished Doctor, that a few days before that most painful night, one of the Priests who lead the holy hospice called me to him, saying to me with discretion: If you believe that the poor derelitte can render some service to humanity in the danger that threatens us, seconding the pious desire of my daughters, i offer them to you, so that you may help with their aid the unfortunate who might need it. I immediately appreciated the treasure that was offered to me through those frank words, i thanked that worthy man with all my heart, and unfortunately the day came when the charity of those angelic creatures was put to a very hard test.

At the fall of the evening in which Udine was attacked, at the first thundering of the artilleries, I remembered the offer of the derelitte Sisters and I called them to go immediately to the subsidiary hospital of borg Grazzano, entrusted to my care; even before the first wounded man fell, eight of those brave Sisters were already at their post, ready to endure any hardship and to face every risk to help their suffering brothers.

And it was truly admirable to see this group of young women leave the solemn quiet of their dwelling; leave the peaceful studies and the maternal cares with which they dedicate themselves to raising poor girls in faith and work, to throw themselves suddenly among the rages and resentments of the world, among the blood and horrors of a military assault, among the pains and bereavements of the hospitals. Oh! Certainly not failing in such a rapid change of situation can only have been a miracle of charity, and whoever is in charge of recording the deeds of this divine virtue, let them write this one too, for they have good reason!

It was certainly God's will that the area where the generous Sisters rushed was the hardest hit by the lightning of war and where the number of poor wretches who fell under their deadly power was greatest. But the constancy of those chosen ones did not fail in the very hard clash; they were seen rushing to the aid of those in danger; they were seen watching like angels by their bed and heartening them with medicines and most sweet words; they were seen gently supporting their heads and feeding them with their own hands; when they were taken to the hospitals, they were seen engaging in cleaning and covering the wounds, always with their faces illuminated by a celestial sweetness, always calm, serene and secure.

Nor less strong did the blessed Sisters show themselves when, having moved to the city hospital, they had to deal with the torn and bleeding limbs of those poor wretches, nor when, to save them from death, they saw them undergo the unspeakable spasms of the surgical knife that severed those limbs without mercy. Oh! Yes, I repeat it with a soul moved by wonder and devotion: this was a prodigy, a true prodigy!

But charity, as you well know, excellent friend, knows no party rancor, no sufferer is a stranger to her, to all she gives equal affection and equal care; therefore the derelitte virgins did not work only in favor of their fellow citizens but, as they desired, they gave proof of their piety also toward those who were considered an adversary.

For this reason, when the Lieutenant Colonel of artillery, Baron Smola was admitted among us, seriously wounded by a projectile, they were generous with so many consolations and rendered him such loving services that, when that gentleman recovered from the mortal exhaustion that oppressed him, squeezing my hand he said to me: Receive my thanks, you have entrusted me to the care of some angels.

And when a few days later that officer received a visit from the General of artillery Count Nugent, the latter, having heard from him how much the derelitte Sisters had done to serve him, expressed vivid thanks to them in his name and that of the army he commands.

More than twenty days have now passed since that fatal night, and a chosen group of derelitte Sisters still performs the holy task of helping the wounded. They are its hope and its consolation; they are the admiration of the doctors and the example for the salaried nurses, to whom they teach how this difficult ministry should be performed.

And after such beautiful proofs, after having seen how much benefit can derive to the sick from the services rendered by those who are inflamed by charity, can we doubt that those who administer the civil hospital of Udine will not commit themselves with all their strength so that the poor infirm shall never again be deprived of such aid? Oh, I trust too much in the faith and courtesy of that president to fear such a misfortune!

In this way, in a short time, that place which is so avoided by the poor will become a dear and desired stay, as it would have always been if the sick, instead of being left in the hands of mercenary servants, had had in their aid those who hope for nothing and ask for nothing from men, because they await every prize and every reward from Heaven ».

Trial by fire

The brief siege of Udine did not cause serious material damage. A few houses were hit or set on fire by the fire of the Austrian artilleries, but the loss of human lives was fortunately limited. The registers of the civil hospital report five deaths following the wounds sustained. In the two most exposed parishes, located in the southern area of the city toward which the enemy army was pressing, another four deaths were counted: only one in the *parish of san Giorgio* and three in that of the *Carmine*. Among the latter were two citizens — father and son — and a captain of the Austrian grenadiers, a certain

Francesco Giuseppe Schima, a Moravian, hit by the defensive cannon just outside *Aquileia gate*.

The most profound damage was however the moral one: the bitterness over the rapid defeat and the accusations of cowardice directed at those who were governing at that moment. Even the Archbishop, Monsignor Bricito, was accused of excessive compliance toward the enemy. It was he himself who was begged to negotiate the surrender; legend describes him walking barefoot along *Palmanova avenue* among the Austrian troops who, moved, spread their cloaks on the road as he passed. The Archbishop responded to these criticisms in a long and famous letter, reproduced by Antonini, defined as written « *with candor and historical objectivity* ».

After the immense tragedies of 1914-1918 — when Udine became « the capital of the war » — and the dramas of 1940-1945 with carpet bombings, we might be tempted to smile by defining as « *terrible* » the night of Good Friday 1848. However, one must immerse oneself in that time: after thirty-five years of uninterrupted peace since 1813, it took authentic courage even just to throw a stone against an Austrian guard's cap or to sing the choruses of *Nabucco*. Even more was needed to take up a rifle and raise barricades.

The heroism of the *derelitte* Sisters does not appear at all diminished by the limited scope of their actions. Considering the extremely reserved life of the women of that time, and in particular of the religious women, their gesture was surprisingly bold. They were, in fact, precursors of the voluntary Red Cross nurses, driven exclusively by the spirit of charity.

Father Luigi was proud of the testimony offered by his spiritual daughters; he did not seek the applause of the world, but rejoiced to see that the Sisters were capable of a love for God and for their neighbor ready to defy death.

Once the armistice was proclaimed, he made sure to reunite the dispersed orphans with a profound joy. Easter was not festive in consumption, but it was so in the fervor of community prayer.

The Sisters, who were assisting the wounded, remained to provide aid in the hospital for one hundred days, until the end of July.

Baron Colonel Carlo Smola

According to Tinti's chronicles, this Austrian officer was transported to the hospital after the surrender of the city. It seems that he was hit precisely while, looking out over the square of *Aquileia gate*, he was inviting the besieged to surrender.

Baron Smola received loving care from the Superior, Sister Lucia De Giorgio, and from Sister Amalia Borghese. Father Carlo, thanks to his perfect knowledge of the German language, was of great spiritual support to him. The Colonel, as a sign of gratitude, later wrote to him: « *Rest assured that the memory of the assistance you rendered me in the saddest period of my life will never fail* ».

After fifty days of suffering, the Baron recovered and visited the *Institute of the derelitte* to personally thank the two Priests. Once he returned to Vienna, he maintained a constant

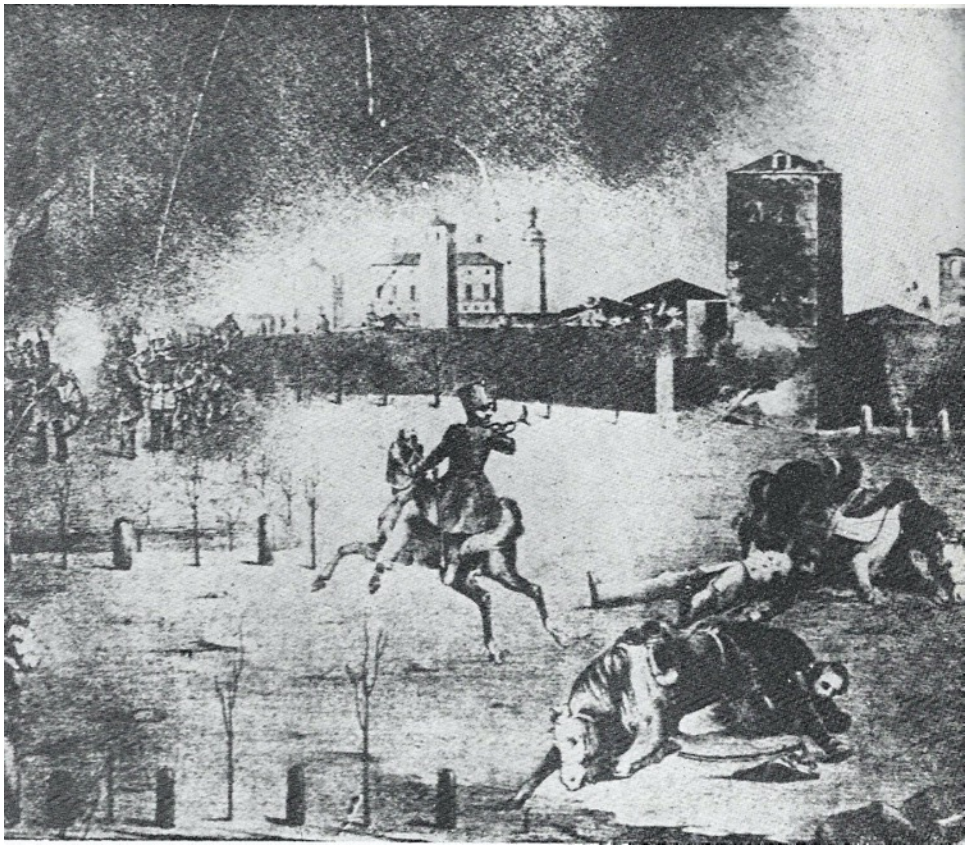
epistolary relationship with the Scrosoppi brothers, often accompanying his letters with generous gifts for the work. This officer proved himself grateful not only in words: he intervened indeed with the imperial administration to favor the exchange of some fields outside the walls for a large plot of land situated right in front of the *House of the derelitte*.

In a letter sent to *don* Luigi on May 4, 1854, on the occasion of Father Carlo's death, Smola wrote:

« *I am deeply saddened by the loss of your brother Carlo... I am convinced that he already finds in heaven the reward for having sacrificed himself in favor of the innocent poor. I venerated him as a saint... He has left in you a worthy successor* ».

He concluded by entrusting his family to the prayers of *don* Luigi, for whom he felt the liveliest esteem.

In that defeat of 1848, the Sisters and the two brothers had obtained over the enemy the highest victory: that of goodness.



Period print reproducing the reference to Baron Colonel Smola under the walls of Udine besieged in 1848.

Why the Sisters did not remain in the Udine hospital

Dr. Zambelli had expressed the desire that the *Sisters of Providence* be hired on a stable basis for the service of the city hospital.

It is not clear whether, during the hundred days in which they remained there for the emergency, formal negotiations in this sense had already taken place between the management and Father Carlo. However, as soon as the religious women withdrew, their

absence was immediately felt. On August 5, the hospital management wrote to the Archbishop, begging him to intervene with his authoritative word so that « *some of those Sisters who so distinguished themselves for the humanity shown in the days of misfortune* » might be assigned to the care of the infirm.

The Archbishop welcomed the request with joy and on August 8 wrote to Father Carlo:

« *It was precisely in the plans of Providence that, in those days of suffering, everyone should come to know that in this city one already possessed that treasure which the writer sought in other provinces for the good of the hospital, and that for this reason misfortune itself should become the bearer of the dearest consolations* ».

The Archbishop, enthusiastic that his diocese no longer had to envy other provinces those generous figures capable of understanding and implementing the sublime inspirations of charity, asked the Director to get in touch with him to establish the necessary agreements and define the operational plan.

Father Carlo Filaferro replied on August 14, setting some precise conditions: he requested that the number of Sisters for the female ward and for that of the foundlings — since the hiring concerned only these two sectors — be raised to fifteen; he established that the local Superior should remain subordinate to the Superior of the *derelitte*, since the new foundation would always depend on the mother institute; he also requested that the Sisters be assigned separate housing, which would guarantee the tranquility necessary to dedicate themselves to spiritual life. From an economic point of view, he proposed that the hospital allocate an initial capital of 1300 lire for the start-up and, subsequently, one lira per day for each nurse. On August 28, to meet the difficulties of the management, he agreed to reduce the number of Sisters to thirteen and the initial capital to 1200 lire.

On August 29 the Archbishop wrote to the hospital management communicating that every obstacle had been removed. On the contrary, the most serious problem was about to arise.

Two days later, Father Carlo went to the office of the hospital Director — who at the time was Dr. Persoli Dell'Onore — to concretely agree on the matter of housing. It is evident that he cared deeply about the « *quiet necessary for the things of the spirit* », as he had already requested. To this end, he insisted that the Sisters be granted some rooms located in front of the facade of the *Church of san Francesco* (now demolished), where however for fourteen years the *Asylum of Charity* directed by *don* Pietro Benedetti had been established.

The Director, who initially had not given weight to the clause on housing, was caught off guard. He immediately wrote to the Archbishop explaining that for the infant asylum a lease contract valid until 1851 was in force; he added that the adaptation of those rooms for use by the Sisters would have required an expense of a thousand florins, a sum impossible to find in the current economic conditions of the hospital, and that public opinion would judge the eviction of the asylum negatively. He therefore invited the Archbishop to personally inspect the other spaces offered by the hospital, to verify if they were compatible with the conditions set by Father Carlo. With a rather bitter reflection, he concluded by stating that — if the Sisters of the *derelitte* did not yield or did so only

out of pure obedience — it would be better to abandon the idea and resume the contacts already initiated with the Sisters of the institute of *Lovere*, given that the improvement of the political situation now allowed regular postal correspondence.

We do not know if Monsignor Bricito carried out that inspection. It is certain, however, that the negotiations were interrupted and the *Sisters of Providence* did not enter the Udine hospital at all.

Four years later, not the Sisters of Charity of *Lovere* — founded by the saints Bartolomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa, today commonly called « *of Maria Bambina* », but the *Handmaids of Charity* of *Brescia*, founded by Saint Maria Crocifissa Di Rosa, made their entrance into the structure. At that point *don* Benedetti, with his asylum, had to leave the premises and move for some time to *Cicogna street*.

It is very probable that, in addition to the disagreement over housing, there was in the souls of the two Scrosoppi brothers a prudent hesitation in soliciting the expansion of the congregation. Perhaps they deemed a further period of interior preparation necessary, or perhaps they reflected on the evangelical warning: « *No one is a prophet in his own country* ».

The two founders and the politically persecuted

It would not be right to conclude this narration on the events of 1848 without adding a detail which, in our opinion, highlights the very high moral stature of Father Carlo and Father Luigi.

Behind them was the responsibility of an institute for orphans. We well know how much they were always opposed to any form of guardianship or control by the civil authority. However, so-called « *human prudence* » (that is: the caution dictated by opportunism or material fear) should have at least suggested to them not to attract the suspicions of the Austrian police, which could have caused serious problems and hindrances. Of all this, they did not worry in the least.

When, four years later, Marshal Radetzky ordered the removal from the seminary — which had been one of the most ardent centers of patriotism — of some teachers, among the Priests affected were *don* Fantoni and *don* Valentino Liccaro, long-time friends [15] of the two Scrosoppi brothers.

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[15] They had been accused of having « false and exaggerated principles of ecclesiastical supremacy over civil powers ». For don Liccaro, his « bad » political precedents and his « fierce aversion » to the government when he was in Zara, for which he was expelled from there, were also recalled. The Vicar General Monsignor Darù defended them on December 30, 1852: for Liccaro there was no relationship between the facts of Zara and the present circumstances; « he never gave an example of exalted opinion on ecclesiastical power ». The subjects taught by don Fantoni did not even offer an occasion to deal with the supremacy of the Church. He then informed, regarding Fantoni to whom he also joined don De Apollonia, that it was a matter of malevolent gossip made by some who, bending toward crooked ways, judged the two Priests too rigid in morals and zealous in the observance of ecclesiastical discipline. He concluded by praising the « exemplary religion » also of the other professors « to whom the city and the diocese render justice », praising their teaching which inculcated « faithful subjection to the supreme ecclesiastical and civil powers as the Apostle teaches, and to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's ». Vain defense: on February 15, 1853, by order of Radetzky, the Priests Liccaro and Fantoni (and with them also don De Apollonia

Well, the two brothers not only did not distance themselves from them, as unfortunately often happens when a friend becomes a suspect or a persecuted person, but from that moment they held them dearer than ever.

Liccaro continued his ministry at the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena* and in 1854 he would be its official orator. *Don* Fantoni, for his part, remained so linked to Father Luigi as to be considered in his own right, together with him, almost a co-founder of the congregation of the Sisters.

If in this attitude the noble human value of a faithful friendship emerges above all, one cannot help but also discern in it a solicitous charity and a quiet, but firm, pride.

and don T. Turchetti, bursar) had to be « for political views immediately removed from the seminary itself, and absolutely excluded from any assignment in public instruction ». (Cf. U. PELLEGRINO, o. c., vol. II, pp. 384-391).

Chapter 6

THE DECISIVE SEVEN YEARS
OF SPIRITUAL ASCENSIONS (1845-1852)

The years ranging from 1845 to 1852 were like a « *cell in time* » for the founder and for the *Sisters of Providence*: a period of concentrated and intense recollection, almost outside the anxieties of the century.

As for the Sisters: if the teachers of the *House of the derelitte* overflowed with docility and generosity, the decade of long and uncertain searches to find a congregation to which to entrust the work certainly did not benefit their spiritual serenity. *Don* Luigi brought clarity and peace with the constitution, at Christmas 1845, of the first religious community of the *Daughters of St. Cajetan*. This undoubtedly took place as an experiment, but this very commitment required of the Sisters, and above all of him, a period of great formative tension.

The sudden clamor of 1848 fell right in the middle of that period of isolation and aroused a response of heroic dedication, which did not distract or divert from the holy purpose, but rather invigorated it.

As for the founder: how could he have shaped that variegated group of souls toward religious perfection? Experience certainly did not help him, so only one method remained for him: to precede them and draw them along by example. It was not in his character to demand from others what he had not done first. He had to ask everything of himself to be able to ask much of his spiritual daughters.

In truth, we believe the animating spirit of *don* Luigi has already clearly emerged from his formation and his works: ardent, magnanimous, tenacious, and very active; but at the same time humble, shy, and a lover of a jealous concealment. Between 1845 and 1852, however, some facts occurred that allow us to look deeply into his interior life, precisely between the forty-first and forty-eighth years of his life.

It is the era in which every personality reaches a settlement or a nearly definitive disruption.

It often happens that, precisely in the so-called « *good* » people, the settlement takes place in a resigned or bitter goodness. The fervors calmed and many enthusiasms vanished, virtue and the fervor of works settle into a routine perhaps rich in wisdom, but devoid of momentum; or the scars of past battles embitter the character. When instead from the travail the figure of the profoundly virtuous man (that is: a person of profound and authentic kindness), shining with spiritual youth and sweetness, one cries out at a prodigy.

We do not wish to enter into subtle psychological analyses of the interior life of *don* Luigi, but we will let the facts and documents speak, from which we will finally see flashes of heroic holiness burst forth.

Don Luigi becomes an Oratorian

As early as 1815, some Udinese citizens — among whom Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi appeared — had presented a petition to the Emperor of Austria so that he might permit the restoration of the congregation of the *filippini* in Udine; it is probable that it was also for this reason that Father Carlo renounced, at the time, entering among the Jesuits. However, the request was not granted.

In the twenty-five years that followed, nothing concrete was achieved.

Father Carlo returned to thinking about it in 1840, as soon as he was entrusted with the leadership of the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*. Since there was no hope that the Austrian government would return the ancient seat — used for the offices of the provincial delegation and today the seat of the police headquarters and the prefecture — he immediately began negotiations with the brothers Francesco and Niccolò Braida to purchase the building that then bore the number 1850, situated at the northern end of the current post office building. With the enthusiastic approval of the Bishop Monsignor Lodi and thanks to the contributions of twenty-eight citizens, on January 26, 1842, he was finally able to sign the purchase contract. Two and a half months later, on April 9, the imperial decree finally arrived approving the restoration of the congregation of the *filippini* of Udine. The document, however, set the condition that it should never weigh upon the State coffers or other public funds and that it should dedicate itself to the care of souls under the direction of the diocesan Bishop. Furthermore, the annual payment of 344.82 lire to the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena*, which passed definitively to the congregation, was maintained.

The Braida house, however, was unhealthy and unsuitable to host the new religious men.

To this was added a further bureaucratic complication: although the imperial decision of April 9, 1842, had sanctioned the transfer of ownership of the church to the reconstituting congregation, the officials imposed the customary wait. Father Carlo had to commit himself for over three years so that the promise would be kept. Only on November 4, 1845, could Canon Faraj write to him from Venice: « *Hurrah! Hurrah! On this day, sacred to Saint Charles Borromeo — with whom Saint Philip got along very well — the certain news of the favorable decree for the filippini of Udine has reached me, albeit late* ». The official handover of the church took place on January 8, 1846.

Finally, on May 26, Father Carlo, Father Antonio Specie — also a former *filippino* —, *don* Luigi Scrosoppi and the lay brother Lorenzo Menon, also a survivor of the old congregation, gathered in the *Church of santa Maria Maddalena* to reconstitute it; Father Carlo was, rightly, elected Superior.

But why did *don* Luigi join them only four and a half months after the handover of the church?

Undoubtedly Father Carlo had hoped that some of the excellent Priests who served in that same church would follow him. Instead, despite the affection and sharing of ideals, no one joined: neither Someda, nor Benedetti, nor Fantoni, nor Liccaro, and not even *don* Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi. Yet they all possessed the necessary qualities and spirit. But times had changed and the future appeared uncertain and confused.

One is led to think that to Father Carlo's invitations they did not oppose a flat refusal, but a series of hesitations and cautious reservations. Precisely what was needed to trigger *don* Luigi's determination. He must have said, once again, to Father Carlo:

« *We have sought far too much the consensus of men to put the congregation back on its feet. The three necessary Priests are now here: you and Father Specie; and here is the third. For the future we trust in the Lord* ».

We believe that things actually went this way, because eight years later we will see the same situation made of prudent postponements repeat itself. It will be Father Luigi himself who will break the delays, in an almost impetuous way, at the risk of straining the friendship with the dear and esteemed *don* Benedetti. This will happen because Father Carlo, although having formally restored the Oratorian congregation in 1846, never implemented life in common among its members. A task that, after his death, his brother would indeed take upon himself.

In the momentum and constancy with which Father Luigi wanted the rebirth of the *filippini*, besides the devotion toward Father Carlo, we can discern the desire to bring to completion his priestly dedication of 1827 with the generosity typical of religious life, inspiring himself by the spirit of "*Pippo buono*" (the good Pippo, Saint Philip Neri's nickname) upon which he had nourished himself since childhood. But there was much more.

Precisely because times were turning for the worse for the religious sentiment of many, he considered it indispensable to protect and revive the Christian courage of the most devout faithful, which was one of the main purposes of the Philippine Oratory. Although the Oratory had never ceased to exist, Father Luigi committed himself to giving it new vigor, so much so that in 1857 it became the target of harsh criticism directed at one of its most assiduous frequenters, the playwright Giovanni Battista Zerbini [(1)].

He dreamed, moreover, of giving birth, as was customary in Philippine houses, to a center of Christian formation for the young workers and students of Udine, or at least a sort of pioneering Catholic youth circle [(2)]. He did not fully succeed, above all due to the lack of suitable collaborators, or he succeeded only in a minimal part. However, it is well understood why, many years later, he strongly supported similar initiatives by the Abbot Giovanni Dal Negro, in which he saw his apostolic dreams being realized.

It was necessary to explain all this to give full meaning to *don* Luigi's Oratorian choice. With this decision, he stops being « *don* » and becomes « Father », as we shall call him

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[1] Udinese (1788-1868), in the offices of deputy, provincial school inspector, etc., he acted with conscience and zeal. In composing his dramatic essays, he always aimed at the moral education of youth. Profoundly religious, sensitive to the pains of others, he largely assisted charitable institutions. (Cf. Obituary in Giornale di Udine, 18-12-1868).

[2] Cf. L. TINTI, o.c., p. 78.

from here on. Probably the Sisters already called him that before, even if in their conversations they preferred the Friulian term "*padrut*" that is: little Father. They used it to distinguish him from Father Carlo as long as he was alive, and continued to do so afterwards because it well expressed their filial affection and his humility.

However, he was a « Father » only halfway, since the Philippine congregation was not yet a community of life in common.

To the Sisters « Daughters of Saint Cajetan and of Providence », who had begun their provisional religious journey at Christmas 1845, he, who in May 1846 was beginning his equally provisional journey as a « son of Saint Philip », could well say:

« *Behold, we are all* "*provisional*" *ones: let us compete together to reach fullness in the name of the Lord* ».

The small Church of *san Gaetano*

To the east of the house formerly *Florenzis* were some humble rooms intended for wood sheds or warehouses, as usually happens in every rural dwelling. The two founders had already transformed them in 1837, obtaining from them the kitchen and the spaces for silkworm breeding and the spinning mill. Around 1846 they decided to raise that building and build, on the first floor, a beautiful small chapel with a private choir attached for the community. They began precisely with the small church.

This was finished in the spring of 1847 and blessed on June 20 by the Canon Monsignor Giovanni Battista Bearzi, who was for many years a collaborator of Father Carlo. The Vicar Capitular Monsignor Darù immediately elevated it to the rank of sacramental, granting, that is, the permission to permanently keep the Blessed Sacrament there.

To the small Church of san Gaetano still under construction, Count Lodovico Rota ( ) hints in his booklet entitled "*Cenni su alcuni oggetti di belle arti ed utili istituzioni esistenti nella Regia città di Udine capitale della Provincia del Friuli*", whose preface dates back to May 15, 1847. « This small church, which is rising with the maximum savings between the two buildings of the pious institute, deserves to be remembered both for its unique position and for its Gothic simplicity ».

Indeed, in his pamphlet, Rota dedicates to the church and to the *Institute of the derelitte* more space than to any other church or institution in the city. This is not surprising, since Rota was linked to the two founders by very close ties of friendship and esteem; he defines them as « *true men of the Gospel and... the decorum and pride of this flourishing city* ».

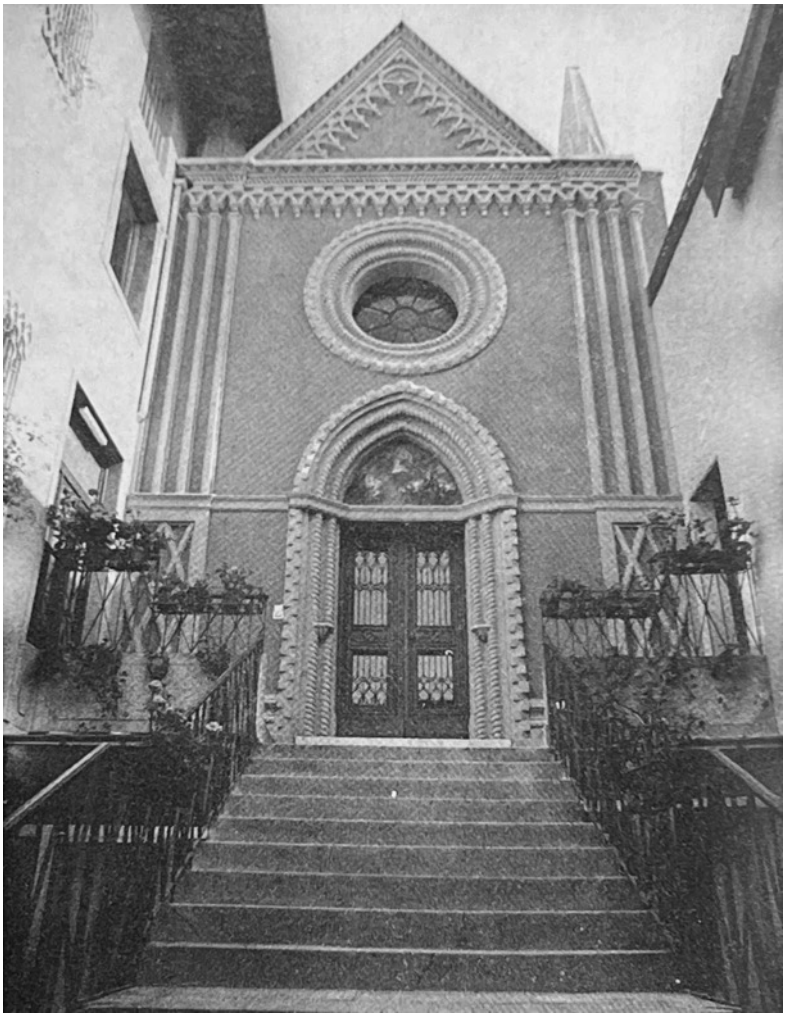
To Father Luigi he had entrusted the spiritual direction of his children — as Maria Jacob attests — and he himself had become a voluntary technical advisor to the house for building works and for the management of the agricultural lands of Udine and *Orzano*.

It seems that the design of the small church is the work of Count Rota himself, who delighted in various forms of art, while the pictorial part was reportedly executed by an

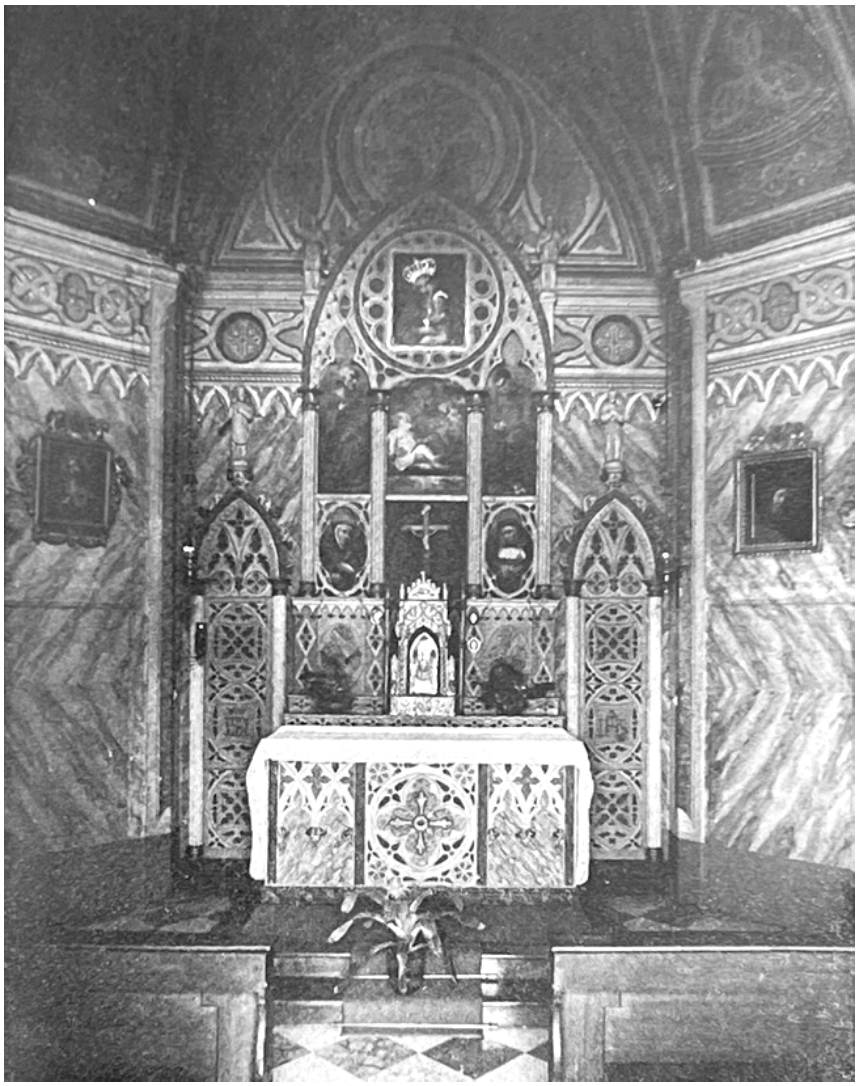
artist who had promised to commit his ability to the utmost to make it a jewel. It is probable that that painter was the already mentioned Filippo Giuseppini.

It was of paramount importance to Father Luigi that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament be present in the house. The decree of the curia of Udine dates back to January 29, 1849, with which the exposition and blessing with the Blessed Sacrament are permitted on various days and festivities of the year: it is necessary to remember how such ceremonies were then granted much more rarely than in our day.

From that moment he introduced the practice of perpetual adoration into the house. He himself chose his own turn, from 10 to 11 in the evening, and remained always faithful to it. The memory of those hours of adoration of his remained indelible among the Sisters. Simple testimonies, precious precisely because they were unaware of their own importance, allow us to catch a glimpse of Father Luigi in ecstasy, on a mystical path and wrapped in a soft light during those fervent eucharistic colloquies.



Udine. Entrance to the small Church of san Gaetano.



Udine. Interior of the small Church of san Gaetano.

The private choir of the House of the *derelitte* dedicated to the S. Cuore in a 1937 photo, now completely transformed.

« *May your soul breathe among the saints* »

Let us pause for a moment to visit the chapel ourselves. It is beautiful, yet modest, and it attracts us in a particular way because it constitutes an indubitable monument that speaks of the spiritual guidelines of the founder of the *Sisters of Providence*.

The Gothic style, mentioned by Rota, anticipated by the entrance door, characterizes the entire facade of the church and the internal structure, re-proposing itself in the carved wooden altar. Since it is located on the first floor, it is accessed via a wide staircase of eighteen steps.

In the pointed arch placed above the portal, a fresco, partially restored, shows a large group of orphans in their bluish dress under the white veil, led by three Sisters — two of whom are placed in the foreground —, intent on praying in front of an altar with the image of the titular *san Gaetano*.

The small church measures internally, in its maximum dimensions, about 6.50 meters by 5.70 meters. It is a small nest of recollection, sufficiently illuminated by the windows of the door and by the circular opening placed at the top of the facade.

We prostrate ourselves again to adore the Master of the house, Jesus present in the sacrament, beside the remains of Father Luigi, entombed since 1952 inside the southern wall.

What captures the gaze, however, is the altar.

Above the table is placed the tabernacle, on whose small door Father Luigi had the image of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus* painted; the current representation is however the result of a recent retouching executed by an inexpert hand. The tabernacle is surmounted by the Gothic throne intended for the exposition of the monstrance.

Higher up, we find a small canvas of *san Gaetano* with the Child Jesus — coming from the small house of 1817 and a gift from Father Gaetano Salomoni —; when it was placed in this see, it was lengthened at the base with a strip of dark green color. Even higher up there is a Madonna with Child, both girded with crowns. These two paintings are the work of a talented eighteenth-century author.

At the sides of *san Gaetano* and the Madonna, *san Giuseppe* and *san Luigi* stand out, painted on canvas in full figure, while in the lower part — alongside the throne — are similar paintings, but in half bust, of *santa Veronica Giuliani* and *santa Giovanna Francesca Frémiot de Chantal*.

On the two spires of the wooden altar rise two small statues of *san Carlo Borromeo* and *san Vincenzo de' Paoli*, who holds a crucifix.

To the right and left of the altar, two narrow portals in Gothic style lean against the wall, at whose summit are as many small statues of *san Filippo Neri* and *san Francesco d'Assisi*. In both portals there is an openable small door, one decorated with the Marian monogram, the other with that of the name of Jesus. From the latter, holy communion was distributed.

Father Luigi celebrated the holy Mass here for over thirty years; he did it according to the cloistered style, that is: remaining not visible to the crowd of female students of the

boarding school and of the religious women. There existed however an altar leaning against the wall, in the oratory behind, where Mass was celebrated during solemn festivities and where ceremonies took place — such as the devotions of the month of May — reserved exclusively for the community.

In this set of sacred images every figure possessed a precise meaning. *san Carlo* and *san Luigi* recalled to mind the devotion of the founders for their own personal patrons; *san Filippo Neri* and *san Francesco d'Assisi* represented the fathers and teachers of their ascetic orientation; *san Vincenzo de' Paoli* was the saint of charity and *san Gaetano* the model of trust in divine Providence; finally *san Giuseppe*, the Madonna with Child and the tabernacle spoke of Jesus, the center of all hearts.

To the Sisters the two saints, Veronica and Giovanna Francesca, were indicated as special models. For what reason precisely these two and not others? Although one can glimpse the influence of Capuchin, Salesian, or Visitandine spirituality, dear to the two brothers, in our opinion the meaning is deeper. The name of Jesus symbolically imprinted on the chest of Chantal and the crown of thorns on the head of *santa Veronica* intended to recall the religious women to the dual characteristic of their vocation: to exist solely for Jesus and together with the suffering Jesus. here one perceives with extreme clarity the principle of total and sacrificial dedication, typical of Father Luigi.

In the vault of the small church, inside two circular frames, *santa Teresa d'Avila* and again *san Vincenzo de' Paoli* are frescoed. The hand of the artist, very different, and other details suggest that they are from a later period. Perhaps the founder wanted to represent in them contemplation and charitable commitment as the two riches or the two supporting elements of the *Sister of Providence*, according to the rules established in 1862.

This chapel represented the cradle of the congregation, conceived and wanted down to the smallest details by Father Luigi. In it we really feel his spirit hovering.

There exists a way of feeling and understanding, deep and mysterious, that goes beyond the material aspect and penetrates between the lines and the stones. Those who know how to immerse themselves in a profound silence have experienced it. We ourselves have felt it in this small church. To our heart has resonated the solitary song of Father Luigi, made of poetry, faith, sweet melody, and strength of mind. We have perceived the hushed choir of hundreds of voices of girls who followed, with shyness and joy, the voice of the Father.

The internal oratory

Certainly the events of 1848 imposed an interruption in the continuation of the works to build the north wing of the small church. On the first floor, as already mentioned, the private oratory of the community was planned [3].

[3] It is still there, but much changed with successive transformations. In particular, its orientation has been reversed. In the first form the presbytery stood to the south, opposite the small church of san Gaetano where there is now a transit corridor; now instead it opens luminously at the northern end of the building. It was necessary to accelerate

The oratory was not yet finished in the spring of 1852, when on May 7 the humble Sister Orsola Baldasso died, who in her last days of life spoke of it as if it were already concluded. It was brought to completion in the autumn of the same year. And to inaugurate it, permission was requested to solemnly celebrate on that occasion the feast of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*, to which the building was dedicated, just as it is currently.

On November 12, 1852, the *Congregation of Indulgences* responded that there was no need for a specific permission, since Pius VII, with a decree of July 7, 1815, had already granted general authorization « *that such a feast could be celebrated on any day of the year with the license of the relevant diocesan Bishop, and with the privilege of celebrating on that day its own Mass, that is: of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* », adding a plenary indulgence valid also for the souls of the deceased. On the following December 24, the register of the curia of Udine notes a further decree in which, based on a papal document, the only altar present in the oratory of the *derelitte* is declared privileged and plenary and partial indulgences are recognized on various festivities of the year.

We know how much Father Luigi cared about prayers of suffrage for the dead. During the works on the oratory, between 1849 and 1852, five Sisters had passed away, among whom — besides Baldasso — the venerable Sister Giovanna Luigia Cortelazzis and the joyful soul of the house, the Sister assigned to manual labor Maddalena Morassi.

To these internal bereavements had been added the loss of his father, Mr. Domenico, who died due to an apoplectic stroke on August 10, 1851. We do not know specific details about this death, but it is natural to suppose that the son's heart was struck by grief and drew from it a new motive for detachment from material goods and total dedication to the Lord.

A few months after Scrosoppi, on March 4, 1852, that great friend of the institute died who had been Monsignor Giovanni Battista Bearzi, who in his will left, among other provisions, « *To the so-called derelitte of Father Carlo, 100 florins* ».

It was necessary to accelerate for those souls, for all souls, the joy and peace of Paradise. For this reason, Father Luigi asked from the beginning for the indult of the privileged altar also for this new chapel.

The 25th anniversary of the founder's Mass

Some Sisters, among the first, maintain that Father Luigi went to *Loreto* and personally took the measurements of the *Holy House* there, although others say that such dimensions — later reproduced in the chapel of *Orzano*, where the Father chose to be buried — he obtained later from a small church in the *Veronese* area.

It is certain that among the objects he kept with extreme care is a small envelope with the writing « *Dust of the Holy House of Loreto* », which, due to the characters and the overprinted image, seems to date precisely to the mid-nineteenth century; there also

for those souls, for all souls, the joy and peace of Paradise. For this reason Father Luigi asked from the beginning for the indult of the privileged altar also for this new chapel.

exists a ribbon that reports the measurements of the crucifix of *Saint Francis of Assisi*. These clues, united with his deep love for *Saint Francis*, lead to the belief that he truly made that journey.

And what moment would have been more suitable than the beginning of the spring of 1852? March 31 of that year marked, in fact, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his first Mass.

Naturally, from *Assisi* he will have then gone down to Rome.

A confirmation could come from the fact that, a short time later, the Friulian Jesuit Priest Paolo Beorchia sent to *don* Luigi a brief preface for a booklet, intended for the Archbishop of *Gorizia* and aimed at « *offering, through its dissemination, economic help to an institute for girls to provide for their difficult conditions of subsistence* ». It concerned the *Contavalli Orphanage*, whose management was offered to the *derelitte* by the Archbishop of *Gorizia* on August 28, 1852. Since the initiative did not then come to fruition, the booklet was not published. In Beorchia's preface the signatory was indicated as « *the publisher P.L.S.* », that is: Priest Luigi Scrosoppi. It remains however evident that between Father Beorchia and *don* Luigi there were cordial relations, born probably from a visit by the latter to Rome, where the Jesuit resided.

Further confirmation of that trip could be the growing devotion of *don* Scrosoppi toward the *Poverello* of *Assisi*. Indeed, on October 15, 1852, his « investment » is recorded as a brother of the *Franciscan Third Order*, in which he would emit his « profession » on October 17, 1853. Ten years later, on January 27, 1863, the Superior of the *Capuchin convent* of Udine, Father Agostino Scattaglia from Venice, would communicate to him that he had been elected unanimously as Minister of the Udinese *Third Order*.

If *don* Luigi had always been Franciscan at heart, that « investment » of October 15 demonstrates how in that autumn he burned with a very high fervor. Shortly thereafter, he himself would leave us an exceptional document as a testimony of this.

The spiritual retreat of November 1852: humility on the cross and the vow of service

Towards the end of that November, therefore, the internal oratory of the *House of the derelitte* was solemnly inaugurated with a celebration in honor of the *Heart of Jesus*, to whom it was dedicated.

The ceremony was preceded by a course of spiritual exercises.

Was it perhaps *don* Luigi himself who led them?

He certainly participated in them. And from those days an immensely valuable document has remained to us.

The original was lost while it was in the hands of the biographer Monsignor Tinti, who, fortunately, preserved its text. The document is all the more precious in that it spontaneously reveals the level of spirituality that the founder had by then reached.

« *Which and how many resolutions the venerated Father* — writes Tinti — *established in his spiritual retreat, is demonstrated by the following autograph writings on the occasion of the retreat in November 1852, renewed by him in subsequent years.*

1st I propose at any cost to want to remedy the failings that unfortunately I am accustomed to committing in holy prayers, in the celebration of holy Mass, in the recitation of the breviary and in the administration of the sacraments of the Eucharist and confession.

2nd I propose to want to perfect the daily actions that I will perform and to cleanse them of defects:

a) reciting to this end every morning, as soon as I rise, special prayers to my dear mother Most Holy Mary, to my dear father Saint Joseph, and to the saints who are my protectors;

b) performing the examination of conscience at noon and in the evening, to see if I had committed any failing in such holy works and, in the positive case, immediately ask forgiveness from the Lord and perform some penance, as if it were imposed on me by the Madonna herself.

3rd I propose to embrace the third degree of humility and to want to follow Jesus Christ in poverty, humility and sacrifice. I will often think that Jesus is my captain and I am a soldier who wants to be faithful to him, perfectly united to him on the journey toward Heaven, to become his faithful image. Ah, yes, Lord! I will often look at You on the cross, where I will find You as a model of the third degree of humility. I must therefore not only esteem and love poverty, humility and suffering, but I shall have to desire these three virtues. To practice them and desire them as the supreme good and my inheritance, I will consider myself as a servant in the congregation of my father Saint Philip, and as a servant also in the house of Providence of the holy father Cajetan. I will visit the sick and the poor, placing myself beside them as a servant.

4th I propose to be regular and precise in all my offices and duties, doing everything at the established time and in the fixed way, acting always as if the Lord Himself commanded me the work to be performed. 5th I propose to persevere in the established rule of life, at the cost of any sacrifice, and only expressed or presumed obedience will make me change or suspend my commitments. 6th I propose to read these resolutions and my rule of life once a week. »

When Father Luigi wrote these lines, he had recently turned forty-eight. An age in which, on the one hand, the examination of conscience necessarily reaches the maximum clarity and rigor, especially in a note of intimate confidentiality drafted at the conclusion of a course of spiritual exercises; and in which, on the other hand, the resolutions must adhere to the concrete situation of the soul, since the generous but unreal spiritual aspirations — we could define them as holy ambitions — are understandable only in the years of youth.

For these reasons the document is an authentic testimony of life and, without doubt, of exceptional importance.

From it emerges, first of all, how Father Scrosoppi had by then serenely overcome the many hardships of the interior struggle. Nothing remains to him but the anxiety « *of wanting to perfect the daily works that I will perform and to cleanse them of defects* », that is: of failings that are more involuntary than conscious. Indeed, the purity of intention and actions is such that these failings are imagined as a vague possibility: « *if I had committed* — he writes — *any failing in such holy works* »; these too, however, would not have escaped an immediate purifying penance, desired and executed gently « *as if it were imposed on me by the Madonna herself* ».

But what strikes one deeply is above all the third resolution, with the twofold choice of the third degree of humility and of total servitude.

Father Scrosoppi follows, in the degrees of humility, the classification of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

« *The third degree of humility is most perfect* — writes Tanquerey —. *It is the degree of the perfect, it is the love of the cross and of humiliation with Christ and for his love; having reached this point, one is on the path to holiness* » [(4)].

If Father Luigi proposes to himself this third degree, it is because he felt it was now within reach, because he sensed its urgency in his soul and in his blood. He had had time and sufficient opportunities to practice the first two! Now nothing remained for him but to complete the holy toil, ascending the cross with Christ.

At this point had his spirituality arrived! At the point of not hesitating to write a surprising sentence for a man as concrete, realistic, sober and far from all rhetoric as he was: « *I want... to succeed in being his faithful image* », an authentic reflection of Jesus Christ!

Another expression worthy of greatest note is that with which the Father declares three times that he wants to consider himself as a servant: among the *filippini*, in the *House of the derelitte* and before the sick and the poor. We do not believe it is merely a pious expression; we think, instead, that we are faced with an explicit formulation of that vow of servitude [(5)], which was pronounced by other holy souls and in which the supreme flame of charity toward one's neighbor joins with a heroic humility. One's neighbor is no longer simply a neighbor, to be loved in the name of the Lord as oneself; the neighbor here becomes the superior — he is God, he is Jesus! —, who has the right to demand services rendered with loving and joyful readiness. His life confirms it for us, spent always in the last place to be able to serve everyone. We could say that such a vow was predictable. It was born almost spontaneously from his interior world and defines the form of his dedication for the years to come.

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[4] A. TANQUEREY, Compendio di teologia ascetica e mistica, Rome 1948, p. 699.

[5] The practice of fraternal charity of the perfect, according to Tanquerey, consists in this: they love their neighbor to the point of self-sacrifice: « Having Jesus given his life for us, we too must give our lives for our brothers! » This was the idea that pushed holy priests to make the vow of servitude with respect to souls. And the author continues by describing the manifestations of fraternal charity by those who have pronounced such a vow. (Ibid., pp. 765-766).

Truly moving to us seems the parallel growth of the work and of the soul that had wanted it.

On the same day in which, with the solemn blessing of the internal oratory, the structure of the *House of the derelitte* could be said to be truly concluded, on that very same day Father Luigi — with humility on the cross and with total servitude — seems to complete his interior cathedral.

The formative piety of Father Luigi

In this same seven-year period, the greatest responsibility of his life weighed upon Father Luigi: that of giving a precise and strong spiritual orientation to the first Sisters and, through them, providing the fundamental tone and direction to the life of the nascent congregation.

Father Carlo left him complete freedom of action, knowing he could count on him totally. *Don* Francesco Fantoni would join him in the formation of the religious women only after 1852, when the Austrian police removed him from teaching in the seminary. However, from 1845 to 1852, the founder found himself alone in facing a task of such commitment.

He was not in a hurry and did not seek to anticipate the times. His main thought was not that of elaborating the definitive model of the congregation or of the *Sister of Providence* at his desk. He would think about the constitutions only a decade later. As for the rules, he composed with his brother Father Carlo that short draft that Pirona did not approve; but even that attempt was made only in the hope of obtaining legal recognition for the small religious community, which however did not arrive. Later, basing himself on concrete experience and not on theoretical schemes, he went on collecting observations of his own, of the Superiors, and of the Sisters, until around 1860-61 he derived from them a code of rules that was considered a model of perfection.

For the moment, he concerned himself above all else with transmitting and consolidating in the Sisters a specific spirit: that spirit by which he wanted them to be intimately animated, so that they might become the type of religious woman he desired.

Such a spirit could only be a reflection of his own interior world.

The asceticism of Father Luigi was profoundly centered on Jesus Christ. But even in this field he made a precise choice. He did not concentrate on the Jesus of miracles and of the transfiguration on *Mount Tabor*, nor on the risen Jesus or on the one who sits at the right hand of the Father. He chose instead the poor Jesus on the straw of *Bethlehem*, the hardworking and hidden Jesus of the house of *Nazareth*, the bleeding Jesus of the *Way of the Cross*, and the Jesus concealed in the Eucharist. And, precisely for this reason, he sought the living Jesus in the humble, the poor, and the sick; the Jesus present in the community gathered in his love and in his name.

It was a perspective of religious life perennially valid and, at the same time, very modern.

This was the Jesus to be loved and served; this was the Jesus spouse of the soul of every Christian, but with an even stronger accent for the consecrated soul. Only a petty

superficiality or grotesque residues of sentimentalism can ignore or misinterpret the powerful requirement of this spiritual nuptial bond. One goes to the wedding of the Lamb to toil and die with him and like him, becoming victims of charity for the benefit of the brothers.

When we observed the multitude of saints in the small *Church of san Gaetano*, perhaps someone thought of a sort of dispersion of devotion, in contrast with this centrality of Jesus. But it is not so.

Father Luigi was not at all opposed to a correct pluralism within the same Christocentric devotion. However, those sweet and dear figures all led to Jesus and all spoke of him. Some because of the ineffable bond of kinship, such as the Madonna, *san Giuseppe* and, then, the saints *Gioacchino* and *Anna*, whom he loved to call "*grandparents*". Others because of their direct proximity to the humanity of Christ, such as the apostles and the three Marys of the sepulcher [6].

Still others because they protected our union with Christ: the saints of one's own name received in baptism; the male and female saints who, in the religious vocation, defined its particular style.

The attention to Jesus was therefore not weakened, but increased: every saint indicated him as the only purpose of the soul and of community life.

An absolutely special place, however, belonged to Most Holy Mary and *san Giuseppe*. Certainly to them the heart turned with particular tenderness and gratitude, being the closest intermediaries of the Father's gift. But in them too the founder emphasized above all the very close bond with the humble, poor, hardworking, and martyr Jesus, and the exemplary teaching that derived from it.

How much Father Luigi loved and made others love the Madonna is easier to imagine than to describe. We saw him since he was a boy devoted to the *Sorrowful Heart of Mary* and to *Mary Help of Christians*. Since 1837, then, he placed in the oratory of the community a wooden statue of the Virgin Mother which, because of the bright red color of the mantle, was called "*the red Madonna*". The *Dimesse* Sisters had given it to him as a gift and it had no artistic merit. But what did it matter? The first Sisters considered it miraculous, because the Father sent them to her in every difficult moment or for every interior torment, and they returned from there serene.

Around 1840, the *Confraternities of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* for the conversion of sinners, promoted since 1836 by the Abbot Carlo Dufriche-Desgenettes, Parish Priest of *Our Lady of Victories* in Paris, began to spread also in *Friuli*. The *Church of santa Maria Maddalena* immediately became the center of that Marian movement, and the Sisters and girls of the *House of the derelitte* were naturally enrolled in it.

Perhaps even earlier, but certainly in those years, the pious practice of the Marian month was introduced in the same church; and from the church it passed immediately to the

[6] In the testimonies and trial reports there is mention of Father Scrosoppi's devotion to the « three Marys » of Calvary, a devotion that enters into his Christocentric asceticism: he had a tender adoration for the Humanity of Christ, therefore, in addition to saints connected with the Incarnation, he venerated the « three Marys » who served Christ during his life and accompanied him in his passion. (Cf. Summarium, e.g. pp. 104, par. 328; 131, 417; 693, in Positio...).

house, since as early as June 18, 1850, Father Luigi thanked the famous composer Giovanni Battista Candotti for the beautiful composition of the litanies.

However, if the founder indicated Most Holy Mary as the sweet mother, benevolent consoler and powerful help, he wanted the Sisters and orphans — especially the religious women — to see in her the mother who accompanied Jesus in the earthly journey made of sweat and blood and, therefore, the teacher of sacrifice and mortification who taught how to walk the same path.

For this reason, among the various forms of devotion, he gave primacy to that toward *Our Lady of Sorrows*: and if he joined to it that to the *Heart of Mary*, it was still a heart pierced by the sword. For this reason, again, he sought and practiced penance and mortification as if they were imposed on him by the Madonna herself. For this reason he cared so much about the particular devotions of the month of May, in which he was the first to give sometimes astonishing examples of public humiliation. Once, following the slip of paper he had drawn by lot, he chose to kiss the feet of the Superior in front of the whole community.

san Giuseppe, then, had to be the father of all because he had been the father of Jesus: but seen in tribulations, in toil, and in concealment. Father Luigi made others admire his constant and total search for the will of God and his generous obedience in carrying it out, ready to give everything without asking anything for himself. Furthermore, he emphasized that full and trusting abandonment of his in Providence, to the point of almost making him take the place of the traditional *san Gaetano*. He placed, in fact, a small statue of *san Giuseppe* at the entrance of the *House of the derelitte*, naming him master of the house, and put a shoulder bag around his neck, so that the bread of alms would seem to come from his hands. The statue still exists, although without the bag.

In this solid formative piety of the founder, everything that the Sisters had to believe, love, venerate, pray, and do was joined in a splendid unity. Everything returned to Jesus: from the cave of *Bethlehem* to the cross and the sepulcher of Calvary.

It was the only necessary knowledge of Saint Paul, extended to the entire humiliated and suffering humanity of the Lord.

The Elder Mothers

In the history of the *Sisters of Providence*, the councilors who in the early days supported the Superior were called « *Elder Mothers* ». Later, tradition used this title for the Sisters who lived in the times of Father Luigi and who bore his imprint most vividly.

Among these, it was also customary to distinguish three generations: the first reaches until 1855, the second to 1877, and the third until his death in 1884.

Which Sisters emerged from the founder's school is easy to intuit, after what has been said.

One should only add a maxim, somewhat paradoxical, that *don* Luigi used to repeat with significant insistence:

« *We must become saints and great saints* — he would say — *but not altar-saints.* »

Certainly he was not against the canonized saints. But he wanted to distance his spiritual daughters from those ascetic poses and from those imaginary mystical raptures, to which the feminine soul could be tempted, to lead them back to a totally concrete holiness, since it was nourished by humility, mortification, and silence.

He left us a sheet of « *Remembrances* », which can well be defined as the Scrosoppian code of religious life.

It begins thus:

« *You will soon be a saint:*

1. If you hold yourself as a nothing;

2. If you desire to be abandoned and held in no account;

3. If you accept from the hand of God everything that happens to you;

4. If you desire nothing else than to do the will of God. »

He continues by indicating which types of religious women will never reach perfection, which instead will achieve happiness of the spirit, and which are the virtues and attitudes that lead to sanctification.

And he concludes with the trinomial « *Do, Suffer, Be Silent* » [7], which was to be the motto and the insignia of the congregation and of every *Sister of Providence*.

Whoever invites, here, the religious women to consider themselves a nothing, to desire to be abandoned, to consider themselves inferior to anyone, is the same one who in November 1852 proposed to embrace the third degree of humility and to want to consider himself as the servant of all.

To the religious women formed by Father Luigi, the saying of Jesus can be perfectly applied:

« *The disciple is not greater than the teacher; but every well-prepared disciple will be like his teacher.* »

If they did not surpass their spiritual Father, they nevertheless competed generously with him. Here is a rapid set of definitions that effectively describe the souls who lived in his compelling example; definitions that we gather here and there from the precious "*Appunti biografici"*:

« *Fortunate our first mothers, who had the grace of knowing and dealing with the venerated father founder, and thus immersed themselves in that simplicity, charity, humility and poverty that he himself lived. Ingenuity and simplicity, characteristic virtues of our venerated elder mothers, because so much taught and recommended by our venerated father founder. A serious and mild education, as was the custom in those early times of our institute.* »

[7] A motto that was already that of Saint Paul of the Cross (1694-1775).

It seems that in that first blessed group three sentiments predominated: a perfect fraternal charity, a total self-oblivion, and an inextinguishable thirst for mortification.

« *The religious family... —* say the "*Appunti biografici"* again *— was a warm nest of love, exactly as our venerated founder desired it, and this yearning of the Father was implemented very well in our venerated elder mothers. Of them one could well say and apply what was said of the first Christians: they were of one heart and one soul.* »

And speaking of Sister Maria Maddalena, born Orsola Marini, who entered the convent on November 22, 1851, this incisive observation is made:

« *We regret that, regarding both this one and our other venerated elder mothers, we cannot write long pages on the holy and heroic virtues constantly exercised by them. First of all, because they were hidden souls; they profoundly refused to manifest how much good they performed. Hidden virtues, Father Luigi preached and wanted. Secondly, Mother Osanna said, nothing was observed and one paid no heed to oneself. In those beautiful golden times of the father founder, it never seemed too much, in the matter of virtue and sacrifice.* »

Austerity and mortification held the place of honor.

« *It must be said, to the praise of truth —* the "*Appunti"* continue *— that our elder mothers, who had the great fortune of living with our venerated father founder, learned from his example and his holy teachings a great and concrete love for holy mortification, for the mortification of the senses, for embracing with fervor the penances and austerities of the body, for renouncing themselves even in lawful things, for mortifying above all their own passions, vices and defects...*

The austerities in that fervent family were not only many and continuous, but also held in great esteem. The first collaborators in the meritorious work of Father Scrosoppi felt driven to perform extraordinary penances, as appears from some notes in which Mother Lucia De Giorgio asked Father Luigi for permission to perform such acts. Thus those souls strengthened and encouraged themselves to endure willingly, for the love of God and of the poor girls they had in their custody, even the daily privations imposed upon them by necessity. »

And with a summarizing phrase elsewhere it is said:

« *That God who searches hearts and keeps recorded every virtuous act of ours, every sacrifice of ours, He alone one day will make visible to all the heroic acts that our venerated elder mothers practiced; virtues and acts seen, learned and practiced by our venerated father founder, and that they knew how to imitate so well.* »

No wonder, therefore, if not a few orphans felt fascinated by those admirable examples. The testimony of Sister Diomira Tuzzi will suffice for all:

« *My vocation came to me —* she would say *— upon seeing our elder mothers so humble, so mortified, so fervent.* »

But it is very significant how at every step the founder is always remembered; the heroic virtues of his spiritual daughters are always presented as the mirror of the Father's virtues.

If these brushstrokes outline the environment well, in a certain respect they paint with even greater incisiveness the figure of Father Luigi as model and guide of his little flock.

The founder of a religious family is recognized not so much by the fact of having instituted a new community, as by the soul he knew how to infuse into it and by the momentum with which he drew it along. In this, Father Scrosoppi appears to us of a truly exceptional power and incisiveness.

Little flowers in the style of Saint Philip

Saint Philip Neri very much liked certain gestures, between the playful and the unusual, with which he intended to strengthen his disciples in virtue, especially in humility.

Father Luigi also liked them very much, and his activity as an educator is amply enriched by them.

Before returning to the concerns of historical events, we wish to conclude this chapter, dedicated to his interior life and to that of the Sisters, with some brief episodes.

« *A Sister* — a witness recounts — *before 1845, in a period in which the institute was extremely poor and struggled even to guarantee the necessary clothing, received as a gift from her sister the fabric to make herself a black habit. As was the custom, she immediately handed it over to the father founder, manifesting however the great desire that that dress be prepared for her. But the Father, who wanted his daughters detached from every good and with their hearts belonging entirely to the Lord, not only did not satisfy her but, seeing her too attached to that gift, had the habit prepared for another. The Sister accepted that sacrifice with submission, although it cost her much effort.* »

« *A novice* — we read in another account — *showed an excessive attachment to a prayer book. What did the Father do? He took it from her; then he went into the sacristy. He tied it with a small cord from the missal and hung it around her neck, sending her into the middle of the choir until the prayers were concluded. He would have nothing to do with material attachments; they withdraw the heart from God, and God wants it in its entirety or He rejects it.* » Probably Saint Philip would have acted in the same way.

Something similar happened to the already mentioned Sister Maddalena Marini. The passage from the biographical notes that speaks of it is imbued with a humor so delicate as to deserve to be reported in its entirety.

« *Sister Maddalena possessed beautiful spiritual books and Father Luigi, every now and then, would ask her for some. One day, finally, he took them all away. Mother Maddalena goes into the dormitory and finds the small shelf next to the bed empty. What do I do now with the shelf without the books?* — she said —. *She took it and carried it to the Father's room. Now that you have taken the books, keep the shelf too, because I no longer know what to do with it. Simple souls.* »

This last episode happened long after the period we are treating, but it remains a graceful example of the good-natured and gradual method with which the founder loved to make the religious women grow in virtue and, at the same time, of the simplicity with which they accepted these trials.

At a distance of over a century, we seem to still perceive the firm guidance of that holy man, capable of being at once sweet and strong like a father. All this so that his spiritual daughters might follow him on the path of holiness.

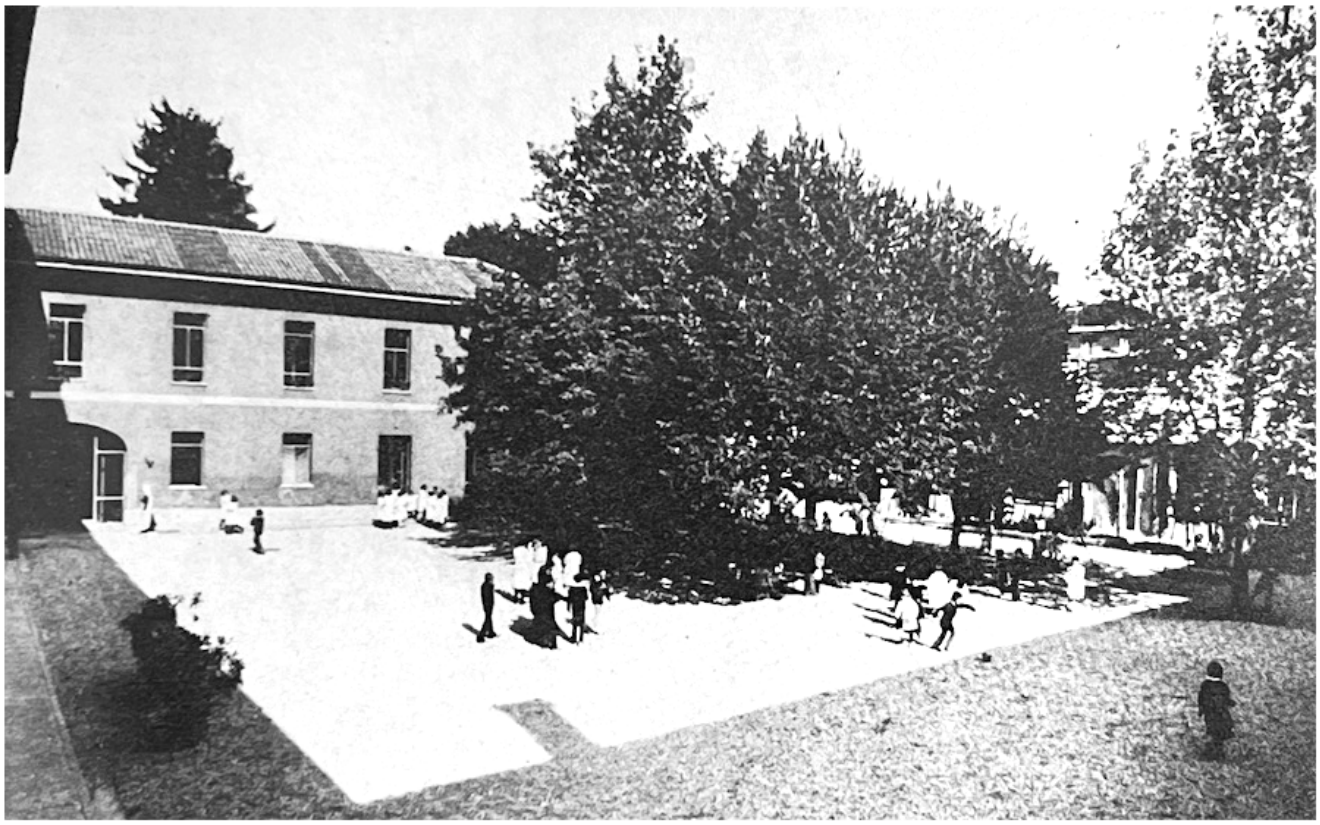
Chapter 7

THE PIOUS SUNSET OF FATHER CARLO (1848-1854)

Air and sun for fragile girls

Sometimes those blessed girls arrived at the *House of the derelitte* in truly pitiful conditions: they were malnourished, suffering from rickets, pellagra, scrofula, or tuberculosis. Today we find it hard to imagine, because social hygiene and widespread economic improvement have brought immense benefits to the poorest classes, or at least to their physical health. But at that time the poor lived in a dreadful misery.

Naturally the hearts of the two brothers, animated by a deep Christian charity, welcomed those unfortunate innocents with a special tenderness. However, one could certainly not think of forcing them to bend over books at school, or to work in the workshops with needles, in front of the stoves of the spinning mill or at the weaving machines. For them, an invigorating bath of air and sun was necessary first of all.



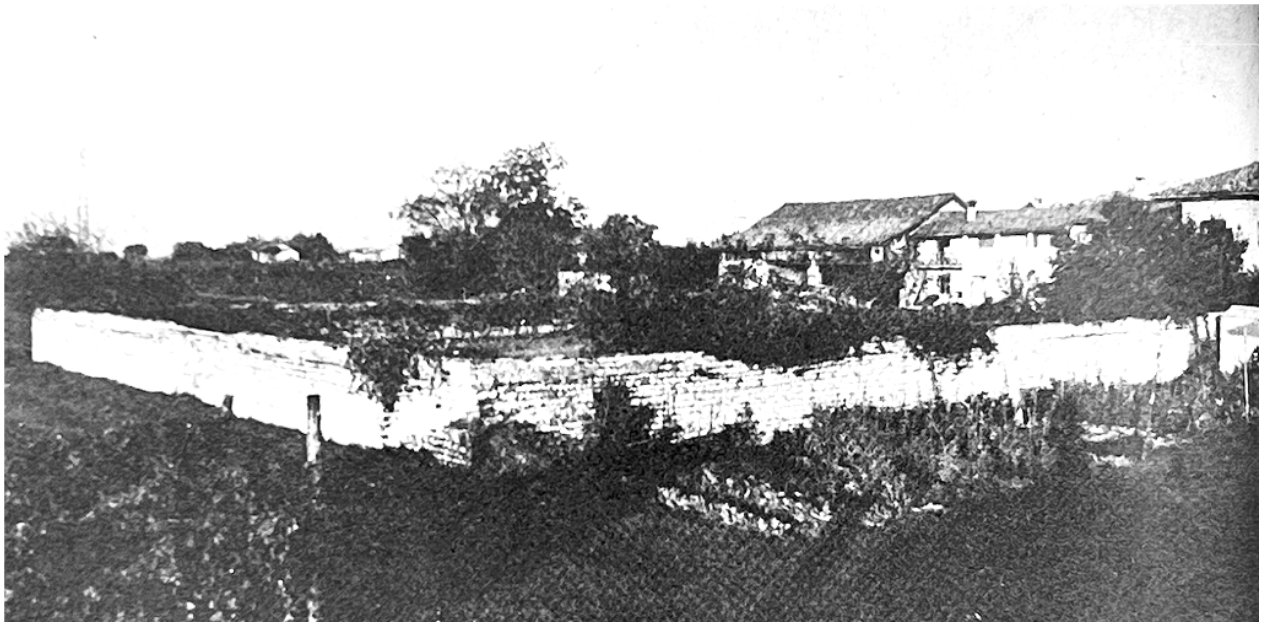
Internal courtyard of the boarding school of the Providence with some pupils of the elementary school.

The city of that time was not that of today, and the *House of the derelitte* enjoyed an extremely favorable position: it was an airy, sunny, quiet place, isolated from the even

limited city noise. Yet, for the two holy priests, this was not enough. They immediately thought of a country house, considering it necessary for several reasons.

Undoubtedly admirable is their concern to carry out a health selection for the weak girls, perhaps carriers of diseases, separating them from the healthy ones to protect the latter from any possible contagion and to reinvigorate the former with the inestimable gifts of rural serenity.

The country house would also serve the sisters and the more robust girls for shifts of rest after the constant fatigue of the school year.



Orzano (UD). Overall view of the property purchased by Father Carlo and Father Luigi.

Orzano (UD). Facade of the house in Orzano.

In this, as in every other choice, the two brothers shared the same thought. It is evident, however, that it was above all *don* Luigi who insisted on the opportunity of this new initiative: that *don* Luigi who spent the entire day in direct contact with the needs of the house; that *don* Luigi who had begun his apostolate precisely there, enriching the table of the orphans with meat and side dishes thanks to his alms-gathering. In this decision, one senses the concrete and loving touch of his hand.

Initially Father Carlo hoped to open this house of rest in Lovaria, about nine kilometers from Udine, on the road that leads to Gorizia.

In 1833 Mr. Pietro Piani had bequeathed to the hospital of Udine some of his houses and lands in that village, so that a convalescent center could be opened there for the poor who were discharged from the hospital but who did not have a family to return to or who would not have been able to receive the necessary care there after their hospitalization.

For various reasons the hospital had not given life to the new institute until 1842. In that year Father Carlo, acting on behalf of the Piani heirs and with the support of the bishop Monsignor Lodi, proposed to the direction of the hospital to entrust the realization of the project to him. He asked, however, to avoid any civil interference, that those assets be sold to him, for which he offered twenty thousand lire, a sum then increased to twenty-five thousand in 1844 and to thirty thousand in 1847. Despite this, nothing was concluded.

In 1837 Father Luigi, to support the holy intentions of his brother, renewed the proposal, guaranteeing a minimum of one thousand two hundred days of annual presence in the future convalescent center and also adding a boarding school for a certain number of foundlings. But he had no better fortune.

The two founders understood from the very beginning that the Lovaria project would not succeed. Since they considered a healthy house in the open countryside indispensable, they turned their gaze elsewhere and set it upon Orzano.

The country house in Orzano

Orzano is a small country village, situated eight kilometers east of Udine and as many west of Cividale, positioned somewhat back on the left bank of the gravelly Torre river, from which the Malina torrent separates it.

At the time, both of these watercourses were devoid of bridges. These water flows, which it was necessary to cross by fording, sometimes swelled suddenly, and *don* Luigi found himself in danger on several occasions.

One day, for example, it seemed that the wave would sweep away the horse, the carriage, and everyone on it; the driver himself lost his calm. He, instead, did not. A fervent prayer, and there they were, safe on the other bank.

Today industrialization reaches those areas with numerous companies of various kinds. At the time of the Father, the population dedicated itself exclusively to agricultural work: to the noble simplicity of faith and life, they united only a recreational interest, which revealed the kindness of the soul: music.

There, on August 1, 1844, Father Carlo purchased from Mr. Pietro Gennaro a manor villa with a farmhouse, together with three other small dwellings and forty-eight Friulian fields. On October 1 of the same year, he acquired through a long-term lease contract another seventeen fields of formerly municipal property, and on December 20, he added about eight more of the same type, ceded to him by Giovanni Battista Nicolin of Orzano [1].

In total, the new property of Orzano consisted of over five hectares of arable or meadow land and two gravelly areas intended for woodland.

Of great help in the arrangement of the agricultural colony of Orzano was the already mentioned Count Lodovico Rota, an expert in agriculture, who personally took care of the planting of vines and a mulberry trees, as well as coppice groves of acacias, poplars, and other trees for firewood. Already in 1849, Father Carlo had invested eleven thousand lire of that time in improvements, above all to adapt the modest manor villa into a vacation place for the orphans and the Sisters.

The two brothers certainly did not neglect the economic aspect of the lands of Orzano, since from there they expected wheat, corn, wine, cheese and butter, wood, and every other income necessary to support the *House of the derelitte*. Alms-gathering being forbidden and the spontaneous offerings of benefactors reduced to a minimum, they aimed at a self-financing of their work. However, they always showed themselves understanding, indeed amply generous toward the peasants or tenants of the lands of Orzano; it is not rare to find, in the autograph registers of administration kept by Father Luigi, the entry "*subsidies*" granted to those workers, especially during less fortunate agricultural years.

Two admirable criteria of Father Scrosoppi

From the beginning, some Sisters and lay sisters were sent to Orzano with a small group of orphans. Father Luigi added a « *tertiary* » particularly suited to economic management. He sacrificed her dreamed desire of becoming a religious sister with vows, so that she could, without harming recollection and holy poverty, deal with the peasants and with the brokers or go to the markets. His attentive sensitivity did not prevent him, however, from demanding a deep interior life from those precious collaborators as well. There was one — nicknamed the *Rosona* because of her imposing stature [2] — who remained famous in the annals of the congregation.

To Orzano he also sent those poor girls with physical and mental problems — rejects in the eyes of the world — who flocked to him to become Sisters. The physical

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[1] It must be remembered that the Austrian government, by sovereign resolution of April 16, 1839, had ordered the sale at auction to private individuals of the municipal lands, which until that time had been administered by the municipalities or rural villages and used for pasture or woods of collective use.

[2] Novello Rosa, born in Artegna (Udine) on 11-9-1832, entered the congregation as a tertiary on 24-2-1866 and died in Orzano (Udine) on 29-3-1908. Two sisters had preceded her into the convent in 1864: Teresa (b. 1-4-1837) and Luigia; the second, also a tertiary, died in Cormons (Gorizia) in 1888; the first was invested in 1871 with the name of Sister Maria Francesca Serafina, professed in 1875, died in Cormons in 1918. For notes on Novello Rosa see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 293-295.

impairments did not allow them to be welcomed among the religious women; the ardent love of God that animated them did not permit them to be rejected. One of these became the angel of Orzano and died there in the odor of sanctity, loved and venerated by that good population [3].

A rural school in Orzano

All the Sisters had to practice the apostolate. It is true, the solitary life in Orzano could be filled with prayer and work, but for the founder it was not enough. It was necessary that they did good.

Therefore, as early as 1853, he wanted to establish a female elementary school there for the local girls. At that time, there were few villages that enjoyed such good fortune. Father Luigi gave Orzano that gift. Indeed, the first teacher was none other than he. Here is how.

Sister Giacinta De Monte, who from that year was the first Superior of the house, provides us with the account.

« *It was the feast of the Immaculate Conception towards evening. The Most Reverend Father called me to him and said to me: Listen, I have thought of establishing a school in Orzano to remedy the ignorance of those poor girls. We shall leave this evening and spend the night in Orzano. The following day he called to himself the farmer's daughter and two others, inviting them into the room on the ground floor to stay with him. First of all, he had them make the sign of the cross, the only religious practice that the poor things knew how to do; for the rest, neither prayers nor anything else could be heard from them* [4].

These three were the seed of the many who, entirely free of charge, later received that primary education, so necessary and precious for the poor daughters of the people. The number of external pupils in the winter was considerable; in the summer, because of the field labors, the number then decreased. They were mainly taught Christian doctrine, then sewing and embroidery, and finally reading and writing.

Although — continues Sister Giacinta — *the Father had to distance himself from that villa, which he loved so much and which he said he had chosen as his tomb, yet every eight or at most fifteen days he returned there for a few hours, and there he questioned the girls on what they were learning and interested himself in their progress.* »

To the school was immediately added the festive oratory for girls.

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[3] It was Nadalutti Luigia (1844-1902), welcomed as an orphan into the House of the *derelitte*. She was so crippled in her body that she could never be admitted among the Sisters. Her education completed, Father Scrosoppi sent her to Orzano (Udine) as a sewing teacher and teacher of Christian doctrine, an office which for 36 years she exercised « maximo zelo et spiritu Christi ». (Cf. Summarium, pp. 475-476, in Positio...). For notes on her see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 347-354.

[4] Probably an exaggeration of the account by Sister Giacinta (see: part II, ch. 4, sec. Towards a congregation of its own).

When Father Scrosoppi arrived in Orzano for those brief visits, the news spread in a flash. The boys and girls, the women and the men themselves ran to kiss his hand. « *Stay with us, Father* » they begged him.

He replied: « *Do not fear, I shall return soon. And in death I shall always remain with you.* »

His body, in fact, remained in Orzano for sixty-eight years: they had to take it away secretly, because the inhabitants of Orzano considered it their only and precious treasure.

Father Luigi loved Orzano as his second homeland, his homeland of choice: and he was profoundly reciprocated in his affection.

The « *braida* » of the Missionaries

In Udine, opposite the *House of the derelitte*, extended a large *braida* (an enclosed meadow used for cultivation). It was once called « *the braida of the Missionaries* », because towards the middle of the eighteenth century the last patriarch of Aquileia, Cardinal Daniele Delfino, had separated it from the assets of the patrimony of the patriarchate to donate it to the congregation of the Fathers of the *Missione*. These Priests, followers of St. Vincent de Paul, had been called to *Friuli* by the patriarch so that they might dedicate themselves to popular missions.

After the suppressions of the Napoleonic era, the dwelling and the land had passed partly to the municipality of Udine and partly to the State, ending up immediately afterwards under the control of the ministry of war. Even today, in its western part, rise the buildings of the military district of Udine.

On March 2, 1841, the Bishop Monsignor Lodi had obtained it on lease, succeeding a certain Mr. Sante Moschini. On October 26 of the same year, he had asked the military command to be able to purchase it, since it once belonged to the patriarchal patrimony and it seemed right to him that it should return to the Church. However, an exorbitant price was demanded of him:

« *If indeed* — the Bishop wrote on December 27, 1842 — *a treasure is not buried in that land that allows covering such an enormous sum.* »

The negotiations of Monsignor Lodi were not successful and the most zealous Bishop fell ill shortly afterwards, dying at the beginning of 1845.

At that point, Father Carlo began to take an interest in the matter. Certainly the obvious utility of such a large vegetable garden situated right opposite the *House of the derelitte* attracted him, but the main reason was the desire that that land should not end up in the hands of strangers, compromising the privacy of the institute.

Father Carlo committed himself for years to this negotiation, strongly supported in Vienna by Monsignor Luigi Bragato and by Colonel Smola, the same one who had been cared for by the Sisters in 1848. It was precisely Smola who announced with joy, on November 11, 1852, the news of the favorable conclusion. On March 20, 1853, the contract was signed. It was not a purchase, but an exchange. Father Carlo ceded in return some plots of land on *Cividale street*, which he had begun to purchase for that very purpose since 1848. Those lands served as a parade ground, first for the Austrian army

and then for the Italian one; today they are occupied by the barracks « *Spaccamela* » of the military engineers.

As soon as the *braida* was acquired, a high boundary wall was raised towards the southwest to separate it from the area reserved for the military district. On June 8 of the same year, 1853, Father Carlo presented a request to the municipal council of Udine to open a small gate in the large wall that faced *delle Dimesse street*, right in front of the entrance to the *House of the derelitte*, and to lower the wall by about a meter. The project, signed by the mason Eusebio Brida, reveals that the wall was never lowered, while the pillars of the small gate were made half a meter higher than the original design.

Only in recent times, in the winter of 1974, the wall was finally lowered, while keeping the small gate intact.

The land was cultivated as a vegetable garden and orchard. Over time, those fruit trees became a temptation for the orphans. The most lively ones, driven by greediness, committed small thefts. Father Luigi, however, watched over them and at a certain point took the drastic decision to have the trees cut down. The Sister in charge of the garden was displeased, thinking of the sick who very much enjoyed those fruits; she turned to the founder, begging him earnestly to withdraw the order. He agreed, but on condition that there be closer supervision, so that those young daughters of the people would not get into the habit of stealing.

However, since there were fruit trees also in the courtyard of the House, where supervision was more difficult, the repeated warnings proved useless. Then the Father had the trees cut down first whose low branches were within reach of the girls, and then he had to have the others felled as well. From that moment, in the courtyard of the derelicts, they sat in the shade of the mulberry trees. As Jesus withered the barren fig tree with a curse, so Father Luigi had apple, pear, and cherry trees uprooted, so that those transgressions would not damage the education and purity of his spiritual daughters.

There was always a way to buy fruit at the market; if instead it did not arrive at the table, that deprivation had to serve as a lesson. It is an episode demonstrative of his evangelical-style pedagogy:

« *And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you.* »

Tangled skeins of silk

That concession of the enclosed meadow — obtained not free of charge, but through an exchange — represented a rare moment of serenity, like a solitary lotus flower floating on waters agitated by the oppressive demands of the civil authorities.

On December 14, 1850, the municipal administration, prompted by a circular from the provincial delegation, requested the sending of the customary and meticulous economic-statistical reports. Father Carlo replied on December 27, specifying that twenty women resided in the house, including the Superior, teachers, and service staff, sixty internal pupils, and one hundred and forty external ones. Not without a clear polemical allusion, he added that the revenues of the modest patrimony and the proceeds of labor « *are barely*

enough — he said — *to cover half of the annual expenses, while for the remaining part one must rely on some occasional alms from spontaneous helpers* ».

Yet the government continued to demand money and accepted no justifications.

In 1851 the institute was forced to contribute to the so-called voluntary national loans with a quota of 1850 Lire.

One could not even hope for tax exemptions: on July 30, 1851, Father Carlo asked that at least the building of the institute be included among the assets temporarily excluded from taxes, and the archiepiscopal curia supported the request with a heartfelt recommendation. However, the provincial delegation rejected the petition, followed closely by the inspector of the land registry for *Friuli* and by the central census board for the *regno Lombardo-Veneto*.

The two brothers were usually opposed to asking for subsidies from the State. On some rare occasions, however, they were forced to do so by the serious financial difficulties of the house. One could certainly not feed the orphans with air, and taxes together with the loan forms took away the necessary bread. They sent a request for help in 1853, when the Empress of Austria passed through *Sacile*, where their brother *don* Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi was Archpriest. The latter wrote on June 14:

« *I spoke personally and handed into her hands the appeal which I enclose to you in copy. He promised that he will do what is possible, given that she receives continuous requests; she added that the will to help exists, but funds are lacking. We shall see if the promise will be followed up.* »

It had no effect. However, the greatest annoyance came from another side. We have already mentioned it, but it is useful to speak of it again.

Because of the small spinning mill equipped with four spinning boilers, open since 1837, the *House of the derelitte* had been immediately entered in the tax registers for industry and commerce. In truth, the municipality of Udine had always exempted it without demanding specific documents: it was enough to observe the reality of the facts.

But on February 10, 1853, the imperial commission for the determination of the tax on revenues demanded its payment, sending the formal notice directly to Father Carlo Filaferro. He therefore had an easy game in replying, on February 28, with a letter that deserves to be reported in its entirety:

« *The most devout signatory Father Carlo Filaferro has never been an owner of a spinning mill, nor can he ever be, both due to his priestly ministry and due to his poor economic condition. Despite this, he has been considered almost every year an operator in this industrial branch, but every year he has been just as naturally exempted. It seems finally appropriate that similar errors, repeated too often, cease once and for all, to avoid continuous exchanges of correspondence and rectifications for public offices, and useless headaches and annoyances for the undersigned.*

It is true that the signatory, in his capacity as founder and director of this pious Institute of the derelitte, has desired and permitted that, for the instruction of the girls welcomed here, annual exercises be carried out also in silkworm breeding and in the related spinning, using exclusively the mulberry leaves that can be gathered at the institute. This

educational activity, as is evident, does not represent a taxable commercial exercise, but a praiseworthy work of charity.

If one wished to object that four boilers are present in the institute and that only one would suffice for instruction, it can be shown that these remain in operation for a very short time and that their quantity is useful to make a good number of young people work at the same time, stimulating interest, encouragement, and competition in them. We also had the comfort of seeing that the silk thus produced, although in a small quantity, obtained a few months ago an honorable mention among the industrial awards of our province.

If then, despite all this, one still wished to consider such spinning subject to the tax on revenues, it is declared that the registered subject must be the pious Institute of the derelitte and never Father Carlo Filaferro, who, as representative and director of the establishment, would return as customary to demonstrate the inappropriateness of such a fiscal application. »

One could not be more dignifiedly clear and, at the same time, vexed. The signature is Father Carlo's, but he was of a very affable and diplomatic disposition; for this reason we think that the vigor of the answer reveals the character of Father Luigi, decisively hostile to every form of fiscal greed and injustice. It was he, moreover, who in May and June rose at three or four in the morning to run into the field outside *Ronchi gate* to cut the branches of the mulberries, then returned to celebrate the holy Mass and dedicated many hours of the day to working and supervising the silkworm breeding. If a salary had to be calculated for him and for his female collaborators, as happens in an industrial company, nothing of the presumed profit would have remained.

But there was nothing to be done. Father Carlo reminded the bureaucrats in vain that the sixth paragraph of the imperial law of April 11 exempted the house from the tax on revenues, « *without even appealing* — he observed — *to the special condition of this poor establishment which lives exclusively on charity* ».

He had to protest again, on November 20, 1853, against the order to pay 403.88 Lire in taxes and an equivalent figure as a fine for failure to notify. They had even inflicted a fine upon him!

The divestment of Father Carlo

It was not only a matter of bureaucratic precision pushed to a clearly hostile excess. Underneath, a certain aversion toward Filaferro was hidden. In addition to the cursed weed — couch grass — of envy, there must have been someone who cloaked criticisms in deceptive pretexts.

The pretext was not lacking at all: until that moment, houses and lands were registered personally to Father Carlo. Partly to silence the ill-intentioned, partly because he felt his own end was near, Father Carlo remedied this with an act signed on January 2, 1852, between himself and the Superior Mother Lucia De Giorgio. In that document he declared — after an accurate listing of the buildings, agricultural properties, and capitals — « *that all the real estate described above I have had registered to the private owner*

firm House of the derelitte in Udine in the public registers of the new stable census »; at the same time, the Superior attested that the house, from that very moment, had received the actual ownership and the enjoyment of the fruits of every single asset.

On April 16, 1852, the royal provincial delegate visited the institute, and on May 1 he wrote to Father Carlo:

« *In the visit paid by me on April 16 of last year to the Institute of the derelitte in this city, I was able to convince myself that good order reigns in its every part, and that to your distinguished zeal correspond with full success the cares of the tireless vice-director Father Luigi Scrosoppi, of the Superior, and of the teachers. ... I read with true pleasure the act of January 2 of the current year provided by you, with which you declare that all the lands and assets purchased belong forever to the private House of the derelitte and constitute its current endowment, indicating one by one the lands and assets themselves; such a solemn act will serve, if made public by the deposit of the original or an authenticated copy at public and notary offices, to consolidate the existence and the economic and moral credit of the institute.* »

Father Carlo did not worry about making the act public, aware that there is no way to extinguish the malice of those who want to be wicked; he merely had a copy drawn up, on July 13, 1852, so that it might be deposited in the archiepiscopal curia, that is, into the hands of his ecclesiastical superior. The bitterness that came to him from men was amply comforted by hope in the just divine Judge.

Of bitterness he had much. In these circumstances, even more than in the honors of the early years, Father Luigi was doubly close to him: both because he was involved in it himself, and because he felt in his own soul what saddened the last days of his beloved and venerated brother.

The infamous accusation

The acid murmuring against Father Carlo must have been very widespread and known to everyone, if *don* Valentino Liccaro had no fear of speaking about it at length in the eulogy [5] that he delivered during his funeral before the crowd packed into the *Church of St. Mary Magdalene*.

He had first summarized the history of the *House of the derelitte*; he had emphasized in a particular way the enlightened and most zealous administration and the scrupulous management, attributing the merit — in the printed text — to Father Luigi. « *Such success* — he continued —, *so many hardships endured and so many merits acquired by Father Carlo seemed as though they should procure him public gratitude and universal applause. But, alas, miserable condition of our fallen humanity! In this lower world it is not possible to do good without clashing with contradiction and remaining subject to the bites of ill-born passions.* »

After recalling the example of Jesus Christ, who had received cries of condemnation in exchange for the good performed and preached, he continued: « *No wonder, therefore, if*

[5] Cf. V. Liccaro, Funebre elogio del padre Carlo Filaferro, Udine 1854, pp. 20-21.

Father Carlo, doing good in resemblance to the divine model, was not spared by wicked tongues. The accusation was hurled at him of being a greedy speculator on the charity of others, an avid hunter of inheritances and legacies, as if he had then converted them to his own advantage. »

Nor did Liccaro waste time refuting those perverse and calumnious insinuations. « *I have no need to do so* — he exclaimed —; *let the facts speak with their unassailable language.* » The listeners knew those facts, they knew very well how Father Carlo had behaved. The speaker preferred to describe the delicate and discreet method used by Filaferro, certain that he could not be contradicted. The refined style detracts nothing from the vigor of this public and solemn testimony.

« *And furthermore observe well, gentlemen* — he said —, *that Father Carlo, to obtain such results in favor of the wretched, having to have recourse to the charity of others, which is a Christian duty for those who possess wealth, did not crawl at all before the rich or the well-to-do, nor did he flatter them or put pressure on them: simply explaining the needs of the pious work, he asked with dignity, leaving everyone fully free, both in life and in death, to give and consecrate to the poor that alms which pleased him most. And whoever was generous with him* — he concluded —, *was he not perhaps master of his own money like anyone else? Or perhaps did he not know well how fruitfully it would be employed?* »

Today, with the documents of the scrupulous management of the house in hand, we ask ourselves with surprise what legacies or what inheritances could have triggered such an unjust fuss. From 1845 to the death of Father Carlo we find recorded only six legacies for a total of 4300 Lire; another three for 7300 Lire, a small house, and four fields, arrived after his death. And they all came from people as wealthy as they were free to dispose of their own assets, without harming anyone.

From more than one clue it emerges that the calumny drew strength from the growing anticlericalism, which sought pretexts to discredit priests, especially those of intrepid fidelity to the Holy See, as the two brothers were. The greatest resonance must have been aroused by two cases in which Father Luigi was called into question. We mention them briefly, since precisely in these his sensitivity shines.

The two donations of *don* Giuseppe Pletti

The Udinese priest *don* Giuseppe Pletti [6] had donated, through a notary deed of June 25, 1843, a capital of 6,000 lire for the benefit of the *House of the derelitte*. Subsequently, with another contract dated March 18, 1846, he disposed of a further sum of 8,107 lire to establish a scholarship in the congregation of the *Oratorio*, which would be reconstituted two months later. In the meantime, he arranged that this capital should remain for the benefit of the *derelitte*. In both deeds, *don* Pletti expressly requested that the funds and the related documents be personally delivered into the hands of Father Carlo. The latter, due to the importance of the matter and for a form of personal

[6] Born in 1780, died in 1846.

correctness, wished for a copy of the two donations to be prepared to be delivered to the archiepiscopal curia.

All this had been managed with extreme confidentiality, but in a completely regular manner, before illness led to the death of the donor, which occurred on November 14, 1846.

don Pletti had drawn up a will in favor of one of his brothers and the latter's wife. However, a second brother, who had been excluded from the inheritance, sent a formal memorandum to the Archbishop of Udine on August 24, 1847. In this writing he stated among other things:

« *During his last illness, the deceased was tirelessly assisted by the reverend don Luigi Scrosoppi, who occupied himself exclusively with all matters regarding Pletti, that is, the documents, the money, and everything that was in the room; after his death, he declared that he had found neither money nor papers* ».

In reality, the money and documents had been delivered eight months earlier to Father Carlo. The author of the protest himself recognized that the heirs, not wishing to question the honesty of the reverend Scrosoppi, had accepted his declaration. However, he asked the Archbishop to investigate the matter, threatening to turn to the civil courts.

The investigation was conducted with such precision that the definitive verdict was issued only over four years later. On January 9, 1852, the Vicar Capitular Monsignor Darù, a man of well-known moral severity, declared that the dual contract of donation of *don* Giuseppe Pletti had been deposited in the curia and explicitly approved in its every part. On the same day, the registers of the curia record a letter sent to the brother of the deceased in which it was replied that, after having had the long petition examined by wise and prudent persons, nothing contrary to either justice or the laws of the Church emerged in the contracts of June 25, 1845, and March 10, 1846.

But how did Father Luigi behave? Of the capital of six thousand lire destined for the house, he recorded only 3,428.37 lire, which were used for the construction of the small church; the remaining sum he clearly renounced for the sake of peace and to avoid further conflicts. As for the fund destined for the students of the Oratorian congregation, after it was suppressed in 1867, he destined it for a scholarship at the archiepiscopal seminary.

Aunt Rosa Lazzarini

A clear proof of Father Carlo's correctness in requesting financial help for the house and in managing it is provided to us by his relations with *don* Francesco Cernazai. Between 1842 and 1844 he had received from him three loans for a total of eight thousand lire. This was a very small thing for that extremely wealthy priest. Although Cernazai was a close friend of the two brothers, and in particular of Father Luigi, Filaferro issued him the relative promissory note each time. And when, on March 12, 1850, Cernazai decided to forgive the debt, considering it as a donation from his mother Orsolina Cernazai Cargnelli — who passed away on February 1, 1842, and was already a fervent protector of the derelicts —, Father Carlo committed to maintaining two orphans in the

institute as a consideration for the annual interest, who would be chosen by *don* Francesco or by his heirs. Who could ever discern in Filaferro's way of acting a trace of the flattery, insistence, or pressure of which he was accused? Yet that would have been the ideal case to do so; if he had done it, we would not wonder, indeed we would find it understandable or even praiseworthy. However, Father Carlo did not do it.

But the sensitivity of the two brothers, and in this case especially of Father Luigi, manifests itself with moving or even dramatic tones in their relations with their aunt Rosa Lazzarini.

She possessed a patrimony valued at that time at about three hundred thousand lire, consisting of the Lazzarini houses in *Strazzamantello street* [7] in Udine, of the timber and hardware warehouse with the relative credits, of forty fields with dwellings in Pozzuolo del Friuli and of a rich family trousseau. Since her children had deceased, everything led her to favor Father Carlo and Father Luigi, sons of her sister Antonia, being closer to her both in affection and in Christian sentiments; or rather to favor the *House of the derelitte*, of which, as long as she remained alive, she was one of the protectors provided for by the regulations.

In fact, she helped the house, both with subsidies and with the cancellation of the debt for the purchases made in her warehouse for the construction of the building itself. In a note written in his own hand, Father Scrosoppi indicates the total amount as twelve thousand lire. However, not even that sum was considered on a purely free basis.

Aunt Rosa had remarried in 1818 with Mr. Gabriele Angelo Pecile. Following approximately the same method and proportion used with *don* Francesco Cernazai, on January 20, 1854, a deed was drawn up on the basis of which the pious *House of the derelitte*, « *always grateful for the various and important aids that Mr. Gabriele, the late Paolo, and Rosa born Lazzarini, the spouses Pecile... have granted to it at different times* », recognized to Mrs. Rosa and, after her passing, to the women of the Pecile house the right to welcome free of charge into the institute three girls, to be chosen among the orphans of Udine, Fagagna, or Pozzuolo.

With a letter of the subsequent July 31, Father Luigi invited his aunt to exercise that right, and she actually did so on August 10. In the relative document she wrote that « *her nephew Father Carlo traced everything back to divine Providence and confided entirely in it to provide for the needs of every kind for his derelicts* »; and she declared « *that since adolescence she loved and was reciprocated by the affection of her excellent nephew Father Carlo Filaferro. And in the painful passing that occurred* — father Carlo had been dead for about seven months —, *the hope consoles me that he has been welcomed by divine goodness into the abode of the blessed, as a reward for his evangelical labors constantly lived and sustained with dignity* ».

Several years earlier, with a will of 1839 and then with a donation of 1841, Mrs. Rosa had let herself be convinced to cede the entire Lazzarini patrimony to her husband. And the latter, a couple of months before his death, which occurred on July 10, 1833, had left

[7] The ancient Strazzamantello street comprised half of the current Paolo Canciani street, namely the one that connects Pascolle street with Matteotti square (formerly St. James square).

all his assets to his nephew Gabriele Luigi Pecile — later mayor of Udine and senator of the Kingdom of Italy — with the sole obligation to lend assistance to the aunt, defined as suffering from mental disorders. The poor woman died in Fagagna on December 7, 1853; the witnesses close to her recount her deep sadness when she realized she could dispose of nothing to perform works of good, due to the donation made many years before.

Her natural heirs would have been the children of her older sister Antonia — *don* Giovanni Battista and *don* Luigi Scrosoppi — and those of her younger sister Francesca — Professor Giovanni Battista Bassi [8] and Francesca, married D'Este-Roviglio. To them a share of the movable assets of the Lazzarini house was finally recognized; the Scrosoppi accepted to be liquidated last, in May 1839, with three thousand lire each.

No, one could not truly address to the two founders of the *House of the derelitte* the infamous accusation of going in search of legacies and inheritances. They relied with humility on divine Providence. And Father Luigi, although deprived of human help that would have been justly predictable, expressed neither complaints nor recriminations. He was on the contrary glad to be able to repeat, almost like his beloved Saint Francis, that he and his orphans had to address their prayers and their hopes solely to the Father who is in heaven.

The pious passing of Father Carlo

Already in the autumn of 1853, Father Carlo had been forewarned of his imminent end by a serious health crisis, which at that moment he successfully overcame. A second attack struck him towards the end of January 1854, and once again it seemed he might recover. However, organic complications ensued, leading to his death on January 30, shortly after midnight.

« *He immediately asked* — writes the curate of the metropolitan cathedral, *don* Zoratti — *for the comforts of religion, barely enduring being deprived of the Viaticum due to the violent vomiting with which he was afflicted. Often expressing acts of faith, hope, and charity, and offering and commending himself to divine goodness, he breathed his last. His remains were transported from the house at nine o'clock on the morning of January 31 and placed on the catafalque in the Church of santa Maria Maddalena.* »

In that place, the entire Office of the Dead was chanted and a solemn funeral Mass was celebrated, in the presence of a large crowd of citizens of every social standing. After the reading of the funeral eulogy by *don* Valentino Liccaro, the final absolution was given to the body. Zoratti reports that the rite took place amidst the groans and weeping — which were not held back, according to the custom of the era — of the Sisters, the orphans, and the numerous faithful who used to go to confession to the holy priest. The

[8] From Pordenone (1792-1879), mathematician, meteorologist, architect. In 1851 he published the Osservazioni meteorologiche di G. Venerio; he was the author of biographical pamphlets and designed the bell tower of san Giorgio in Pordenone. (Cf. G. Marchetti, o.c., p. 742).

body was then taken to the cathedral, where another Mass was celebrated, and then brought back to *santa Maria Maddalena*, where it remained exposed for the entire day.

On the morning of February 1, the body was finally transported to the cemetery with a solemn ceremony and procession [9] and buried in the Porcia tomb, in which the remains of mother Antonia and stepfather Domenico Scrosoppi already rested.

Almost to summarize the spiritual traits of this luminous priestly figure, here is the portrait provided by Liccaro at the end of his funeral eulogy:

« *In conclusion of what has been set forth, I will say that Father Carlo, who lived in a frugal way, dressed poorly, and treated himself with severity..., Father Carlo died poor, full of good will in helping his neighbor, and burdened by the debts contracted for the cause of the poor. A life upright, pure, and impeccable as his was; a life sober, dedicated to sacrifice, and industrious; a life pious, devout, exemplary, and active, because it was entirely consecrated to the fulfillment of his priestly duties: these are the foundations of our hopes for his eternal salvation.* »

Then, after having praised his authentic humility, unique modesty, unshakable firmness, and the unalterable patience that distinguished him among the many adversities and sorrows of life, he addressed these heartfelt appeals to the priests and seminarians present:

« *As for us ecclesiastics, finally, gathered here to offer the suffrage of our prayers to the well-merited Father Carlo, to the man of God, great in intelligence, in heart, in labors, and in his works, whose memory will certainly be blessed by posterity, let us look at ourselves in this model and profit from the example of his most pure life, of his tireless dedication to his sacred duties, of his activity for the glory of God and for the good of souls, of his disinterestedness, of charity, and of his patience... And you, young clerics, hope of the future, seeing our masters in ecclesiastical discipline, the pillars of the sanctuary, Monsignor Darù, Father Carlo, pass away one after another... remember their teachings and the examples they left you, and reflect upon such models.* »

The spiritual heir of Father Carlo

We would like to be able to know the contents of the inexpressible conversations that took place between the two holy priests at the hour of earthly parting. What words did Father Carlo ever address to his *don* Luigi? With what tender emotion did *don* Luigi try to comfort the last moments of the one who had been more of a father than a brother to him?

Undoubtedly, if Father Carlo serenely commended his spirit to divine goodness, he left his mission and his works without fear, indeed with an unshakeable faith. He entrusted them to knotty and strong, generous and sweet, magnanimous and tenacious hands: the hands of the one who, in appearance, had been his humble executor, but in reality had been its tireless animator and would now become its sure helmsman.

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[9] Cf. Death Register of the Cathedral parish, book VI, p. 124.

The *House of the derelitte* was by then organized and consolidated with wisdom.

The congregation of the Sisters of *san Gaetano* — or of the *Provvidenza* — had given extraordinary proofs of the spirit by which it was animated, so much so that it was spoken of with admiration even outside the narrow circle of Udine. To the pressing requests to have the sisters in the civil hospital of Udine in 1848 was added in 1852 the petition of the Archbishop of Gorizia, Monsignor Francesco Saverio Lushin, so that they might assume the direction of the institute for orphan girls founded in that city by *don* Contavalli. The prudence of the two brothers had led them to decline both offers and to postpone the birth of new communities; but in the twenty-four religious women who wept around the coffin of Father Carlo burned the desire for even vaster dedications.

The loss of Filaferro was, undoubtedly, deeply felt by the Sisters; however, since Father Luigi had been its soul and guide since its foundation, not the slightest void was perceived. On the contrary, they gathered even closer around him, ready to depart at his nod toward the holiest adventures of charity. Moreover, Father Scrosoppi associated with the direction of the religious women that admirable figure of a priest who was *don* Francesco Fantoni, very similar in intelligence and sweetness to Father Carlo.

Not even the human grief for the death of his brother, sweetly mitigated by his great faith, slowed his pace; rather, it invigorated his will to bring to completion what they had planned and desired together.

At the death of Father Carlo, three initiatives were underway, some barely sketched out, others only dreamed of: two of a charitable character and one of a more strictly spiritual nature.

In his funeral eulogy for Filaferro, Liccaro hints at the first two. It concerned a *"Casa del Provvedimento"* for domestic servants awaiting employment, which was already being worked on: Father Luigi would open it in October 1854. The other was an institute for deaf-mutes that would be realized in 1857.

We will speak of both later.

There was, finally, in another field, the necessity to bring to a perfect form the Philippine congregation, resurrected indeed in 1846, but not yet as a regularly formed religious community.

In the funeral eulogy of Father Carlo, Liccaro had placed the problem of his succession with great delicacy:

« *When the prophet Elijah was taken from the earth and caught up in a chariot of fire, his faithful Elisha prayed him that his spirit might descend doubled upon him...; and seeing him ascend to heaven..., grasping his mantle he held it as a pledge of divine protection, and with it he worked wonders. May the merciful Lord grant, and you supplicate Him, O Christian brothers, that upon some of the ecclesiastics who listen to me the spirit of Father Carlo may descend doubled, and that he may possess the inheritance of his mantle for the glory of God and for your good.* »

Did Liccaro perhaps allude to *don* Luigi? Did the gazes of the listeners turn toward him at those words? Probably yes.

However, his profound humility and his living completely in the shadow of his brother had perhaps not allowed his capabilities to be fully evaluated. He had been spoken of only as the most faithful arm of Father Carlo, so much so that it was perhaps difficult to imagine him as the directing mind of all those works. A steel still enclosed in its scabbard: that is what Father Luigi must have seemed at the end of January 1854; and in a simple and worn scabbard, such as not to make anyone suspect that a Toledo blade was hidden inside.

It will not be long before everyone notices it, and not because of any vain self-promotion of his. He had on his side two forces of absolutely personal value: on the supernatural level, a granitic faith and an unparalleled operational courage; on the natural level, an immense affection for his brother, for whom he considered it sacred to continue what he had begun and to realize what he had dreamed.

Once again, even if Liccaro or the listeners had not thought of him, the word of the Apostle came true:

« *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* »

And so a poor, simple, and easygoing priest takes the helm. Human calculation would not have given him credit. Then, however, it will see with wonder the sails unfurl toward great spiritual and material goals.

But, at fifty, was he not perhaps already too old?

No. From faith and from union with God flows a vein of luxuriant and perennial youth: « *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.* »

PART THREE

Father Luigi at the Helm (1855-1884)

Chapter 1

DON LUIGI, PROVOST
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY (1854-1867)

The good seed choked by thorns

Thirteen years of generous efforts, yet completely thwarted; thirteen years marked by bitter disappointments; thirteen years that found their epilogue in the suppression of the order and, above all, in the torment of seeing the beloved Church of Santa Maria Maddalena deconsecrated: this is the melancholy summary of the Oratorian experience of *don* Luigi Scrosoppi. However, the failure of a project by no means proves that it was not valid, nor does it diminish the value of the man animated by great desires who had promoted it. If the good seed dies choked by thorns, the responsibility does not fall on the seed, nor on the one who sowed it.

In 1854, *don* Luigi was convinced that the full restoration of the Congregation of the Oratory was an urgent necessity; the wait had been too long and perhaps the useful time was about to expire. Should he, therefore, lose heart? It was not in his nature, nor did his unwavering faith and his zeal, as firm as steel, allow it. The glory of God and the salvation of souls demanded an attempt. And he tried.

What were his motivations? It is well to reiterate them.

Certainly, the deep love for the Oratory and for his dear father San Filippo influenced him, a feeling absorbed since childhood and rooted in his soul. Certainly, the tender desire to realize the dreams of his brother, *don* Carlo, weighed upon him.

However, to these personal reasons, two others of a general nature were added.

The religious situation was worsening day by day. The times were undoubtedly critical for the Church and every sign suggested that they would become even harder. San Filippo had lived in an equally difficult era, yet he had not let himself be discouraged. It was necessary to launch a holy spiritual counter-offensive; it was necessary to gather a group of courageous priests who would go among the people to preach fidelity or the return to God, especially through missions. Too many times the ministers of the Gospel, overcome by discouragement or fear, had abandoned the field to Satan. Too many times, instead of acting with apostolic promptness, they had moved too late, when the spiritual harvest had already been devastated.

Don Luigi was also fascinated by the Oratorian model of a totally free priestly ministry. In this way, the slanders of those who accused priests of acting out of professional habit or personal interest would fall on deaf ears. For this reason, the Oratorian congregation usually welcomed only priests capable of supporting themselves with their own heritage. But what should be done if there were no wealthy or well-to-do priests? He dreamed that

the poor would answer the call. For them, divine Providence would provide; for them, he himself committed to guaranteeing sustenance, so that they could dedicate themselves to the apostolate « *gratis et amore Dei* » (that is, freely and for the love of God) .

The memorandum of *don* Pietro Benedetti

Barely three days after the death of Father Carlo, at 6:00 p.m. on February 2, the priests Pietro Benedetti, Luigi Scrosoppi, Antonio Specie, Francesco Fantoni, Domenico Someda, and Domenico Deotti [(1)] met in the house of the congregation (purchased in 1842) « *for the purpose of appointing a new representative of the congregation itself* ». Benedetti, the learned and pious founder of the infant asylum, was unanimously elected; Archbishop Monsignor Trevisanato [(2)] immediately granted his approval, also appointing Benedetti rector of the Church of *Santa Maria Magdalene*.

Father Luigi had no doubt about the support of that venerated confrere. His surprise was therefore even more bitter when, on May 21, 1854, he heard Benedetti read, before the same priests, a detailed « *Memorandum regarding the restoration of the filippini in Udine* » [(3)].

The difficulties followed one another like the links of an inexorable chain.

Why had Father Carlo, « *of blessed and regretted memory... a man of great intelligence and great heart..., extremely zealous* », never decided to open the boarding school? He must have had « *certainly very grave reasons for procrastinating so long, despite the risk to the new congregation* ».

He therefore invited reflection on the state of the house: little sunny and poorly ventilated, with only three decent rooms, devoid of open spaces to take air, and so damp that he himself, in the three years he had lived there, had fallen ill twice with rheumatic fevers. « *Regarding two young wealthy, capable priests of good morals* — he stated —

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[1] Born in Postoncico (S. Martino di Valvasone - Udine) in 1801, he died in Udine in 1869. He joined the congregation of the Oratorio and after its suppression he collaborated in the parish of the cathedral. A man of faith, piety, and zeal, he was « ready to serve humbly everywhere if only to win souls for the Lord » (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti..., p. 34). Don Specie of Resiutta (Udine) — 1788-1855 — was a companion in novitiate and profession of Father Carlo Filaferro. After the suppression of the Oratorio, he was in the care of souls in the diocese, then choir chaplain of the chapter of Udine, where he died.

[2] He was born in Venice at the Giudecca. He was a learned professor of oriental languages and sacred hermeneutics in the seminary for several years, then canon theologian of s. Marco, Archbishop of Udine, and finally Patriarch of Venice in 1862 and Cardinal in 1863. He took care of the formation of the clergy, recommended missions and spiritual exercises for the people. He supported the Work of the Propagation of the Faith, established that of the Holy Childhood; extremely generous in charity, he carried out great activity as president of the commission of public beneficence; during his episcopate, the association « The Conferences of St. Vincent » arose. A combination of strength and gentleness, of wisdom and prudence characterized his government. He fought for the rights of the Church and at the First Vatican Council he was among the most learned and strenuous supporters of pontifical infallibility. (Cf. A. TESSARIN, Delle lodi dell'eminentissimo cardinale Giuseppe Luigi Trevisanato, Venice 1877, p. 68; G. COPOLUTTI, o.c., pp. 40-52).

[3] A.L.S., photocopy of the ms., pp. 8 (Religious Institutes Fund, A.C.A.U.).

to whom I proposed entering the congregation, no one took from me the hope of accepting, but both expressed reservations about the current conditions of the house. »

He then proceeded to examine the four candidates who were to constitute the congregation: himself, Specie, Deotti, and *don* Luigi. All had passed forty-five years of age, the maximum age established by Saint Philip. Regarding commitments, especially preaching, he was the elderly catechist of the gymnasium, retired for two years due to voice problems; Specie was chaplain of the cathedral; Deotti collaborated tirelessly as much as his precarious health permitted, but had never preached. « *Don Luigi Scrosoppi* — he continued — *in other circumstances would be an excellent collaborator. But, being administrator, director, and confessor of the hospice of the derelitte, extremely poor and very crowded* — three assignments that would be enough to crush three robust men — *it is a matter of fact that in our church he does not celebrate Mass, does not confess, does not distribute communion, nor preach; it is almost a miracle that he finds the time to attend the other functions.* »

Finally, he presented a balance sheet of the expected revenues and expenses, remembering that the *filippini* by rule must maintain themselves autonomously and serve free of charge. It followed that for food no more than twenty-nine cents a day per person would remain, « *unless* — he added — *there are hidden financial aids.* »

At this point he observed:

« *To anyone who would answer me that we must trust in divine Providence, I would reply as Father Giuseppe Passalenti did to his superior, Father Massimo of the counts Brazzà, the last of the ancient congregation: My father, was it not perhaps divine Providence that put our heads upon our shoulders, so that we too might think of our affairs?* »

Benedetti concluded by urging to postpone the opening of the boarding school until the house had been restored and the necessary financial means had been found, despite the famine then widespread, to guarantee the survival of the congregation.

In the meantime, *don* Luigi could have settled the debts for the purchase of the house and faced the expenses for the restoration. Meanwhile, two poor priests would be sent to the *Oratorio* of Verona, where *don* Luigi himself had inquired in person, utilizing the two study subsidies of three hundred lire each already prepared.

He also urged that in the meantime other priests, preferably local and wealthy, should join them, pointing out to those interested in the missions that the new congregation of the *Oratorio* would also become the center for the congregation of diocesan missionaries to be established on the model of that of Vicenza or of those operating with success in the Kingdom of Naples.

There is no doubt about Benedetti's good intentions. However, whoever reads that « *Memorandum* » today can appreciate its prudence, but receives the impression that it was destined to close forever the project of the *filippini* congregation. And this, Father Scrosoppi could not accept.

The minutes of the meeting

Once the reading of the « *Memorandum* » was completed, all those present were invited to express their opinion.

« *The reverend don Luigi Scrosoppi* — reads the minutes written by Someda — *despite the difficulties listed and full of confidence in divine Providence, insists on the immediate opening of the congregation, declaring that if this does not happen, he will no longer keep the promises to support the congregation with means known to him.*

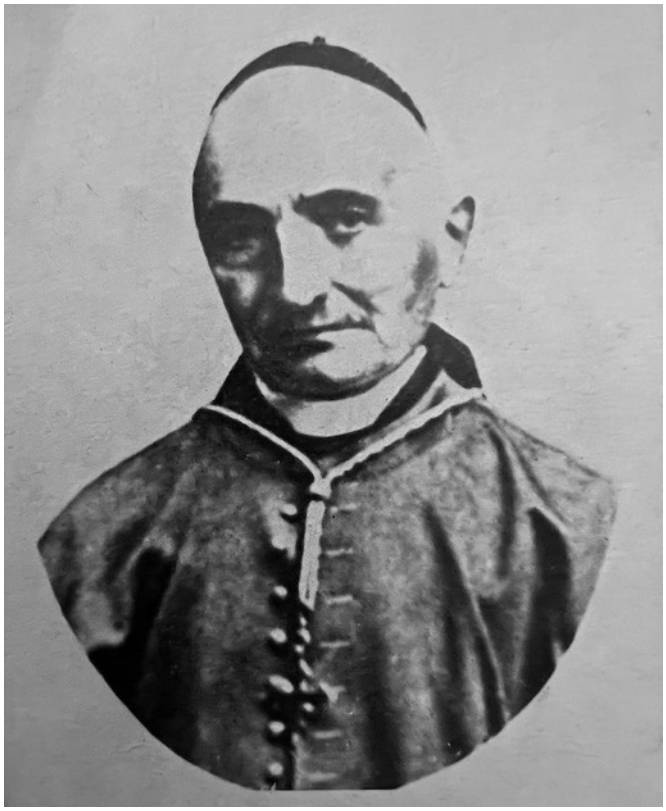
Don Domenico Deotti also declares that he wants the immediate opening. Don Antonio Specie, on the contrary, believes he must suspend the opening to better secure the means of subsistence.

Don Francesco Fantoni and don Domenico Someda, considering on the one hand the good of the reopening and on the other hand the difficulty that would derive from the withdrawal of don Luigi and his means, vote for the reopening, although all the critical issues of the "Memorandum" are not resolved; this also because, since it is a provisional phase, the priests can withdraw if experience demonstrates the impossibility of continuing, according to the rules of Saint Philip. »

Everyone signed the minutes. However, Father Scrosoppi added to his signature:

« *I declare that I expressed many observations and objections to the reading of the "Memorandum" of the very reverend Father Pietro Benedetti, which have been omitted from these minutes.* »

We do not know what they were, but it is evident that Father Luigi remained deeply embittered.



Monsignor Domenico Someda, Vicar General of the diocese of Udine and confessor of Father Luigi.

The admirable humility of *don* Benedetti

The « *Memorandum* » and the minutes of the meeting were delivered to the Archbishop, who kept them with him for more than two months.

The good *don* Benedetti must have suffered a deep inner torment during that period of time, uncertain about the decision to be taken, given that only on September 8 did he write a long letter addressed « *To the venerable congregation of the Oratorio of Udine* », directing it to *don* Someda.

In the letter he states that he had always sought, in all his life, to implement whatever his superior had commanded or suggested to him. However, the Archbishop had pointed out to him that he too perceived « *the arduousness of the undertaking* » and had returned the documents to him « *without imparting any order to me on the matter... And although don Luigi had assured me that his excellence the monsignor archbishop would summon me again to discuss it, the reality was that, after waiting in vain for the call for several days, and having later presented myself to him for other reasons, he made no further mention of the matter to me* ».

« *I therefore find myself* — the text continues — *entrusted solely to my discernment. Without a superior order, without an inner impulse that can be interpreted as a divine vocation, weakened by advanced age, by illnesses and above all by the hardships faced in the past, and therefore unable to face difficulties and obstacles as in the past, I would end up being myself a hindrance to the success of the project if I decided to commit myself to it.*

Praying therefore to the Lord that He may bless this work, I leave the task of attempting it to whoever possesses more energy than I and a firmer trust in divine Providence. »

He further added that the previous evening he had left the house of the congregation together with his family and had retired, alone, into the room « *which in the past had served as accommodation for the rectors of the church... for the purpose of not leaving the sacred building devoid of a custodian, until it is decided otherwise, and also to join the courageous founders of the new community of evangelical workers, should the heavenly Master, who sometimes sends workers into his vineyard even at the eleventh hour, deign to call me* ».

This is a truly wonderful letter!

It is entirely imbued with regret for not having found the courage to dare, but at the same time it is illuminated by the hope of still being able to offer his contribution, despite his sixty-seven years of age.

Don Luigi sells his paternal house

On September 20 *don* Luigi wrote a letter to his friends; although the original text has been lost, we know that in it he requested authorization to immediately begin the restoration works on the house. His friends replied on the 23rd in the following terms:

« *In relation to the request made by you with your writing of the 20th current, the undersigned declare that not only does nothing stand in the way on their part, but that they are on the contrary glad that you are beginning the works for the preparation of the house which is to serve for the congregation of the Filippini Fathers; and that, once it is ready, you may await there in the company of the reverend don Domenico Deotti those subjects whom divine Providence will call to be sons of Saint Philip. May God assist you in the holy undertaking, upon which the undersigned with their prayers will not fail to invoke heavenly blessings.* »

The approval bore the signatures of Benedetti, Fantoni, Someda, Deotti, and Specie.

Don Luigi promptly started the works, which continued throughout 1855: a testimony of this work is still visible in the Philippine coat of arms [4] placed above the lintel of a door on the western side of *della Prefettura street*.

At the same time, together with *don* Benedetti — then rector of the church — and basing himself on the designs of the architect Zandigiacomo, he promoted the completion of the facade of *Santa Maria Maddalena*, which had remained unfinished since the times of the reconstruction of the early eighteenth century.

Where did he find the necessary funds?

For the church, several citizens offered generous contributions. For the house, instead, he relied exclusively on his own strength: he assumed the entire financial burden of it, since it was his unshakeable will to inaugurate it. In fact, precisely in 1855, he sold his paternal house situated at number 47 of *Rauscedo street*. Although he was not born there, he had spent thirty years there and within those walls he had seen his mother, his father, and his half-brother Father Carlo die.

Tradition narrates that the sale was motivated by the desire to prevent an apostasy (the abandonment of faith). This version is historically reliable: he ceded the property at a very low price to a priest in spiritual crisis, hoping to lead him back to wiser counsel through his own benevolence. In response, a short time later, that same priest would repay him by making him the target of spiteful derision, along with many other religious and lay people faithful to the Church [5].

Despite having inherited other properties together with *don* Giovanni Battista, the sale of that specific house, so dense with dear memories, represented an act of extreme detachment. For *don* Luigi it was a definitive symbolic gesture: it meant renouncing a

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[4] In the current Marinolli street at house no. 2 there is the Philippine coat of arms bearing the date 1651; in it are depicted three olive branches on each of which a dove rests.

[5] It was the Canon Gianfrancesco Banchieri, born in Feltre (Belluno) in 1800, died in Udine in 1882, teacher in the seminary and high school, abbot of Latisana, diocesan school inspector; he was a man of culture, but of a rather unhappy character. Having professed himself faithful to Austria, around 1857 he changed his political feelings. (See Cronaca Umoristica 1857, Bibl. Com. Udine, ms. 1542). « Affirmed the integrity of the dogmas and his deference to the hierarchy; but outside of that he liked to pose as an exponent of "*free and innovative*" spirits. In those "*times of confused transition*", he, "*cut out for books*", but not a strong type to "withstand the flattery and passions of party", did not know how to "*navigate among the reefs of life*" ». Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti..., pp. 6-8. It is in the aforementioned Cronaca that he launches baseless accusations against distinguished priests of Udine, branding them as illiberal, papists, pro-Austrian.

private dwelling to embrace — by now fifty years old — life in common. As the saying goes, he "*burned his ships*" to make any retreat impossible.

Towards the end of 1855, the *filippino* Father Ferdinando Bettini arrived in Udine from the *Oratorio* of Venice. Under his direction, Scrosoppi, the faithful *don* Deotti, and the lay brother Francesco Zaninotti — who had joined the nascent congregation on January 1, 1855 — settled in the former *Braida* house, next to the Church of *Santa Maria Maddalena*, beginning their year of novitiate. They were also joined by Brother Lorenzo Menon, a survivor of the previous congregation before the Napoleonic suppressions; he, however, did not live to see the full restoration of the order, passing away on February 25, 1856, at the age of seventy-eight and a half years.

Father Luigi immersed himself with his customary dedication in the life of the new community and in the spiritual practices of the novitiate. He certainly did not neglect the orphans and the *Sisters of Providence*, being able to count on the valuable help of *don* Francesco Fantoni, who had in the meantime become vice-director of the *House of the derelitte* . And yet, he found the inner strength to multiply his efforts. If *don* Benedetti had already noticed that anyone else would have remained crushed by the mass of commitments of *don* Luigi, during that period the burden increased further. Faith and divine love work wonders: in the face of what appeared humanly unachievable, he loved to repeat:

« *All things are possible to him who believes.* »

What a great example his religious women must have received in seeing their own father and founder become a humble and fervent novice, he who was the guide and teacher of those very souls.

Father Luigi, Provost of the Oratorio

The year of trial, established by the Philippine rules, came to completion on November 9, 1856, on the occasion of the second Sunday of the month, a date on which the feast of the Patronage of Most Holy Mary was then celebrated. The small community — composed of Fathers Bettini, Scrosoppi, and Deotti — officially communicated the occurred constitution of the congregation to the Archbishop through a letter.

« *Divine Providence* — reads the opening — *which through the congregation of the Oratorio has accomplished, and accomplishes, such a great good for the benefit of society, has finally allowed that joyful day to arrive in which this instrument of good is reborn in this city, and the practices founded by the holy father Philip are renewed, so effective in bringing back to the right path those who have gone astray and so dear to the devout faithful. »*

After recalling the sacrifices of Father Carlo, described as a figure « *of dear and holy memory* », and citing the imperial decree of April 9, 1842 (considered the founding act of the legal rebirth of the congregation), the text recalls how the Oratorian spiritual practices had already been restored by Father Carlo and carried forward « *under the guidance of the illustrious don Pietro Benedetti* ».

« *Today finally, under the protection of the Patronage of Mary mother of God and of our holy father Philip, with the consent and blessing of Your Most Reverend Excellence, the congregation formally rises again. The undersigned here, with the support of the very reverend Father Ferdinando Bettini of the congregation of the Oratorio of Venice, begin the activities of the congregation of the Oratorio according to the established forms. Therefore, following the rules, they proceeded to elect a superior in the person of the very reverend Father Luigi Scrosoppi.* »

The following day, Archbishop Monsignor Trevisanato issued a decree by which he also appointed Scrosoppi rector of the Church of *Santa Maria Maddalena*. At the same time, he sent a warm letter to *don* Benedetti, expressing gratitude to him for the work accomplished and inviting him to « *continue with the same zeal the spiritual assistance to the souls in that church* ». *Don* Benedetti honored this request until the moment of his passing, which occurred in 1869.

Since the feast of Saint Charles Borromeo had passed very recently, it is highly probable that the choice of the Sunday following November 4 was a deliberate act to pay homage to the memory of Father Carlo, who had desired that day with all his being. Certainly, in that solemn moment, the thought of the new provost went to his most beloved brother.

The evangelical superior

Father Luigi certainly had no concern of an autobiographical nature; his profound humility prevented him from it. Very rarely did he put into writing the most intimate feelings of his soul, hindered by a disposition little inclined to effusion and by a characteristic spiritual modesty. For this reason, every document capable of illuminating his interior life is today even more precious to us.

One of these is a simple fragment of paper: a hasty note regarding an « *hourly program* », probably written on the evening of November 1, 1856. Listed there initially are the prayers and pious practices with which he was accustomed to begin the day: adoration, thanksgiving, offering, recall of the meditation, dressing, meditation, and a visit to the church with the relative prayers. The slip of paper then continues with these five resolutions of a general character:

« *... 9. Mortification: gaze directed to the ground – tongue: speaking in a low voice and with calm, saying only what is strictly necessary and proper – body always erect – prayers on one's knees and without leaning.*

10. Penance: discipline, hair-shirt and cords to the hands and feet – S.P.A.G. (five Our Fathers, Hail Marys, Glorias for the five wounds of the Lord) with open arms – 7 Salve Regina (for the seven sorrows of Most Holy Mary) with open arms – Via Crucis with open arms – Miserere with open arms.

11. Humility: in the way of standing, speaking and asking – brushing clothes and shoes – sweeping floors – making beds, cleaning combs, chamber pots and nightstands.

12. Obedience in everything: not going to any place, not receiving, not giving and not doing anything without permission or without having given notice.

13. Poverty: always asking (that is, not taking anything on one's own initiative) and always choosing the worst thing – possessing nothing. »

In the Philippine congregation, at the time, there was only one lay brother, Zaninotti, who was already excessively occupied between the sacristy and the kitchen. Who would therefore take upon themselves the hardships of domestic cleaning? Father Luigi was very happy to assume them himself. Four years earlier he had made the vow of servitude:

« *I will consider myself as a servant in the congregation of my father Saint Philip, and in the same way as a servant in the house of the Providence of the holy father Cajetan.* »

However, the interior servitude inspired by the words of Jesus was not enough for him:

« *The greatest among you shall be your servant.* »

At least in the house of the Philippine congregation, he wished to be a servant in a material sense as well, reserving the most humble tasks for himself. Despite the obvious protests of his confreres, he began to exercise his authority as provost in this very way:

« *To me the broom, to me the tidying of the rooms!* »

Many of us, in the course of life, have written pages filled with holy resolutions, expressed with words more eloquent or apparently more heroic than those used by Father Luigi. Often, however, our resolutions have vanished at their birth. The Father's page is extremely essential: few and incisive traces. But he kept those resolutions faithfully.

There are details in those five points that will resurface in every phase of his existence. For example, the commitment to keep the « *body always straight... without leaning* » during prayer on one's knees; it will be an absolute novelty to see him lean on a pew to raise himself only in the final years of his life. Or again, the use of binding himself with « *cords to the hands and feet* »: almost thirty years later, Sister Osanna Tisot will accidentally discover him in that position, receiving a severe reprimand for her indiscretion. Finally, the necessity to ask permission for every movement and the wanting to « *asking, and always the worst* »: Mother Serafina Strazzolini, Superior of the *House of the derelitte* from 1855 until after the death of the founder, will say she was literally « *afflicted* » by such constant manifestations of obedience and poverty on the part of the venerated Father.

Today we could affirm that in those five points Father Luigi took, with an ideal spiritual snapshot, his most authentic spiritual photograph.

Another precious document

A further testimony is provided to us by Tinti, under the title *"Frutti degli esercizi spirituali e regolamento di vita"*. The text certainly dates back to 1857 or to an immediately subsequent period, given the reference to the institute for deaf-mutes that the Father founded in that very year.

Here is the content of the document, supplemented by some explanatory notes:

«

1. *Full conformity to the will of God to achieve happiness in this life and in the next. Your will, O Lord, be mine! (Voluntas tua, Domine, voluntas mea!).*
2. *Frequently reflect on the love that the Lord has poured out upon me and on His divine perfections, to inflame my heart towards Him.*
3. *I will fulfill my duties as a tertiary and as a member of the confraternities of the Most Holy Heart of Jesus, of the Belt, of the Most Precious Blood, and of the Sacred Heart of the Virgin Mary; I will also observe my commitments as a member of Propaganda Fide, of the Holy Childhood, and as a Confrere of Priests (this refers to the confraternity of Saint Peter the Apostle for the clergy, established at the Church of Saint Anthony the Abbot in Udine).*
4. *As soon as I wake up, I will spend an hour in church: I will dedicate myself to confessions, if necessary, or to prayer according to the customs of the Oratory.*
5. *I will be present in church half an hour before the evening Ave Maria to confess and for the activities of the Oratory (at this point and in the preceding one, reference is made to the Church of Santa Maria Maddalena, where after 1856 the Father served for about ten years as confessor and animator of the Oratorian practices).*
6. *Every Wednesday and Sunday I will dedicate a quarter of an hour to the brothers and novices of the Oratory.*
7. *On Thursdays I will go for half an hour to visit the sick in the hospital (it was precisely during these visits that he obtained the deep esteem of don Colomba and don Sinigaglia, respectively curate and chaplain of the facility).*
8. *I will scrupulously respect the holy rules, both during conferences and in practices of humility.*
9. *I will dedicate three hours every day to teaching the derelitte: one hour for the novices, one for the deaf-mutes, and one for the young girls.*
10. *I will employ two hours a day in the management and administration of the institute.*
11. *I will participate every year in the spiritual exercises.*
12. *On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I will practice the discipline (corporal penance) and on those same days I will perform the rite of the Via Crucis.*

Let humility and charity be evident towards everyone and in my every action. Always honey in the mouth and honey in the heart (Semper mel in ore, et mel in corde).

To live constantly in the presence of the Lord, doing everything solely for Him and with Him, beginning my every activity with the invocation: O God, come to my assistance (Deus in adiutorium meum intende) ».

The last two paragraphs enclose the very essence of Scrosoppi's spirituality: humility, charity, the constant sense of the divine presence, and acting exclusively for the glory of

God. These are the fundamental "*registers*" upon which he intoned his uninterrupted and coherent hymn of life directed to the Lord.

The *filippini* congregation does not take root

Under the guidance of Father Luigi, the Church of Santa Maria Maddalena continued to be, as it had always been, the most vital center of devotion in the city of Udine. Indeed, under his management, a further increase in religious fervor occurred. In addition to the customary Oratorian practices, the church was distinguished for the prayer of the chaplet to the Sorrowful Mother, celebrated from Sexagesima Sunday until the last day of Carnival, for the solemn observance of the Marian month — introduced even before 1850 — and for the great devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. A document of the time, entitled "*Ricordi lasciati ai devoti di Maria Santissima nel mese di maggio 1863 nella chiesa dei PP. Filippini di Udine*", testifies that since the preceding year the « *formula of the Consecration of the Heart to Mary* » was in use at that temple.

Father Scrosoppi personally took care of the printing and distribution of numerous devotional leaflets of this kind. Among the papers, for example, an autograph note of his is preserved on a small card reporting « *Appropriate prayers for the current needs of the Catholic Church* ». These were initiatives perfectly consistent with the Philippine apostolate, aimed at spreading the spirit of prayer [6].

The irreligious newspaper *Il Friuli*, in the edition of October 21, 1884, will write that Archbishop Monsignor Casasola had tried to replace the suppressed church of the *filippini* with the archiepiscopal one of *Sant'Antonio* to satisfy the « *spiritual women* »: such pungent irony confirms how alive the memory of the Church of *Santa Maria Maddalena* still was as an authentic hotbed of piety. If Father Luigi was its director and tireless engine, much of the merit must be recognized to his dear confreres and friends who continued to serve there: Benedetti, Someda, and Fantoni, to whom *don* Valentino Liccaro had been added.

However, against the luxuriant vitality of the church, the reborn *filippini* congregation was unable to develop.

The two priests of good morals and wealthy, mentioned by *don* Benedetti in his « *Memorandum* », did not present themselves, despite the fact that the house had by then been restored. Nor did the adhesions of those two poor priests take shape whom Father Luigi would have liked to send to the *Oratorio* of Verona to be formed in the spirit of Saint Philip; a project that had met with obstacles as early as October 3, 1854, due to the reservations expressed by Father Sorio, provost of that house.

[6] The Filippini used to print small pamphlets and images of a popular nature, containing prayers for the morning, for the evening, and for various moments of the day.

He then tried to attract members from the *filippini* congregations of other cities, but with poor results. On May 20, 1856, Father Giacomo Miconiz of the *Oratorio* of Brescia declared himself « *sorry* » for not being able to help.

Even the venerable Canon Niccolò Giovanni Battista Olivieri, the apostle of the African little girls whom the Father had met in Udine and to whom he had turned hopefully, wrote to him on June 2, 1856, and February 18, 1860, explaining that the houses of Florence and Rome were unable to send subjects.

Only the house of Venice sent, on January 6, 1857, Father Vincenzo Frucco, allowing Bettini to return to the lagoon and guaranteeing the community of Udine the legal minimum number of three fathers. However, after four years, Frucco had to return to the *Serenissima* for health reasons.

Finally, on December 17, 1865, Father Luigi was able to welcome a priest: Father Carlo Peruggia of Cassano, diocese of Como. Unfortunately, that single new branch would soon prove to be a painful thorn for him.

He had no better fortune with the lay brothers. The only one to remain constantly faithful to him was Brother Francesco Zaninotti. Four others remained for short periods before leaving, some for health reasons, others to enter other religious orders.

His plan to create a movement for popular missions around the congregation, which he believed to be the only remedy against the weakening of Christian sentiment and the spread of ideological errors, also failed. In truth, in 1858 a « *Congregation of Priests for Spiritual Exercises in the Archdiocese of Udine* » was established, dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to the Blessed Odorico Mattiussi of Pordenone, a missionary of the fourteenth century; its regulations were even published, but the initiative had a very short life.

And yet, the work of good could not stop. If no one seemed to want to cross the threshold of the *filippini* house by Oratorian vocation, Father Luigi will open those same doors to other apostles whom Providence sent him through different paths: the Jesuits.

The Jesuits in the house of the Oratorians

The inhabitants of Udine, since there had never been Jesuit residences in the city, did not harbor particular sympathies toward the Society of Jesus, while not showing themselves, generally speaking, hostile. However, in certain sectors — those that constituted the so-called public opinion — a feeling of aversion had spread, fueled by the climate of the era, by political reasons, and by a pronounced irreligiosity. Already during the revolutionary uprisings of 1848, the *« Giornale Politico del Friuli »* had directed some criticism at the sons of Saint Ignatius.

There were, instead, no adverse reactions when two Jesuits preached the spiritual exercises in the Cathedral, from December 1st to 10th, 1854, on the occasion of the jubilee proclaimed by Pius IX for the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

« The people in the first days — the chapter acts report — *appeared reluctant to participate, but the eloquence of the Jesuit fathers overcame the initial coldness; the energy, the zeal, and the extraordinary fervor with which Father Banchich guided the meditations, combined with the profound doctrine, the order, and the clarity of his companion, shook the listeners to the point that, in the last days, the turnout was such that the metropolitan church struggled to contain it. Today, December 10, the general communion presided over by the archbishop was extremely crowded and lasted for a good three hours »* [7].

In a few years, however, the climate changed radically.

In 1863, Monsignor Andrea Casasola was transferred from the episcopal see of Concordia to the archiepiscopal see of Udine. He had been among the first, in 1848, to display the tricolor cockade, just like Father Luigi. Since then, however, he had become convinced that the movement for national unification had embarked on a path of open rebellion against the Holy See, the Church, and religion itself.

« A real religious concern — the historian Cessi [8] observes — *never part of the plans of either the popular masses or the intellectual classes responsible for the revolutionary movement, including the most ardent Mazzinians ».*

Monsignor Casasola did not share this vision at all. On the contrary, he saw in the severe decline of faith the only true cause of the confusion and social conflicts.

He therefore set out to promote a vigorous revival of Catholic sentiment in the archdiocese, following a line he considered indisputable: he was convinced that only the Jesuits could succeed in such an enterprise.

He immediately began to negotiate with the Society of Jesus so that it would establish its own residence in Udine. Having obtained a positive response, at the beginning of the spring of 1865, he decided to test the city's reaction with an experiment.

Thus three Jesuits arrived and preached a month of spiritual exercises, from the eve of the eve of the Annunciation (local patroness) until the Sunday in albis, April 23. During that period, the fathers stayed directly in the archiepiscopal palace.

Blasich, in his *"Note cronologiche ecclesiastiche"* [9], reports that from the very first days some groups of agitators tried to turn the faithful away with threats; they even went

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7 Acts of the Chapter, vol. X (1839-1858), c. 217.

8 R. CESSI, Studi sul Risorgimento nel Veneto, Padova 1965, p. 43.

9 The Note Cronologiche Ecclesiastiche are two large manuscript volumes, preserved in the archive of the parish of San Quirino of Udine. The one from which the news used in the present biography are drawn consists of 890 pages and comprises the years 1806-1891. For the narrated episode compare page 95. The author, a native of Udine (1836-1892), was a professor in the diocesan seminary of Concordia, and returned to his diocese upon the election of Monsignor A. Casasola as archbishop of Udine. He had various duties in the curia which he performed with science, foresight and love. He was rector of the church of San Pietro Martire where he exercised the ministry, especially of preaching with maximum zeal. Of strong intellect, a lover of studies, especially of the ecclesiastical history of the diocese, he published several booklets; he was esteemed as an exemplary, learned, most industrious priest. (Compare Registro VI Defunti, of the parish of San Quirino of Udine, 1878-1908, p. 57, n. 11; Il Cittadino Italiano 19-1-1892).

so far as to detonate explosive devices, morning and evening, near the side doors of the Cathedral and even against a window of the archbishopric.

Because of these disturbances, many citizens preferred to abstain and the mission did not achieve the hoped-for results. The Austrian police adopted strict security measures: in the half-empty Cathedral, during the evening services, numerous plainclothes guards roamed around, present also outside.

Despite the unhappy outcome of the test, neither the archbishop nor the Jesuits gave up on the project; however, they decided to act with greater prudence.

But where to house the fathers? Initially, the former convent of Santo Spirito was considered. Later, both to avoid the preparation of a new structure and because of the fear that the charismatic figure of Father Luigi inspired in the violent individuals, it was decided to settle them with the Oratorians. It is probable that Father Scrosoppi himself suggested this solution, which he nevertheless welcomed with great enthusiasm, offering the sons of Saint Ignatius the best part of the congregation's house.

« Our men entered — the Jesuit Adone Aldegheri writes — *in small groups of one or two at a time, starting from October 24, 1865. They acted with such caution that the city only noticed their presence after two months. The fathers appeared in the house for short periods, almost as if they were transient guests of the Oratorians, only to move immediately throughout the diocese to lead popular missions that proved extremely fruitful. They dedicated the last months of 1865 to this ministry; with the beginning of the new year, they believed the time had come to work also for the spiritual good of Udine. The Lord helped them to such an extent that they managed to found two congregations, to preach in the church of the Oratorians where they resided, and to guide numerous cycles of spiritual exercises »* [(10)].

Tinti, referring to the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, underlines that the Father availed himself of the precious collaboration of two Jesuits, Father Zuccherini and Father Banchich, who for some time acted as true apostles toward the faithful, who found in that location constant spiritual support.

Father Luigi drew immense joy from the cohabitation with the Jesuits. However, the political storm that would disperse that small group was already brewing. Fortunately, Providence offered them a new shelter: on April 2, 1866, the most pious priest *don* Giuseppe Bacci died [(11)], who named the Society of Jesus as his heir on the condition that three fathers reside permanently in Gorizia. When, in July 1866, the Italian army advanced into Veneto and Friuli, the Jesuits of Udine were thus able to move to that new house.

The sons of Saint Ignatius, who had shared those nine months with Father Scrosoppi, maintained a sincere affection and a profound devotion for him. It is precisely thanks to

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[10] A. ALDEGHERI, Breve storia della Provincia Veneta della Compagnia di Gesù dalle sue origini fino ai giorni nostri (1814-1914), Venezia 1914, pp. 187-188.

[11] Bacci Giuseppe (1799-1866), goriziano, fu catechista nelle scuole normali, prof. di catechetica e pedagogia nel seminario teologico centrale, confessore per molti anni delle monache di s. Orsola della stessa città.

this direct acquaintance that, twelve years after his death, the pages of the *« Civiltà Cattolica »* will speak of him, defining him *« a saint »*.

Suppression and confiscation

With a law of July 7, 1866, the regulations already enacted in the Sardinian States regarding the suppression of religious corporations and congregations and the « *conversion* » of their property to the State were extended to the entire Kingdom of Italy. Father Luigi received the first official communication that the Oratorian congregation of Udine also fell under this legislation on December 21: a bitter Christmas gift.

We should now recount the long and painful events that followed and the efforts he made to save the congregation or at least the church of Santa Maria Maddalena. We will only mention them briefly.

The attempt to have the Oratorians declared exempt from the law of suppression, an initiative carried forward by the Father together with the superiors of the Oratories of Chioggia, Venice, and Padua, was not successful. The petitions of no fewer than sixty-eight citizens, in May 1868, for the church to be restored to worship, proved in vain, as did similar requests presented by some noblewomen of Udine the following July. The declarations of priests or laymen attesting that some sacred furnishings were private property, presented in the first half of 1868 to rescue at least something from the claims of the tax authorities, also proved useless.

And here are some stages of this painful path of suffering.

On April 2, 1867, Father Scrosoppi had to resign himself to presenting the declaration of the movable and immovable property of the congregation, accompanying it with this letter: « *Royal delegate, in delivering to you the declaration imposed on us by article 13 of the law of July 7, 1866, the undersigned father superior, in obedience to divine and ecclesiastical laws, solemnly declares that he must submit to such acts and to the intended consequences only out of the necessity to avoid worse evils, and so as not to cause even more serious harm to the members of this congregation of the Oratory* ».

On April 24 — barely three days after Easter! — the delegate of the royal finance intendancy of Udine proceeded « *to the operations of inventory and taking of possession* », ordering verbally that the house and the church be vacated by May 9, a date that was later postponed to the 18th and finally, irrevocably, to the 29th. In those days, Father Luigi went to Castellavazzo, in the Belluno area, for a planned foundation of the Sisters of Providence; but he probably did so in the illusory hope that his absence might further delay the inexorable decision, trusting perhaps that his dear Saint Philip, whose feast day fell on May 26, would obtain a miracle for him. Warned that all hope was by then in vain, he immediately returned to Udine, where nothing was left for him but to undergo the confiscation and eviction.

« *The Father* — writes Tinti — *hastened early in the morning to celebrate Holy Mass and to receive for the last time the sacred Species enclosed in the tabernacle; and although he still cherished the hope of redeeming the church from the state property and*

reopening it for worship, nevertheless he bowed to that painful act with bitter tears and with a broken heart at the thought of seeing so hindered the great spiritual good that was being accomplished in that house of God. In the anguish of Father Luigi, his confreres and a large part of the citizenship participated intensely. »

For some months, *don* Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi, removed for political reasons from his parish of Sacile, had taken refuge in the house of the congregation. Now the two brothers would be united in the same destiny. Expelled together from that dwelling, they found a makeshift accommodation in some rooms at the Institute for Deaf-Mutes, a few steps from the House of the *derelitte* .

But Father Scrosoppi had drunk only half of his chalice of bitterness.

A lost confrere

As if the persecution by external authorities were not enough, Father Luigi had to endure the rebellion of the only confrere to whom he had opened the doors of his own house and extended his arms with paternal affection: Father Carlo Peruggia.

The latter, urged by the pressures of the curia of Udine, issued the following declaration on May 5, 1867:

« *I, the undersigned, declare, ready to confirm it under oath, that I have not revealed the content of what I wrote in a well-known notebook of mine, with these sole exceptions:*

1st That it mattered little to me about the suppression of the congregation, since, by not observing its rules, I found myself in a false position with respect to my vocation;

2nd That my superior is jealous and would have done everything possible to prevent me from becoming custodian of the church;

3rd That assuming the custody of the church is a very delicate matter due to the previous presence of the Jesuits, and that I would not have accepted the assignment without the prior consent of the archbishop.

In addition to these declarations... I confirm, also offering to swear, that I have not revealed anything else to any authority, neither by word of mouth nor in writing, neither directly nor indirectly. »

It would be interesting to be able to consult that « *libretto* », but despite careful research it has not been possible to trace it. It was undoubtedly a manuscript and not a printed work, otherwise Peruggia could not have claimed to have kept its content secret.

The deposition of this man is truly singular! He candidly admits that he does not have the Oratorian vocation and at the same time accuses his superior of jealousy because he does not entrust him with the care of the church; he desires to be its rector, but at the same time raises objections because the building would have been « *contaminated* » by the stay of the Jesuits...

We do not know where Peruggia took refuge immediately after the confiscation of the Oratorian house, but it is certain that he remained in Udine for over a year. There is in fact a long letter of his to the curia, dated June 16, 1868, in which he expresses the intention to move in order « *to pursue his own vocation in the very strict congregation of the Oratory of Biella* ».

He claimed to follow the advice of Monsignor Someda (then vicar general), of his own confessor, and even of his former superior, Father Luigi. To leave, however, he demanded the issuance of an official certificate (ad litteram), enclosing a text in his own hand — unknown to us — without which, according to him, any attempt to make him leave the city would have been useless.

Until that moment, Father Luigi had refused to grant him such a document, despite various attempts at friendly mediation. And it is easy to understand the reason: how could his scrupulous conscience recommend to a « *very observant* » community a subject who had openly declared that he did not feel the vocation and did not want to submit to any rule?

Two weeks later, on June 29, Peruggia signed a formal promise: if Father Luigi delivered the aforementioned certificate to him, he would have « *irrevocably decided to leave the diocese within fifteen days, never to return there* ».

We can only imagine how hard Monsignor Someda had to work to convince Father Luigi to overcome his legitimate moral doubts. In the end he succeeded and Peruggia left.

Evidently, that poor man had been overwhelmed by the turbulence of his time. It is not certain whether he ever actually went to the Oratory of Biella, but he certainly did not remain there long. On November 12, 1890, he was living in Milan in a private house, from where he wrote to the archbishop of Udine to obtain a declaration destined for the Milanese curia. He asked that it be put in writing that there was no objection to his staying indefinitely in the diocese of Milan. He did not seem at all cured of his old vice of demanding orders disguised as requests, since he required « *a declaration... formulated exactly in the terms mentioned above* ».

Perhaps Peruggia had just left when the last dramatic act concerning the church of Santa Maria Maddalena took place.

The church of Santa Maria Maddalena desecrated

On July 7, 1868, an « *Notice of Auction* » was posted on the walls of Udine in the form of a poster, in which it was announced that on the 13th day of the same month the furnishings and furniture of the suppressed churches and convents would be put up for public auction, « *among which objects are included the altars, the organ, the bells of the former church of the Oratorians and others of the same origin* ».

On July 4, Father Scrosoppi had written a heartfelt and imploring letter to his friend Luigi Nicoletti [12], counselor of the Court of Appeal and brother-in-law of the patriot from Cividale Giovanni Battista Castellani, who — following the events of 1848-49 — had moved to Tuscany.

« *Your departure for Florence* — he said to him among other things — *fills me with great hope for the question of the church of the Oratorians here... Poor us! So on Monday the 13th current we shall see sold all the furnishings of the most beautiful church of Udine?... You must manage, as soon as you arrive in Florence, to work so that this auction is immediately suspended. Do not spare yourself, for mercy's sake, for Saint Philip will give you a generous reward... In the meantime, see to it that Count Castellani obtains the suspension of the auction... Thank the excellent count for what he has done so far and implore him to intercede to overcome the difficulties that present themselves. Have a good trip! I shall not fail to remember you every day at the holy altar and you remind the deputy count of me, and write to me often to keep me updated on everything.* »

Naturally, Count Castellani did not manage to achieve any result.

Who knows if Father Luigi presented himself personally at the auction; we are inclined to believe not. However, someone went there on his behalf and purchased the high altar — a valuable work by Torretti, which later passed to the church of Maiano del Friuli [13] — and various other objects, among which the paintings of the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary. These were bought partly with his money and partly with funds offered by his friends: Monsignor Someda, Monsignor Cernazai, *don* Tommaso Turchetti, and Messrs. Giovanni Puppati, Pasquale Fior, and Luigi Zamparo.

It was an unspeakable pain for Father Luigi and for the good Father Domenico Deotti, who had remained most faithful to him! Perhaps this grief accelerated the death of the latter, which struck him suddenly on June 21, 1869, precisely on the feast day of Saint Luigi, while he was preparing to offer wishes for the name day to his esteemed confrere and superior. Deotti's brothers would honor his memory by offering benefits to the House of the *derelitte* .

Father Luigi remained alone to hope still, *"contra spem"* (that is, beyond all reasonable hope).

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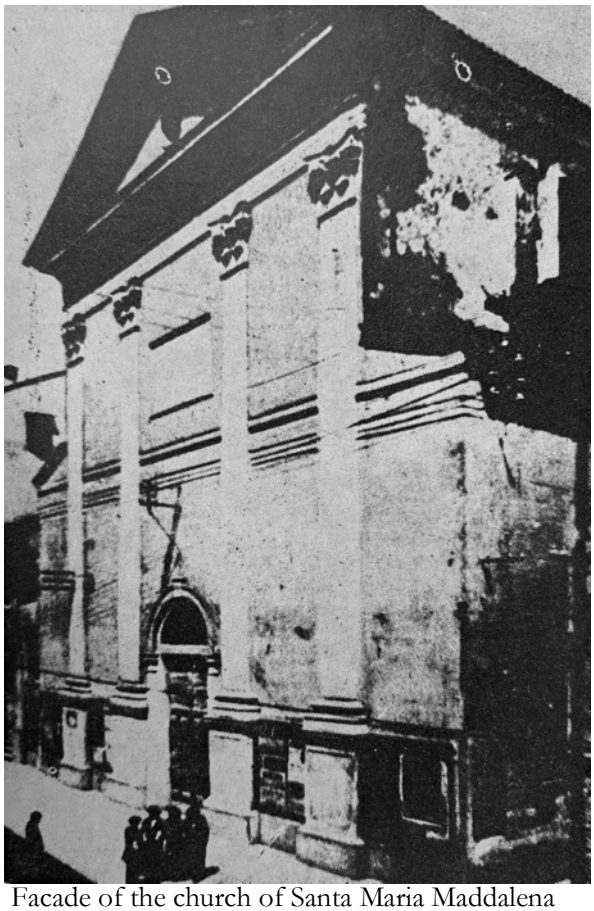
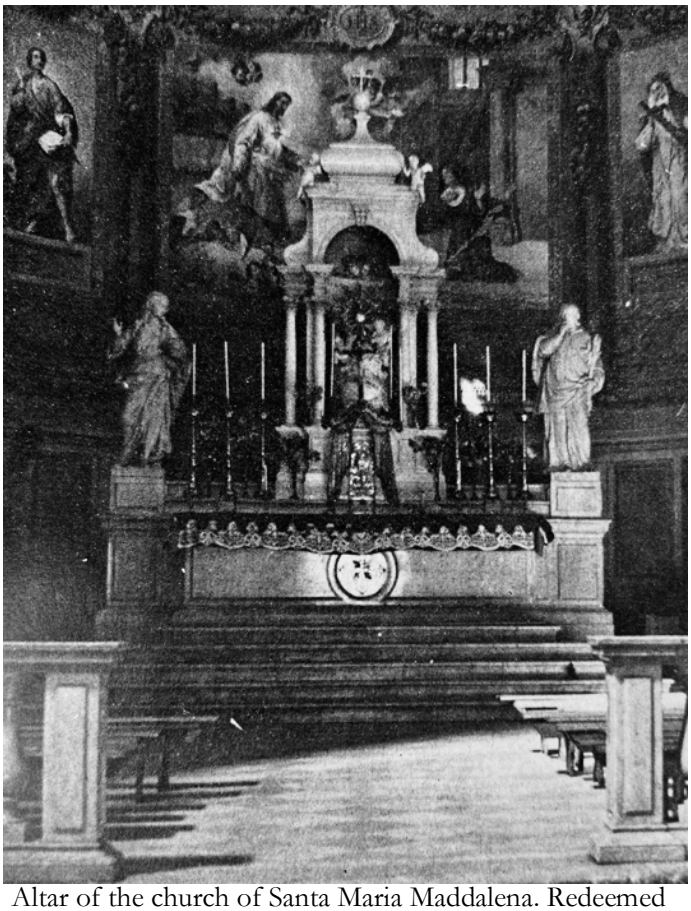
12 Born in Valvasone in 1811, he died in Barbeano (Pordenone) in 1894. « Humble, pious, charitable, he spent his life doing good to as many as he could. Of a delicate conscience, of an excellent heart, of a perspicacious mind, he was an upright magistrate; placed on retirement, he preferentially defended the causes of the poor. » (Registro Canonico dei morti, 1839-1921 - 1894, 14/10, n. 10). His brother-in-law Castellani Giovanni Battista, born in Cividale del Friuli in 1820, graduated in law, was the first free Friulian journalist, giving life for a few months in 1848 to the Giornale politico del Friuli, which also gathered the patriotic voices of his former seminary companions, then priests. He was ambassador of the Republic of Venice to the Holy See, also at the time of the Roman Republic, earning the esteem of republicans, without hiding his Catholic sentiments. Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Giovanni Battista Castellani redattore del « Giornale politico del Friuli »..., pp. 121-126.

13 Instead, from documents in the archive of the Istituto della Provvidenza (formerly House of the *derelitte*) it appears that the altar was sold to the vestry board of the church of Artegna (Udine), where Monsignor Pietro Antonio Antivari, auxiliary bishop of Udine, consecrated it on February 28, 1897.



Facade of the church of Santa Maria Maddalena



Altar of the church of Santa Maria Maddalena. Redeemed at public auction after the confiscation of 1867, it was placed in the church of Artegna (UD)

In vain did Castellani, Nicoletti, and the renowned musician Abbot Jacopo Tomadini exert themselves so that at least the church would be restored to worship. In June 1873, without even a prior notice to the archbishop, the exhumation of the bodies buried in the vaults inside the church was begun, according to the ancient custom. With difficulty did they manage to rescue from profanation the remains of the revered Monsignor Francesco Trento [(14)] — exhumed through the interest of Count Federico Trento — and those of Cardinal Daniele Delfino [(15)], last patriarch of Aquileia and first archbishop of Udine. The latter, at the end of January 1874, were transferred to the tomb of Patriarch Dionisio Delfino, inside the church of Sant'Antonio abate.

In this way, the secularization of the church was brought to completion. The government had ceded it to the Municipality « *for purposes of public utility* »: and the

[14] Nobleman from Udine (1710-1786), also a descendant of the family originally from Val di Non in Trentino, he was a doctor in ecclesiastical law and history, cooperator in the church of the Oratorians, visitor of the schools of Christian doctrine, canon, director of spirit according to the doctrine of Saint Francis de Sales, he published discourses, homilies, instructions, etc., exemplary for solidity and simplicity. (Cf. F. Florio, Elogio di monsignor Francesco Trento, Udine 1787, pp. 68).

[15] (15) He belonged to the famous Venetian house of the Delfino (1688-1762); in 1744 he was patriarch of Aquileia and from 1747 also cardinal. He convoked the diocesan synod, erected in Udine the church of the « Purità di Maria Vergine » frescoed by Tiepolo, called to Udine the fathers of the Mission, contributed to building churches, monasteries, etc., he was a father to the poor. Once the patriarchate was suppressed, he maintained the title during his lifetime. (Cf. F. BLASICH, Preziose memorie Diocesane, ms. 764, pp. 113-116, A.C.A.U.).

municipal administration transformed it into a « *riding school* », that is, into a hall intended for gymnastics and fencing.

In vain did Monsignor Casasola try to reclaim ownership of the house of the congregation, appealing to the purchase contract of January 26, 1842, according to which the property was to return to the archbishop in office should the Oratorian congregation cease after fifteen years from its legal reconstitution. Instead, the house became the headquarters of a music school, of the Society of Veterans of the Homeland Battles and of the Red Cross.

Canvas of the Sacred Heart formerly belonging to the church of Maria Maddalena and currently located in the small church of San Gaetano.

Canvas of Our Lady of Sorrows which arrived at the church of Santa Maria Maddalena from the Benedictine monastery of Spilimbergo towards the end of the 1700s. Now it is located in the small church of San Gaetano.

After the conflict of 1915-18, both the house and the church were demolished; on their site, the post office building, designed by the architect D'Aronco, was constructed in 1926.

In the face of such destruction, one can easily imagine the immense bitterness of Father Luigi. On May 12, 1874, the Capuchins managed to repurchase their convent in via Ronchi from the state property, thanks to the help of some benefactors. Shortly after, the Father wrote to a superior of the Sisters of Providence:

« *Here we have comforting news: the reverend Capuchin fathers managed to buy back their convent at auction for 20,000 Italian lire, so that now they live quietly and all good Christians rejoice. It did not go this way for the Oratorian fathers, who are losing everything. Even the altars of our church have been sold, the organ, the organ, the marble floor, and they have desecrated it by transforming it into a riding school! May the Lord forgive these profaners and grant them to repent. May holy mother Church triumph, and then we hope to witness the resurrection of this revered church of ours.* »

But Saint Philip remained in his heart

That gentleman and holy man Monsignor Giuseppe Vale [16], commenting on the eviction order of the Oratorians from their home, left written:

« *Beautiful law! made by thieves, made for thieves, and executed by thieves!* »

In these words transpires the profound resentment of the clergy who lived in those years poisoned by a fierce anticlericalism.

However, although they had deprived him of his house and church, no one succeeded in stripping from Father Scrosoppi what truly mattered: the spirit of « *Pippo buono* » (that is, the affable and charitable character of Saint Philip Neri).

In the first place, his sweet humility remained intact. One day, several years after the suppression of the congregation, the Jesuit Father Giuseppe Rossi arrived in Udine from Cormons; the Father wished to accompany him to visit the country house in Orzano. Without delay, the carriage was prepared. For the occasion, Father Luigi would certainly have preferred to use « *Puppa* », a more vigorous and faster mare, instead of « *Bagalin* », a slow nag of little value. But behold, a friendly dispute arose between the two clerics over who should board the vehicle first. The dispute seemed to have no end. In the end, Father Rossi had to yield, boarding as he exclaimed:

« *My father Saint Ignatius demands obedience.* » And Father Luigi promptly replied with a smile: « *And my Saint Philip wants humility.* »

And then his sweetness. Father Luigi had extreme need of it, since he possessed by nature a rather irascible temperament. Precisely for this reason he had inserted into his rule of life the resolution:

« *Always honey in the mouth and honey in the heart* » (Semper mel in ore, et mel in corde).

If to this were added his iron will and a certain tendency toward severity, the dose of sweetness had necessarily to be doubled. Saint Philip granted him so much goodness that he remained in the memory of all those who knew him with the appellation of "*padrut*", that is, of « *dear little father* ».

From the saint of joy he learned to become himself a master of spiritual serenity and peace, deriving from it even a taste for joking. He loved to make fun first of all of himself, humbling himself at times to the point of making those who observed him smile. And if some a bit too vain woman happened to be nearby, how he enjoyed teasing her good-naturedly! He did not do it to humiliate, but only to soften tempers that were too rigid (that is, the "*broomsticks*").

This habit accompanied him until his deathbed. Sister Osanna Tisot, a somewhat authoritarian woman with a pronounced nose, assisted him as a nurse. What does Father

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16 Nacque a Gemona del Friuli nel 1877 e morì a Udine nel 1950. Professore di latino e storia nel seminario udinese, poi canonico e direttore della biblioteca arcivescovile, « fu l'archivio vivente della storia ecclesiastica friulana »: scrisse sull'origine e vicende di paesi, istituti, chiese, conventi, riti ecc, del Friuli. (G. MARCHETTI, o.c., p. 787). Cfr. G. VALE, L'Oratorio e la Congregazione dell'Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri a Udine, fasc. III, p. 44 (ms. 550, A.C.A.U.).

Luigi devise, having by now reached the end of his days? He forces her to wear huge slippers, prepared for the corpulent *don* Luigi Costantini, and makes her wear over her religious habit an old wool scapular of his, all worn out and not exactly fragrant. The sister was thirty-seven years old at the time and, although vanity must find no place in the convent, it certainly did not please her to appear like a "*mascherott"* (that is, a ridiculous carnival figure). Fortunately, being accustomed to such educational methods, she accepted the joke with the spirit of Saint Philip. And perhaps she succeeded in winning from the dying Father his last smiles.

And was it not perhaps the relic of Saint Philip, inherited from his brother Carlo and kept with immense love, that made him perceive — as he was convinced — with a mysterious ticking, the moment to leave this world for Heaven?

In any case, this part of the history of Father Luigi as an Oratorian represents almost only a limited chapter of his existence; a life that he dedicated entirely to the little orphans and to the Sisters of Providence.

It is of this fundamental apostolate that we must now return to treat.

Chapter 2

THE WORK CONTINUES FLOURISHING WITH HEROISM (1854-1857)

The *"Casa del Provvedimento"* or Work of Saint Zita [1]

A noble characteristic of the House of the Abandoned, right from its origins, was the family setting that the two founders constantly followed: they took care of welcoming and educating the girls, of finding them a prudent placement when they reached the age and maturity necessary to face life independently, and of watching over them, welcoming them back into the house if they found themselves in difficulty or danger [2].

If the two priests showed a paternal affection toward everyone, they did so in a special way for the truly abandoned girls, as the regulation stated:

« *The poorest and absolutely abandoned are educated and maintained entirely at the expense of the house, of which they become daughters, and they do not leave it except after having completed their education and having received the necessary means* ».

For this reason, Father Luigi kept these young women in the institute for months and sometimes for years, even if they had passed the age of eighteen: he kept them with him, precisely, until he managed to place them adequately.

However, a pedagogical problem soon arose. Was it appropriate to have young children and young women, from four to over twenty years old, live together in the same environment? That is why, while Father Carlo was still alive, the two brothers planned a *"Casa del Provvedimento"*, where the young women could find an environment better suited to their age.

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[1] The work was thus named in memory of Saint Zita, a virgin from Lucca of the 13th century. She spent her life in the Fatinelli house as a servant, endured mistreatment from her fellow workers and harshness from her masters; with her love and respect she converted hearts, gaining trust and affection. The fame of sanctity already enjoyed in life increased with her death and was confirmed by miracles. She was proclaimed, in 1935, heavenly patroness of domestic servants. (Cf. Bibl. Sanctorum, Roma 1969, vol. XII, pp. 1483-1484).

[2] Two contemporaries, in praising the Casa del Provvedimento, indirectly denounced the painful situation in which clueless young women found themselves: if gathered in it, they would be preserved from being « exposed without bread and without shelter to voracious corruption », they would not fall « as unfortunately happens, into the sewers of the city, or into the already so populated brothels, to increase the number of wretched victims of bad morals » (F. BLASICH, Il P. Luigi Scrosoppi d. O., p. 12; V. LICCARO, Funebre elogio del p. Carlo Filaferro, p. 19). That P. Scrosoppi withdrew former students from their place of service when they encountered dangers there appears from the register of those assisted in the House of the *derelitte* . At the informative process, numerous witnesses who had drawn from the same source deposed on a diabolical harassment against P. Scrosoppi, (cf. Summarium, pp. 37-38, 146, 331-332, 461, paragraphs 77, 71, 49, 48, etc., in Positio super causae introductione, Roma 1957). Aside from the real possibility of an intervention of the devil, perhaps the fact could be attributed to some gentleman who, offended in his honor because a former student of the Istituto delle *derelitte* had been withdrawn from his house, would have taken revenge on P. Luigi, entering the institute one day, going up to the Father's study and beating him.

This work was already being worked on in 1853, but the official inauguration took place only on October 4, 1854, on the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi. It is appropriate to recall how this initiative, in small Udine, precedes by more than seven years the analogous one opened in large Turin on February 10, 1862, with the same name of *"Casa del Provvedimento"* or Work of Saint Zita, by the servant of God *don* Francesco Faà di Bruno, whom the biographer Trabucco defines « *pioneer of social assistance* » [(3)].

The Udine work had its headquarters for ten years in a « *small house* » composed of a few rooms, located where the Asylum of the "*Immacolata*" is found today. It was accessed from the large door that opened onto the land (*braida*) of the former Missionaries, right in front of the main entrance of the House of the Abandoned: evidently Father Luigi wished to maintain a discreet surveillance over those who entered and left.

Perhaps to obtain the necessary space for the school for deaf-mutes, Father Luigi thought, a year later, of transferring the "*Casa del Provvedimento*". For this purpose, in 1855, he purchased some buildings owned by Gremese south of the small church and the oratory of the Abandoned; however, he could legally complete the purchase only in 1862. He immediately began the construction of a more imposing building in that place. To this new location the "*Casa del Provvedimento*" moved in 1865 and continued its activity until October 1904, when it was transformed into a boarding school for the students of the college of Providence who attended the external schools of the city. The work lasted, therefore, exactly half a century.

Father Luigi left us an autograph register of the guests in the house between 1854 and 1862. Alongside numerous little orphans, already daughters of the House of the Abandoned, we find a dozen girls discharged from the « *foundlings* » department (abandoned newborns) of the civil hospital and other young women coming from various villages of the province to seek employment as domestic servants in the city. The institution served, therefore, simultaneously as a professional school for maids, as an employment office, and as a work for the protection of the young woman "*ante litteram"* (that is, ahead of its time).

However, right from the beginning, some elderly women also found hospitality there, almost all former housekeepers, who wished to conclude their modest existence in a peaceful religious atmosphere. An explanation of this heterogeneity is provided to us by Mother Elena Zuccolli, superior of the House of the Abandoned, in a letter of July 1, 1898:

« *This "Casa del Provvedimento" was opened... with the sole objective of temporarily welcoming those orphans of ours who, once placed as maids with families, might find themselves without work and without support, and therefore exposed to the dangers of*

[3] Born in Alessandria in 1825, died in Turin in 1888, captain and combatant, graduated in mathematics in Paris, founder of the Sisters Minims of the Suffrage (lay institution) to direct the Opera s. Zita which, having extended its radius of action, was named Conservatorio di Nostra Signora del Suffragio, builder of the homonymous church, to officiate which he took holy orders. His scientific contributions and inventions were highly appreciated; he wrote or edited ascetic publications and for works of apostolate. (Cf. Enciclopedia cattolica, vol. V, p. 935; C. TRABUCCO, Francesco Faà di Bruno, pioniere dell'assistenza sociale, Roma 1957, pp. 122). The decree on the heroicity of virtues is of June 14, 1971.

the world. And if our revered Father Luigi admitted ladies wishing to retire on some occasions, he did so only to satisfy the fervent requests and recommendations of some particular benefactor of the institute ».

In certain cases, however, this exceptional shelter was dictated by an exquisite charitable sensitivity. Father Luigi welcomed there, for example, a woman who had been an aspiring sister and had left the congregation several years before. Later he offered asylum to Francesca and Elena Juri, left alone after the death of their brother Pietro (deceased in 1865), who had been a neighbor in Rauscedo street and his devoted friend, to whom he was also bound by their common fervor in the Franciscan Third Order. It was precisely Elena Juri who was the last guest of the house; upon her death, which occurred at the age of 84 on October 6, 1904, the structure remained empty and was destined for other purposes.

« Da mihi animas » (Give me souls)

The Father took care that the guests of the *"Casa del Provvedimento"* received accurate training and were placed in the working world with prudence; however, he had at heart above all their spiritual elevation. They habitually frequented the small church of San Gaetano to fulfill their religious duties, and precisely in that place Father Luigi had the opportunity to guide and mold their souls. Three of the sheltered young women came to renounce service under earthly masters to consecrate themselves as Sisters of Providence.

He also knew, however, how to use that structure for high apostolic purposes. There he hosted, for example, the African little girls (the "*morette*") whom the servants of God Niccolò Olivieri and his successor Biagio Verri [4] led with them during their pilgrimages dedicated to the collection of alms for the ransom of female slaves. The heroic Father Verri often arrived at his place exhausted, with his clothes in tatters and infested with parasites. Father Luigi welcomed him with a moved veneration, offered him refreshment, gave him his own garments, and entrusted those poor rags to the sister wardrobe-keeper of the House of the Abandoned, recommending that she take care of them as is fitting for the relics of such great missionary labors.

Furthermore, in the house he also gave shelter to two young Lutheran women and a Calvinist one, to whom his charity opened the doors of the Catholic faith. We remember in a particular way the last of them, a certain Amalia Widoszky, born around 1835 in Pusta-Fedimes, in Hungary, to Giovanni and Emilia Zulek. Her father, an evangelical pastor and even superintendent (higher official responsible for pastors) of the entire province of Nitra, xhad converted to Catholicism in 1846. However, opposed by his relatives and by members of his former religion, to survive he had been reduced to working as an elementary school teacher in Kolveza, where he died two years later.

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[4] Olivieri Nicolò Giovanbattista (1792-1864) of Voltaggio in Liguria, priest, apostolic missionary, founded the Opera Pia for the ransom of the Morette in Genoa in 1848. He traveled for fourteen years to fight the slave trade of black women in Africa, from India to Russia. He died in Marseille. (Cf. I grandi del Cattolicesimo, encicl. biogr., Roma 1958, vol. II, p. 247; for don Verri see part II, ch. 2, note 1).

His daughter Amalia had initially remained with her grandmother. Upon the death of the latter, she set out on a journey toward Graz, where one of her sisters had married. Failing to find her, she was told that she had moved to Udine with her husband. She therefore arrived in our city, where, however, she lost all trace of her relative.

She was wandering disconsolately in *piazza delle Erbe* (or of *San Giacomo*), when a good street vendor, Giovanna Bearzotti from Chiesiellis, became aware of her situation. She immediately took her with her and, having learned that she was Protestant, reported it to her confessor, who saw to it that she was welcomed into the *"Casa del Provvedimento"* on September 12, 1856.

The young woman immediately expressed the desire to embrace the Catholic faith, following her father's example. For this reason, Father Luigi entrusted her to the canon Monsignor Filippo Micoli, who had an excellent knowledge of the German language, so that he could provide her with the necessary religious instruction. Finally, on April 19, 1857 (Sunday in albis), the archbishop Monsignor Giuseppe Luigi Trevisanato solemnly administered to her in the cathedral baptism under condition, confirmation, and first communion, before a large crowd of the faithful.

The vicar curate of the cathedral, Monsignor Leonardo Zoratti — who, in the register of baptisms, transcribed in full an article from the Milanese newspaper *La Bilancia* concerning the ceremony and the speech delivered by Monsignor Trevisanato — added in his own hand this note:

« *She has been placed in the branch institute of the abandoned, in that house called del "Provvedimento", established specifically to welcome maids and servants left without employment and abandoned and wandering young women who desire to redeem themselves and set themselves on the right path. Extraordinary thing! The poor central institute of the abandoned, which lives mostly on alms and charity, provides simultaneously and almost by miracle for this branch house of the "Provvedimento", as well as for the one just inaugurated for deaf-mutes.* »

From the words of Monsignor Zoratti emerges with clarity the profound impression that the initiative and charitable fervor of Father Luigi aroused at that time among the citizenship.

That generous apostolic impulse of his must have been very well known, if even some shrewd adventuress tried to take advantage of it. One day a young woman presented herself at the house claiming to be non-Catholic and telling a fictionalized story of suffering and vicissitudes. The Father welcomed her with his customary goodness and prepared her for baptism. However, right on the eve of the sacrament, he sensed that the poor thing had built a castle of lies solely to obtain material advantages. Nothing was left but to dismiss her serenely, probably after a necessary moral warning, but not without having provided her with the necessary means to face the first days of her sad wandering.

The illumination of the Immaculate Conception

Barely two months after the inauguration of the House of Providence, Pope Pius IX solemnly proclaimed in Rome the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The archbishop established that this proclamation should be celebrated with solemnity in Udine and throughout Friuli on February 2, 1855, on the occasion of the feast of the Purification. In the three preceding days, the bells of every bell tower were to ring joyously three times a day for an entire hour; finally, a Holy Mass accompanied by the Te Deum was to be sung everywhere.

On the evening of February 2, at the archiepiscopal seminary, a refined academy was held, opened and closed by graceful Marian songs set to music and directed by the Abbot Jacopo Tomadini. Among the various contributions, a Latin eclogue by Professor *don* Francesco Turchetti was recited, in which Melania and Memmio (Maximin) dialogued, the two little shepherds witnesses of the apparition of the Virgin on September 19, 1846, on Mount La Salette.

At the falling of darkness, the entire city shone with lights. « *Without dwelling* — a chronicle of the Giornale di Roma reports — *on the archiepiscopal palace, the seminary, the municipal palace, or the religious house of the dimesse, which distinguished themselves among all for the abundance of lights and the originality of the decorations, there was no palace, house, or wretched hovel that did not offer to Mary unequivocal signs of homage and religious exultation; and it was magnificent to observe in the streets the windows of farmers and artisans adorned with paintings and small statues of the Queen of Heaven, surrounded by numerous and brilliant little flames* ».

It is easy to imagine with what fervor the Father, the sisters, and the little orphans participated in this celebration. High up, on the facade of the House of the Abandoned, a statue of the Immaculate Conception was placed, surrounded by many flowers and candles at every window. Father Luigi permitted the sisters and the girls to go into the *braida* (enclosed grassy space) so that they could fully enjoy that sweet spectacle. However, between the wonder and the applause, a small temptation crept in.

Those many and multicolored lights on the nearby house of the *dimesse*, so praised by the Roman newspaper! The desire to see them was irresistible.

While nuns and orphans were intent on contemplating the sparkle of the candles on the Institute for the *derelitte*, « *some girls among the most lively* — the chronicle narrates — *without the knowledge of the others left the group, desirous to see the lights of the dimesse. A novice and a sister, Mother Clementina Zoratti* [5]*, having noticed the fact, followed them to watch over them. When the rest of the group returned, these were still outside* ».

Father Luigi and the superior, warned of what had happened, awaited their arrival at the door; the father founder condemned them all to remain without dinner.

Fortunately, a mediator was in the house, Father Fantoni, who, faced with this sentence, began to beg Father Luigi to forgive them for that time, arguing that they had not gone away out of malice, but only to admire the homage to the Madonna. The plea was accepted and all were able to have dinner.

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5 Zoratti Teresa (sr. Maria Clementina del ss. Sacramento) erroneamente in registri indicata « Sorati », nata a Udine nel 1833, entrò in congr. il 5-8-1851, vestì il 27-3-1853, professò il 2-2-1857, morì a Udine il 21-5-1882. Per cenni su lei v. Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 307-312.

Sister Clementina, however, had to serve the punishment for the entire group. The Father imposed on her to take off her veil for an entire week; the poor thing had to go around with her head covered only by a blue handkerchief, as was customary in the convent for domestic work. Once the days of punishment were over, the Father granted her forgiveness and permission to wear her dear veil again. The good Father, enlightened by God, understood that for her it was necessary to act in that way. Who knows what merit that devout religious woman will have acquired before God!

This naive account clearly shows how *don* Fantoni and Father Luigi had well divided the roles in the House of the Abandoned: the first acted like a mother and the second like a father. One could say a father a tiny bit severe, but not too much, given that the *"without dinner"* — a customary punishment in those times — was promptly revoked. More rigorous was the humiliation inflicted on the sister. « *If you had asked* — the Father must certainly have thought — *we could have gone all together. One does not honor the Madonna by acting on one's own initiative and yielding to a capricious curiosity* ».

Moreover, Sister Clementina of the Most Holy Sacrament knew how to profit from that humiliation; she drew such benefit from it as to remain famous in the congregation for her always recollected attitude, with downcast eyes and clasped hands. She was only twenty-two years old and had received the religious habit a year before, on March 27, 1853, when she was put to the test by the founder: an experienced gardener who knew how to guide that tender little plant toward a correct development.

The Sisters of Providence among the cholera victims

From July to September 1855, Friuli was overwhelmed by cholera, which raged like a destroying scourge (an implacable epidemic that sows death). The period of maximum severity was recorded between July 17 and August 26, reaching its acme (the peak of intensity) on the 7th of that month; on that single day, in the city of Udine, 125 new infected cases were counted, 53 of whom expired before sunset.

What was the reaction of the founder? Once again, he mobilized his spiritual daughters, launching them into the heroic service of charity. Even if shells were not raining down as during the uprisings of 1848, the danger was by no means less. The disease acted like an invisible asp (a hidden venomous serpent), capable of striking and striking down a man suddenly. But this did not discourage them: the heroism shown by the sisters was identical, sustained by the same and total spirit of dedication.

« *Father Luigi* — writes the biographer Tinti — *foreseeing the arrival of the scourge, had already instructed the sisters on the methods with which to provide care to the sick affected by the terrible disease. He therefore welcomed with extreme generosity the numerous and pressing requests of the civil authority, to send his daughters to assist the cholera victims both in the city and in the neighboring villages. This chosen group of sacred virgins set about with enthusiasm the highest act of charity: risking their own lives to save those of their brothers. Having departed in pairs, they hastened to the lazarettos and into the homes of the sick, assisting them day and night with the sincere affection of a mother. Father Luigi had previously warned them against the risks and*

instructed them on the methods suggested by piety and prudence to face them; despite this, he frequently went to visit them in the various places of service to assure himself of their health and to instill new courage in them in the midst of those circumstances so fatal and difficult. This is what — Tinti continues — *an elderly sister still living relates to us.* »

« *If it happened that one of us had to go to houses where religion was little considered, Father Luigi would recommend to us: Remember, daughters, that in the places where you go you will find neither a crucifix nor other blessed objects; however, have courage: the Lord will sustain you and bless your labors. And indeed, I was able to verify in person how much the good Father spoke the truth.*

One day, while I was assisting a gentleman struck by the lethal illness, his conditions were worsening from moment to moment, yet he showed no intention of receiving the last religious comforts. I did not leave him for a single instant until I was urgently called by the brother of the dying man, who warmly begged me to do everything possible so that the sick man would receive the sacraments, adding that the unfortunate man had not done so for a good twelve years.

I promised it to him and, after having asked God for strength, I returned to the sick man and said to him: — Good sir, I would like to ask you a favor. He immediately understood what I was getting at and, since he nourished a profound gratitude toward the person who was risking her life for him, he replied smiling: I understand, I understand; well, call the pastor immediately. The priest was sent for, the sick man received the sacraments that very evening, and by morning he had already expired! »

We would be desirous to have greater details on this heroic mission carried out by the sisters both in the city and in the province, and in particular on that constant coming and going of the Father to encourage them in assisting the cholera victims. We know however that coordinating these generous women there was, on this occasion too, the excellent Doctor Zambelli, who managed the forces at his disposal according to his own judgment, at times acting in a different way with respect to the requests of the municipalities or the indications of the Father. Proof of this is a letter dated August 6, written by Niccolò Fabris, representative of the municipality of Lestizza, and addressed to Father Luigi:

« *Reverend Sir, while the writing delegation expresses to you the most lively thanks for the solicitude and charity demonstrated in sending the two reverend sisters of the community guided by you to the aid of the cholera victims of Lestizza, where they represent a true divine blessing, I must express equal gratitude to you for having destined two other reverend sisters to the village of Nespoledo, it too struck by cholera and devoid of any help. However, your will regarding the latter was not respected, since Doctor Zambelli arbitrarily sent them to the village of Pantianicco.* »

Fabris had gone to the spot to reclaim them, but had not managed even to speak with them « *because of the opposition of some* — he reports — *who maintained how much their work was necessary there* », despite the fact that — he notes — three priests and a resident doctor were already present.

« *This municipal delegation therefore considering that the aforementioned sisters are being held in Pantianicco by deceit or perhaps by force (even!), and their intervention being urgent in Nespoledo... we pray you, if possible, to go to the royal district commissioner of Codroipo to put your will in writing, inviting him to have it delivered to your sisters by the means he deems most appropriate.* »

In short, those blessed sisters were so precious that the various villages "*contended*" over them among themselves. It is probable that Father Luigi resolved the dispute by sending two other religious women to Nespoledo.

In Lestizza — where the cholera caused the death of forty-nine people — the sisters remained until August 18. Fabris accompanied them back to the House of the Abandoned with the following letter:

« *Since by the grace of God the terrible disease that struck this municipality has almost entirely disappeared, the municipal delegation, so as not to take further advantage of the goodness of the two venerated sisters of your institute, who with so much charity dedicated themselves to the sick, deemed it a duty to relieve them of the task and accompany them back to their headquarters.*

At the moment when they present themselves to you, Mr. Director, on my behalf and that of the entire population of Lestizza, I express to you the deepest and imperishable gratitude for the charitable, effective, and untiring work provided by the sisters in favor of the numerous cholera victims of this area; we pray you to convey these feelings to them. With the desire to be able one day to reciprocate, we fervently pray that God may reward you and the blessed sisters, generously pouring out divine Providence upon the entire institute. »

It truly seems that Fabris could not find sufficient adjectives to praise adequately the dedication shown by the two religious women.

The superior Mother Lucia De Giorgio victim of cholera

The epidemic also penetrated inside the House of the Abandoned, striking several girls and sisters. The victims were four: two orphans and two religious women. The first to ascend to heaven was an eight-and-a-half-year-old orphan, Caterina Forte, who passed away on June 28 at ten in the morning.

« *And it is precisely in this circumstance* — writes the biographer Tinti — *that the mother superior Maria Lucia De Giorgio shone for her virtues, together with the religious women her daughters, in the intrepid and most loving assistance to the dear sick women. Unfortunately, she herself, a true martyr of charity, contracted the fatal disease, which quickly snatched her from life on July 28, leaving the entire community in grief. All appreciated the rare qualities of the deceased and deeply felt the extremely grave loss suffered by the congregation.* »

The tradition of the house narrates that Mother De Giorgio contracted the illness precisely because she wanted to personally assist the little Forte, so as not to expose the

other sisters to the risk of contagion. She died at two in the afternoon, just four hours after the child she had cared for. She had recently turned thirty-six years old.

To this splendid figure of a religious woman, superior of the Sisters of Providence since Christmas 1845, Tinti dedicates a page full of emotion, which reflects the veneration and the fame of sanctity that the sisters always preserved for their first superior.

« *Tall in stature, of noble bearing and robust health, she possessed a solid judgment, an elevated mind, and a most noble heart... Even today the oldest religious women remember with emotion Mother Maria Lucia, who distinguished herself by the vividness of her faith and the ardor of her charity. She knew how to make herself* "*all things to all*"*; the sisters and the girls found in her, in moments of grief, deprivation, or doubt, an affectionate mother capable of giving guidance, relief, and new vigor to persevere in good. She had learned from divine wisdom the art of governing, possessing the secret of making herself obeyed and, at the same time, loved, so much so that each daughter of her felt like the favorite. She used her authority to reserve for herself the most burdensome, humble, and unpleasant tasks; in return, the Lord rewarded her with extraordinary graces.* »

« *A sister still living testifies that, when a girl was struck by an infectious and repugnant illness, the nurses struggled to resist the unbearable stench; so that the sick person would not remain deprived of assistance, De Giorgio took upon herself that painful task. Well, while the superior was in the room to tend to the sick woman, that sister suddenly smelled the unpleasant odor transform into a sweet perfume, which however became unbearable as soon as the superior momentarily moved away. She further attests that, when De Giorgio came out of the patient's room, her head was seen several times surrounded by a luminous halo and that, after her death, a sister who had gone to the parlor saw the deceased superior remain there listening, almost as if wanting to recommend the exact observance of a rule so fundamental for religious communities.* »

In those sad days a singular and moving episode occurred. She who had been the companion and emulator of De Giorgio in assisting the wounded of 1848, was so also in the care of cholera patients and at the moment of death. We refer to Amalia Borghese, known in religion as Sister Maria Gioseffa, who died three days later, on July 31, together with another ten-year-old orphan, Antonia Venturini. It seemed almost as if she did not want to separate from her beloved sister and mother.

On August 5, the disease also cut short the life of twenty-six-year-old Orsola Desitz, who was hospitalized at the *"Casa del Provvedimento"*.

There were no other victims besides these five; however, the contagion struck numerous other sisters and girls. Of this we are informed by Father Luigi himself, through a petition presented to the municipal congregation.

The House of the Abandoned had purchased from the Filippuzzi pharmacy the medicines necessary to treat the internal sick, for a total expense of 277.71 lire. Since the Municipality of Udine had committed to paying for the drugs for the less well-off, Father Luigi asked that the administration take charge of that debt. Among the reasons, besides the poverty of the institute, he recalled how « *the sisters of the abandoned, during the raging of the epidemic, had offered themselves with promptness to carry out the*

charitable office of nurses in many families of the city »; he also emphasized how the municipality knew how much that service had been welcome and timely, provided with an abnegation dictated solely by religious faith in the midst of a grave danger. He harbored no doubts about the acceptance of the request since, as he stated, the facts spoke in his favor: if those girls had fallen ill in their families of origin instead of inside the work, the cost of the medicines would have fallen on the Municipality anyway given their destitution; furthermore, several among those who fell ill in the house had contracted the virus precisely while providing service as nurses to the cholera victims of the city.

We would be curious to know the names of all those "*several*" sisters who fell ill to assist the sick, but it is enough that they are known to God. Without doubt, Father Luigi found comfort for the grave losses suffered seeing how much his spiritual daughters had proven themselves ready for the most heroic obedience. The city of Udine and the entire Friuli remained deeply edified by it.

Mother Serafina Strazzolini new superior

On September 7, 1855, the meeting prescribed by the regulation for the appointment of the new superior was held. On this occasion too, as had already happened for De Giorgio, one of the elderly religious women was not chosen, but rather the youngest among the sisters: Mother Maria Serafina Strazzolini. A professed sister for a short time and barely thirty years old, Tinti defines her « *a woman all full of charity and very intelligent* ». Although the election represented a recognition of her great qualities, it is legitimate to discern in it the influence of the founder, to whom belonged by regulation the designation of three electors. Once again, he desired at the head of the congregation a figure who was capable, but at the same time rich in those precious virtues and energies typical of youth in love with God — not by chance had Strazzolini assumed the religious name of « *Serafina del divino Amore* »: namely docility, generosity, a sacred enthusiasm, and a lively spirit of initiative. Father Luigi was convinced that the entire congregation would receive a new impulse if stimulated and guided by such fervor; at the same time, the older sisters would have the opportunity to exercise humility, a virtue most dear to the founder.

Her hopes were not disappointed. « *Father Luigi* — writes Tinti — *found in her a precious help to make the congregation progress, to which Mother Serafina rendered most valuable services until death* ».

Also the "*Cenni biografici"*, cited several times, refer to her:

« *Together with the venerable father founder, Mother Serafina exerted herself with immense zeal and spirit of sacrifice for the drafting of the Holy Rules, which at the time were still followed on an experimental basis. Father Luigi constantly consulted with her to manage the affairs of the house, of all the houses, and of the entire congregation. Mother Serafina, thanks to the experience gained over many years, to her prompt intuition and a practical sense that was congenial to her, was of immense support to the father founder... She can be considered a true co-founder, for how much she did and collaborated with Father Luigi for the good of the congregation, even before Mother Cecilia Piacentini entered the institute; it can indeed be asserted that the most reverend*

Mother Cecilia found the work already two-thirds completed... Mother Serafina was always in the front line (a pioneer) so that the rules, in those years of trial desired by Rome, would be observed by the sisters with punctuality and love.

She observed with attention if there were any need to add or modify something in the daily practice, among the varied occupations of the sisters in hospitals, asylums, and schools. She exposed her opinion with humility to the father founder, and together they made the annotations and corrections deemed appropriate. In this way, the first experiments and the first trials took place under the government of Mother Serafina. She and the father founder insisted very much that in the institute so dear to them and which had cost labors and sacrifices of every kind, the spirit of charity and an authentic family spirit should reign supreme. »

This testimony summarizes the entire life of Strazzolini: she was re-elected superior in 1858, remaining in office until August 1862; she again held the role of superior general from 1867 to 1880 — the year in which she ceded the office to Piacentini — and from 1880 until her death, which occurred in 1889, she was superior of the house of Udine.

Thus, 1855 concluded positively for the House of the Abandoned and for the congregation. Mother Lucia De Giorgio and Sister Gioseffa Borghese had left the legacy of an inestimable example of supreme sacrifice, numerous religious women had been formed through a heroic dedication, and the leadership of the congregation had passed into the worthy and passionate hands of Strazzolini.

How Father Luigi welcomed the little orphans

Naturally, the cholera epidemic caused a new wave of orphans to converge toward the House of the Abandoned, so much so that the institute was full of them; on the other hand, it was almost constantly so.

A slight but extremely significant indication of the Father's generosity in welcoming poor and abandoned girls is provided to us by the number of orphans admitted during his government. In the seventeen years in which the direction was entrusted to Father Carlo, that is, from 1837 to the end of 1853, 58 girls were welcomed, with an annual average of eleven. In the exactly thirty years of Father Scrosoppi's management, no fewer than 420 were accepted, bringing the average to fourteen. Father Luigi proved himself, therefore, tendentially more inclined and open to welcoming new orphans.

This certainly did not happen because the economic resources of the house had increased or become more substantial. On the contrary, alms were progressively diminishing and, particularly after 1866, the institute faced a long period made difficult by innumerable sufferings. Despite this, Father Luigi ordered that the house should always keep an « *open door* » for those poor creatures.

The reason for such conduct is to be found in his courageous spirit in the face of adversity and in his unwavering faith in Providence; but it also resides in his deeply merciful soul, ready to be moved before every situation of abandonment. Perhaps, at first, he would begin by raising refusals — « *There is no more space! The house has no means!* » — but he inevitably ended up consenting.

The little orphans represented for him a « *gift of Providence* ». In this way he considered them and expected them to be seen by others. Often — as some witnesses report — he would hide under his large cloak some newly arrived little girl and ask those who already lived in the institute: — « *Guess what I keep hidden under here?* » Then he would answer himself: « *A gift that the good God has sent us!* » Only then did he lift the hem of the cloak to present the new little sister to the orphans.

If then the little girl brought to the house appeared particularly *derelitte* and, as frequently happened in such cases, dirty and infested with parasites, the Father felt an even greater joy from it. He handed her over to the sister wardrobe-keeper, exclaiming: « *These are the most precious gifts of the Lord; have therefore a special care for them.* »

« *The good Father* — the chronicle reports of the institute narrate — *loved the poor to such an extent that, when a girl was entrusted to him who lived in the blackest misery, poorly dressed, with her clothes in tatters and so filthy as to host numerous insects, he immediately took her under his protection. He ordered that the dear little one be washed, cleaned, and dressed with decorum, saying: These are my joys, see to it that they lack nothing* »

Those creatures arrived at the house in the most unthinkable ways, like little birds lost in the snow.

One day a six-year-old boy presented himself together with his younger sister; he pushed her into the atrium of the building and then ran away as fast as his legs could carry him.

« *On another occasion* — the chronicles report — *a poor woman, prostrated by illness and who struggled to stand on her feet, arrived at the door with two little girls. She had the good Father called and said to him: I pray you, Father, take care of these two daughters of mine; I am going to die in the hospital. After having pronounced these words she went away; a few days later she died, serene for having entrusted her little ones into safe hands. The good Father welcomed them in the best of ways and provided with solicitude for their every need.* »

« *Another poor unfortunate woman had a baby girl but was devoid of any means to support her. Not knowing what to do, she rang the bell at the door of the Abandoned and, as soon as they opened it for her, she pushed the little one inside and fled without saying a word. What could be done? The good Father welcomed everyone, trusting without reservation in divine Providence. However, in the end, the institute also reached the limit of its capacity: it maintained sixty in the boarding school of Udine and twenty among the smallest in the house of Orzano.* »

The gifts of Monsignor Filipponi

He who distinguished himself in bringing to Father Luigi those « *most beautiful gifts of the Lord* » was Monsignor Carlo Filipponi, his contemporary, fellow citizen, and fraternal friend. Parish priest of San Quirino in Udine from 1834 until his death, which occurred on January 26, 1879, he was a priest of immense charity; the entire city considered him the worthy heir of the most venerable Monsignor Francesco Tomadini in the direction of the boys' orphanage founded by the latter.

One of his "*gifts*" is linked precisely to the cholera epidemic of 1855.

« *One day* — the chronicles still recount — *the parish priest of San Quirino was called to assist a good sick woman, by now at the end of her life. She lived in a stable, deprived of everything, with two dirty little girls beside her, infested with parasites, covered in rags, emaciated and wasted from hunger: more than human creatures, they looked like two spiders. The mother, with a thread of a voice, told the good parish priest that she entrusted her daughters to him and that she would die serene if she knew they were in his hands. On his part, the parish priest reassured the dying woman that he would take the utmost care of them and told her to die in peace, certain that the good God would provide for everything. He administered to her the last comforts of the holy religion and accompanied her to die Christianly.*

Then he took the two little ones under his cloak and brought them directly to his friend Father Luigi. Who could describe the welcome that the father founder reserved for those two poor children? He had the sister nurse called and entrusted them to her so that they would take a bath immediately; then he handed them over to the teacher with many and heartfelt charitable recommendations. »

The two little orphans are in all probability Maria and Giovanna Pascolatti, whose mother, Paolina Montico, died of cholera on August 9, 1855, in the parish of San Quirino [(6)].

To Filipponi must also be attributed another episode that remained famous in the tradition of the House of the Abandoned [(7)].

« *The good parish priest of San Quirino* — the chronicles still recount —, *who often presented himself with gifts of this kind for the good Father, had been warned that for the moment it was not possible to welcome any more, since there was no more space where to settle them. One day this worthy parish priest... comes across a woman holding by the hand a four-year-old girl, emaciated, hungry, poorly dressed and infested with parasites: she stops him and says to him without mincing words: Either you take care of this little one or I am going to drown her, because I no longer know how to survive. I must work to earn my bread and with her in tow it is absolutely impossible for me. The good parish priest, at those words, took the girl by the hand and the woman fled away.*

And now, to whom to entrust her? Anyone else would have been lost, but he, who knew the greatness of Father Luigi's heart and knew that his charity would have embraced the entire world, if he could, to elevate it to God and rescue it from misery, hides her under

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[6] The first received the sister's habit in 1866, assuming the name of Sister Saveria, but died on April 14, 1871; the second, who having completed her education had left the institute in 1867, re-entered it shortly after her sister's death among the Sisters of Providence, assuming the same religious name.

[7] Unlike Tinti (op. cit., p. 166) according to whom it was the parish priest Filipponi (1805-1879) who led to the House of the Abandoned the little girl for whom the bed was prepared in the laundry basket, in a manuscript report (A.L.S., fasc. 29, doc. 9, c. 90) it is stated that it was instead his successor don Luigi Indri (1840-1909). In this report, Sister Serafina Strazzolini appears as superior of the institute, elected in 1855 and remaining in office for many years. However, for a child of tender age, a certain Maria Cioli of the parish of San Quirino, to enter the House of the Abandoned one must reach August 26, 1883. In that case, the parish priest Indri, successor of Filipponi, would have conducted her: however, the latter was nearly six years old.

his cloak and heads promptly to the Institute of the Abandoned. He rings at the door and asks: Where is Father Luigi?

In his room, he is answered. He runs upstairs, keeping his treasure concealed so as not to be seen. He enters the room and says to the Father: I need you; you cannot deny yourself to the charity I ask of you.

Eh, dear friend — replies the Father —, *I already imagine what you desire, but it is absolutely impossible for me to accept any more, I really would not know where to put them.*

It does not matter, this time too you must satisfy me and welcome what I hand over to you; try to refuse if you are capable of it. And so saying, he opens his cloak and shows the dear little girl, who until that moment had remained in profound silence. The parish priest recounted what happened while the good Father smiled at the little one; and his charity was not capable of putting up a refusal. »

But where to settle her? They ended up adapting the laundry basket as a little bed for her...

Tradition does not pass down to us with certainty who that little creature was for whom that so singular nest was improvised. Much time later, an attempt was made to identify her as Giuseppina Quaini or Elvira Dossi, both later becoming Sisters of Providence, respectively with the names of Sister Rosamaria and Sister Battistina. However, the circumstances of their entry into the institute refute this hypothesis. It is probable that it was instead a certain Teresa Maria Longhino, belonging precisely to the parish of San Quirino, welcomed at exactly four and a half years old on December 2, 1850. Perhaps her name was lost because the episode dated back to a very distant date and because no memory remained of the fate of that little orphan. It is, in any case, a detail of minor importance.

We could have summarized these last pages in a few lines, if from this so naive and fragrant narrative the sweet charity of Father Luigi did not emerge in a vivid way. On the contrary, we desire to add yet another detail.

Father Scrosoppi among the most lonely orphans

In 1852, two little girls, Maria and Barbara Mayerhoffer, seven and four years old respectively, were welcomed into the House of the Abandoned. They were born in Sant'Ulrich, in Hungary. Their father Michele, a colonel in the Austrian army, had settled in Udine after the revolutionary uprisings of 1848. Having been left a widower by his wife Agostina, he found himself with two boys and two little girls, and had entrusted the latter to Father Luigi. A lieutenant marshal Baron Mayerhoffer will receive in 1859-60 the honor of decorating some Friulian soldiers who had fought under his command for the defense of the Papal States: we do not know if he is the same father of the two little orphans.

One of them, Sister Tranquilla, who died in Udine on April 25, 1926, left us a long written testimony about the founder. We reproduce a passage of it here, which reveals at

the same time the melancholy of the little girls due to the lack of their natural father and the sensitivity of Father Luigi in consoling these lost little souls.

« *I always went to visit* — writes Sister Tranquilla — *this blessed Father, who always welcomed me with immense love and told me that he was my papa, asking me to love him as if I were his true daughter. Believe me* — he would say to me — *that I love everyone, but you in particular, because I welcomed you when you were very little. And when he saw us together, in four or five, he would throw himself on his knees and recite with us three Agimus (that is, the prayer of thanksgiving* "*We give You thanks*"*). You are my true daughters* — he would say — *and he desired that we have an unwavering faith in him. And I had it, because I went to visit him every day and always ran to him to unburden myself about everything that happened to me.* »

Here he is, Father Luigi, on his knees among the most abandoned of the abandoned: he prays with them and teaches them to pray. He understands their profound and dangerous loneliness and, to soothe it, offers the gift of an even more affectionate fatherhood. Spiritual comfort and human tenderness blend into an enchanting harmony.

The Work for the Deaf-Mutes

A specific work destined for deaf-mutes was already being thought of before the passing of Father Carlo, as indicated by Liccaro in the funeral eulogy. It is not clear how the idea of establishing such a center in Udine arose, considering that one well underway already existed in nearby Gorizia. It is probable that through the « *open door* » of the House of the Abandoned some of these unfortunate young women had already entered, who obviously required a completely special educational path.

Father Luigi could not attend to it immediately, since between 1854 and 1856 he was totally absorbed by the reconstitution of the Oratorian congregation. As soon as this was re-established, he dedicated himself to the realization of the dreamed-of work. Of this initiative, Tinti and other witnesses have provided sometimes imprecise information, both due to the short duration of the institution and the small number of deaf-mutes hosted. More recent research allows, however, to bring clarity to the matter.

On March 7, 1857, the Emperor of Austria Franz Joseph arrived in Udine together with his consort Elisabeth Eugenia (the famous Sissi). The following day, while the emperor visited barracks and educational institutes, Elisabeth went to visit the convents of the Poor Clare nuns (Uccellis), the Rosaries (Renati), the *Dimesse*, the Abandoned, and the *Zitelle*, each of which hosted a female school.

The work was officially inaugurated on that very day, although the deaf-mutes had a dedicated location only some time later.

On this occasion, the same poems composed for the visit of Anna Maria Carolina in 1838 were recited to the sovereign. However, *don* Fantoni added the following verses:

« *Hail, Augusta, hail, o pious one, our hope and our love! Poor little deaf-mutes, hundreds and hundreds of girls, with mine offer you their heart.* »

And Father Luigi took up the lyre again and wrote the following quatrains:

« *Voi mute gioite.*
S'appresta la scuola
che l'alma parola
donar vi potrà.
E tu lo vorrai,
divina Maria
ché l'opera pia
si dedica a te.
Quel ch'é presso Dio
del Ciel la Reina,
a Cesar vicina,
Augusta, sei tu ».

« You, girls deprived of speech, rejoice. The school is being prepared that will know how to give you the vital word. And you will want it, divine Mary, since this work of charity is dedicated entirely to you. What the Queen of Heaven represents beside God, you, noble Empress, represent beside the Emperor. »

From these verses it is understood that the work was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and it is almost certain that it bore the title of the Immaculate Conception.

The last quatrain, with that rather bold comparison between the empress and the Madonna, aimed to soften Elisabeth's heart in favor of the Institute of the Abandoned. In fact, a memorandum was presented to her in which it was explicitly declared that the institute « *today, to make the memory of your most august presence eternal, opens a special shelter and school for some derelitte deaf-mutes of the province.* » The real objective, however, was to obtain the customary and necessary tax exemptions:

« *as a charitable entity* — it was read — *from the inheritance tax on assets deriving from donations or legacies; as a private entity, from taxes on real estate; as an industrial entity, from contributions on arts and trade.* »

The petition, however, remained without a response.

It is interesting to note how in the plea Father Luigi did not ask for direct subsidies, but solely for exemptions. It was as if he were saying:

« *If you cannot help me, patience! Providence will take care of it. But at least let me work in peace without asking me for money after I have exhausted myself for love of the poor and to the benefit of society itself.* »

Returning to the Work for the Deaf-Mutes, we have seen that Monsignor Zoratti, in registering a baptism in April 1857, defined it « *just opened* ». It was already functioning in some way when, on April 3, Father Scrosoppi purchased a house owned by the Dimesse, bordering the *"Casa del Provvedimento"*. « *Divine Providence* — reads the preamble of the contract — *has opened an asylum for the deaf-mutes of Udine and province at the House of the Abandoned. Lacking the necessary space, the charity of the noble college of the Dimesse was asked to sell the house with adjacent garden, very suitable for the use; and although such a sale is burdensome for the Dimesse, they have*

consented to cooperate in such a holy undertaking. » *don* Fantoni, being chaplain of the Dimesse, certainly acted as an intermediary.

For about ten years, Father Scrosoppi had to make use of specialized personnel from outside the congregation, there being no experts among the sisters in this branch of teaching. Later, however, he sent two religious women to Venice to the Canossians — Sister Costanza Murero and the first Sister Saveria Pascolatti who took their vows in 1868.

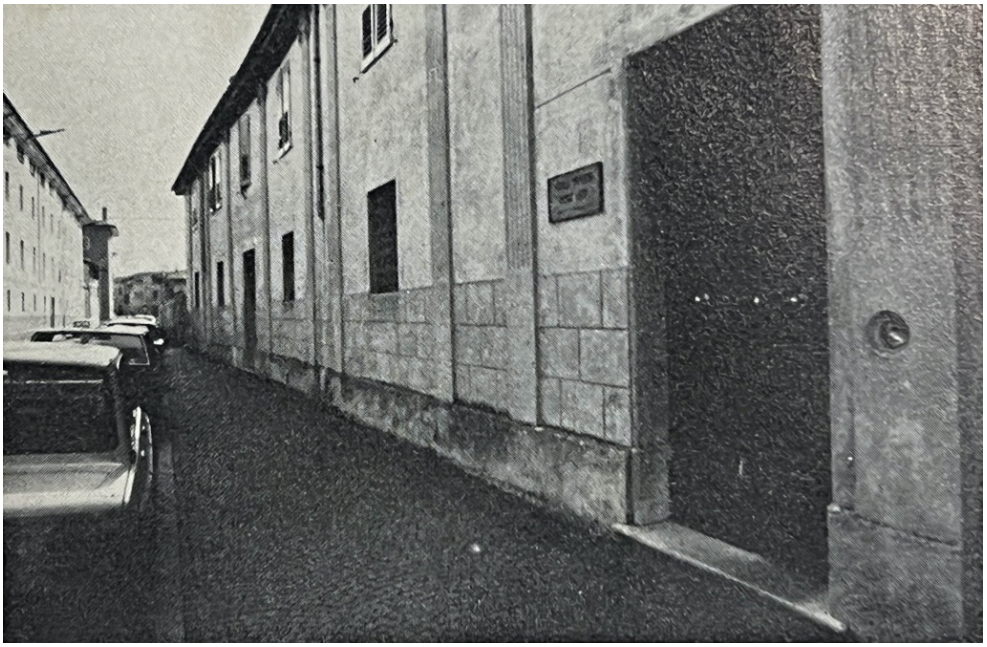
They must have already practiced with the deaf girls, since they returned from Venice with the qualification diploma after only three months of training.

However, Pascolatti died on April 14, 1871. Partly because of this loss and partly — Tinti writes — because « *Father Luigi was abandoned by those who could and should have sustained him... to his great grief he was forced to let fall a work of such great charity.* »

The civil authority, under the Austrian government, interested itself in the matter only to request from him, on October 9, 1861, the statistical data of the guests, having come to know « *that in the establishment established by you there are some deaf girls.* » Once the government changed, the interest vanished completely.

The activity lasted therefore approximately fifteen years, from 1857 to 1872; however, some rare deaf student still appears in the later chronicles.

If in his rule of life he had proposed to dedicate an hour of school every day to the deaf girls, just like to the novices and the little orphans, we must think that he too had learned to communicate with those creatures deprived of speech. There he is, marking the air with symbolic gestures; there he is, suggesting, with the movement of his lips, the first difficult and guttural sounds. His thought was turned to Jesus. And the deaf girls certainly perceived, from his gestures and his movements, all his love for Jesus, together with his paternal invitation to good and to Paradise.



Udine. Father Luigi started a school for the deaf and dumb here.
In 1901, the "*Immacolata*" nursery school was moved here.

Chapter 3

THE FIRST SWARM
THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE
IN THE HOSPITAL OF PORTOGRUARO (1857)

Tribute of gratitude to the heroism of the sisters in the cholera of 1855

The cholera epidemic was barely dying out and the impression aroused by the Sisters of Providence, thanks to their generous service provided to the sick in the city and in the villages, was still very vivid, when on August 26, 1855, the archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Trevisanato, felt the need to distribute a letter so that collections would be organized in the parishes of the diocese for the benefit of the House of the Abandoned.

« *An establishment that lies greatly close to my heart* — the archbishop writes — , *which constitutes the glory and the honor of this city and of this illustrious archdiocese, is certainly the private institute of the poor abandoned girls (derelitte). To no one is it unknown how this well-deserving institute provides every day for the sustenance of over three00 unfortunate girls, who, arriving from every corner of the city, find here, thanks to excellent teachers moved by the spirit of Christian charity, a salutary nourishment for the soul; they, being instructed in the principles of true wisdom and in the holy fear of God, are trained admirably in works suited to their sex and receive at the same time all those subsidies necessary for physical sustenance. And the pious house does not open only to the city girls, but welcomes and hosts in its boarding school as many more wretched young women as it can, who arrive there from every part of the vast archdiocese. However, an institute so worthy of merit is currently provided with barely a sixth part of the patrimony that would be absolutely indispensable to guarantee its future existence.* »

The circular continues at length, illustrating the causes of the economic difficulties in which the house found itself and exhorting to gather from households « *wheat and legumes, butter and cheeses, and every other kind of foodstuff that is offered by the charity of the faithful.* » In fact, in that year, the collections carried out outside the city (the "*foresi*" quests) yielded a proceed five times higher compared to that of the preceding year.

We wanted to cite this letter because from it emerges clearly how much esteem Monsignor Trevisanato — who later became patriarch of Venice and cardinal — nourished for the work of Father Scrosoppi and for his religious women. Furthermore, it was the last circular issued in favor of the house: in the following years, the worsening of economic and political conditions will prevent the making of such official appeals. Therefore, Father Luigi will have to entrust himself more than ever into the sweet hands

of divine Providence, especially considering that in that period death snatched from him many of his most faithful and generous benefactors.

Losses among the benefactors

On September 2, 1855, Countess Cecilia di Brazzà died, wife of Count Alvise Ottelio, who held the office of *podestà* of Udine for several years. We have already seen how this geophysical noblewoman had inherited the charitable ideal of her sister-in-law Giulia di Brazzà Piccoli, becoming in 1816 one of the founders of the House of the Abandoned, of which she was initially, together with her husband, the main support. She did not forget it even after Filaferro and *don* Luigi had given a more vigorous impulse to the work. In favor of the institute she had arranged, in her will of February 11, 1848, a legacy of 2500 Austrian lire, of which her sons Tommaso and Antonio regularly paid the interest until 1862. Later, the heirs — either through neglect or due to the changed cultural climate of the era — stopped looking after it. Father Luigi bore with patience for three years; he waited, and then attempted — as was his custom in such circumstances — the way of a humble reminder of duty. A magnificent example of this is a letter of his of April 15, 1868, addressed to a patrician from Udine, reported by Tinti. However, it caused him profound bitterness that the beneficent wills of the deceased were trampled upon by those who should have carried them out. For this reason, he was forced in 1865 to initiate a lawsuit that concluded on August 11, 1868, with a favorable sentence for the House of the Abandoned.

On November 2, 1856, Countess Teresa Bartolini Dragoni passed away at the age of eighty-four [(1)], another distinguished protectress of the House of the Abandoned, to which she donated a legacy of 5000 lire, in addition to the redemption for 9000 lire of an annual fee on some lands in Baldasseria, located south of the city. The reasons for which the institute could benefit from these donations only starting from 1861 are not known.

A week later, on November 10, 1856, the young Countess Clementina di Porcia died [(2)], who left as an inheritance to the House of the Abandoned fourteen fields, named "*podere Liliana"*, located in the locality of Ca' di Farra in the municipality of Ragogna. Also from this bequest, more than concrete benefits, only endless legal complications arose for Father Luigi and his work. Suffice it to say that the matter was resolved only in 1899, thanks to a voluntary agreement with Count Hermes di Porcia, who committed himself to liquidate to the Sisters of Providence the sum of 5000 lire, in any case burdened by the expenses incurred.

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[1] Bartolini Dragoni Teresa (1772-1836) noblewoman from Udine who left to the cultural institutions of the city the palace where the municipal library is currently located.

[2] Descendant of the historical Friulian family of the counts and princes of Porcia, which began in the early years of the 12th century, she was the daughter of Prince Francesco Serafino. She was born in Spittal in the county of Ortenburg in 1779. Having moved to Udine, she placed herself under the direction of Fr. Carlo Filaferro with the desire to become a religious woman, as appears from a letter of June 9, 1821, from the aforementioned father to Prince Serafino, with whom he had an intimate relationship. (Cf. L. TINTI, o.c., pp. 280-285). At her death, in the register of the Udine parish of St. Giorgio she is indicated as « nun of the abandoned », even though she does not appear as such in the registers of the sisters; the annotation says that she always remained linked to the institute.

On December 15, 1856, Mr. Antonio Venerio passed away, who, with a will of March 2, 1855, had left to the Abandoned a house with about forty fields between Felettis and Bicinicco, in the Lower Friuli; the institute took possession of it, however, only in 1869, upon the death of the deceased's wife. After Antonio's passing, the house was able to collect a bequest of 6000 lire, arranged since 1842 by his more famous brother, Mr. Gerolamo, and participate in the conspicuous legacy that the latter had established in favor of the city's charitable works. On this last donation, however, disputes arose regarding who held the right of administration: whether the Province, the Municipality of Udine, or the Archbishop. On December 31, 1861, the management of the House of the Abandoned was invited to appear in court together with the other beneficiaries, but Father Scrosoppi replied on January 10, 1862, renouncing any legal action on his own behalf. The dispute was later resolved by the judicial authority in favor of the Municipality, since the Archbishop could have a say only as the statutory president of the municipal charity commission.

We have mentioned these rather intricate events for two reasons. In the first place, because it was a duty to remind the Sisters of Providence of the names of persons so devoted and generous toward their founder. In the second place, because in our opinion a clear moral lesson emerges from it: namely how complex and difficult is the charity of the rich, even when it is moved by sincere intentions. Money is always accompanied by weeds (that is, complications and discords).

On the contrary, the charity of the poor seems to flow in a simple and serene way. Proof of this are two episodes from a few years later.

On December 19, 1861, the priest *don* Giovanni Amadio Tirelli from Mortegliano died in Udine [(3)], leaving 3500 lire to the Abandoned. In this case there was no dispute or confusion; his nephew Francesco Colosetti was glad to pay the sum on February 27, 1862.

On November 1, 1861, a certain Giovanni Bacina had died. He himself, when he was alive, had reported to Father Luigi that his wife Elisabetta Bevilacqua, who died before him, had instructed him to donate twenty gold Napoleons to the abandoned girls. A few days after his passing — precisely on November 10 — the main servant presented herself to Father Luigi with the small roll of gold coins (marenghi)!

We must furthermore add that the Austrian financial administration possessed eyes of Argus (ruthless and omnipresent vigilance) and talons of a vulture. Father Luigi sometimes had to wait years before actually collecting the legacies, but the tax authorities immediately imposed the payment of taxes on him. He was forced to write repeatedly: — « *How can I pay if I have not received anything yet? You demand the immediate payment of taxes on assets of which I do not yet have possession and which perhaps I will never obtain. I would expect understanding and sovereign favors, and instead you send me formal notices and bailiffs (uscieri)!* »

[3] Born in Mortegliano (Udine) in 1793, parish priest in some villages, he moved to the diocese of Treviso in 1848; later he returned to Udine and died there in 1861.

However, finance remained deaf to his requests. Nothing remained but to ask for continuous extensions. Fortunately, there was an honest man, Mr. Giovanni Puppati, who each time acted as guarantor for the Father. This is a long and tedious narrative, the details of which we spare the reader, trusting that he can imagine them.

Could Father Luigi ever harbor any sympathy for the Austrian government? After all, his sole interest was to do good.

Touches of family piety

Father Scrosoppi had by now only two cousins on his father's side: Luigi, son of the eldest uncle Valentino, and Giuseppe Angelo, son of the youngest uncle, Giuseppe. Both families were struck, precisely in those years, by two grave losses.

The cousin Luigi lost, during the cholera epidemic of 1855, his wife Pierina Tonutti, originally from Cividale. Shortly after, on January 13, 1856, Father Luigi welcomed the little girl left an orphan, Giovanna, inside the House of the Abandoned. The girl was then a little over twelve years old. Once her education was completed, she entered the congregation as an aspiring sister on January 29, 1864; she received the religious habit on May 14, 1865 — assuming the devout name of Sister *Maria Fedele di Jesus* — and made her solemn profession on October 27, 1868. The founder, before dying, will send her as the first superior to the house of Rovigno d'Istria, a task she maintained before passing to the leadership of the house of Orzano until 1918. She died in Udine on July 29, 1921. Of this esteemed religious woman, the following testimony about the Father remains to us:

« *The deceased Mother Fedele recounted many times that the Father seized every occasion to instruct simple people on the truths of faith; and that every time he approached a worker or a stranger, with holy ingenuity, he sought to elevate their thought to God, suggesting a small prayer to find relief in an illness, an ejaculation to Saint Joseph to obtain work, or a brief reflection on the Crucifix to manage to endure conflicts in the family.* »

In the House of the Abandoned, another relative of *don* Luigi had also been welcomed, Maddalena Baldovini, daughter of a cousin of Mr. Domenico, Regina Scrosoppi, who had left her an orphan in 1845. Maddalena too had entered the congregation in 1864 and, at the moment of her clothing in 1866, had assumed the name of Sister Antonia, probably in memory of the founder's mother. However, due to health problems, she was forced to return to her paternal home before being able to profess her vows.

Without doubt, Father Scrosoppi was deeply grieved by the loss that struck his cousin Giuseppe Angelo. The latter, who carried on the family business as a goldsmith, had married Giulia Rossi from Osoppo, with whom he had had four sons and two daughters. The firstborn was named Girolamo Marino Giuseppe. Although custom urged him to continue his father's company, he chose instead the path of the priesthood. Who knows whether to inspire him had been precisely his admiration for Father Luigi? He was already a student of theology, although he had not yet received holy orders, when death snatched him on June 16, 1857, at only twenty and a half years old. It is legitimate to

wonder whether Father Scrosoppi did not hope to have him at his side in the Oratorian congregation and in charitable activities; he felt indeed a great need for a young and trusted collaborator.

Precisely in those days, the Sisters of Providence were preparing to take their first step outside the original core of Udine (that is, to take their first flight out of the nest).

Monsignor Andrea Casasola, bishop of Concordia

On September 23, 1855, Pope Pius IX designated Monsignor Andrea Casasola [(4)] as bishop of Concordia, formerly a professor at the seminary of Udine and, since 1853 — following the passing of Monsignor Darù —, vicar general of the archdiocese. From April 6 to June 18, 1856, he took part in the conferences of the Lombardo-Venetian episcopate in Vienna, where he received episcopal consecration on May 18 from the apostolic nuncio, Cardinal Viale-Prelà (then elected archbishop of Bologna), together with Monsignor Trevisanato and Monsignor Romilli, archbishop of Milan. Due to these commitments, his official entry into the diocese of Concordia was postponed until August 24, 1856.

Mons. Andrea Casasola, archbishop of Udine, friend and supporter of Fr. Luigi and his work.

[4] Born in Buia (Udine) in 1806 and died in Rosazzo in 1884. Bibl.: We limit ourselves to pointing out: Il Cittadino Italiano, May 18-19, 1881; Ricordo delle feste giubilari di SE. Mons. Andrea Casasola, Udine 1881, pp. 50; B. FEDRIGO, In morte di... parole, Udine 1884, pp. 46; L. MUSSINANO, Elogio funebre..., Udine 1884, pp. 38; P. MENIS, Andrea Casasola arcivescovo di Udine, Udine 1958, pp. 24; G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti..., Udine 1958, pp. 20-23.

Only two years younger than Father Luigi, Monsignor Casasola was united to him by a deep friendship and knew perfectly the spirit that animated his religious congregation. It can be said, therefore, that he had barely arrived in Portogruaro, seat of the bishop of Concordia, when he conceived the idea of calling the Sisters of Providence to work in the city hospital. Until then, the facility was managed by paid lay personnel (mercenary), was in a phase of decline, and could not respond adequately to the health needs that were growing day by day. He must have involved Father Luigi in the project already towards the end of 1856; we believe indeed that the permission to celebrate Mass outside the diocese for ten days (« *ad decem dies* »), issued to him by the curia of Udine on February 3, 1857, refers precisely to a journey of the latter to Portogruaro.

The negotiations turned out to be immediately promising. The Father thought right away of preparing with care some sisters for the delicate mission they were about to undertake. He therefore sent four or five of them to Gorizia, so that they could learn the methods of assistance to the sick at that charity hospital, then directed by the Sisters of Saint Vincent of Innsbruck. Among them were certainly the choir sister Cristina Borghese and the lay sister Orsola Del Medico.

The sisters' internship in Gorizia

« *In the brief months in which the good sisters* — writes Tinti — *stayed in Gorizia, it cannot be described how much they learned in their training under the guidance of that expert teacher who was Mother Nepomucena Piccinini, superior of that house. She engaged the apprentice sisters in the most tiring, humble, and repugnant tasks. Their solid vocation was necessary to withstand the multiple trials they faced in that period in dressing wounds, assisting the dying, composing and dressing corpses. Charity, like death, overcomes everything with its strength. Fortis ut mors dilectio (that is, love is strong as death).* »

The brief annotations of Tinti are completed in a witty way by the lively memories of Sister Cristina Borghese — known for her typical exclamation « *cospettina* » —, reported in the "*Cenni biographiici"* cited several times.

« *At times* — it is read in the text — *during the moments of recreation, the younger sisters asked that they be told about the period of practice as a nurse carried out in Gorizia.*

Mother — they would say to her — *what did you learn at the* "*Beneficenza*" *of Gorizia with those good German sisters?*

Eh! — she would reply with all naturalness — *what did I learn? Everything; what I did not know and what in my life I had never done. Emptying chamber pots: and in doing so I soiled myself very often, because I emptied them the wrong way, and then, cospettina!, I made myself beautiful indeed! ... Then one would call me to remake the bed, another to wash her, a third to comfort her, and almost always all at the same moment. I was truly in difficulty, cospettina!*

Mother — the sisters insisted — *did they ever send you to look after the dead?*

Cospettina, of course they sent me! No less than to wash a corpse; and they locked me in alone with the deceased woman, without anyone to keep me company! It is indeed true that the superior checked on me through the keyhole to see if I was doing my duty, but I did not know it. Oh, my God, that was indeed a fine sacrifice (fioretto)! But I did it, cospettina! When however I thought I had finished and wanted to go wash my hands, that blessed mother superior, to make me overcome every revulsion, did not permit me to; and I had to go to lunch with hands that smelled of death. But I rubbed them well on my apron, and with the same apron I broke the bread, being careful not to let myself be seen by the superior. Ah, blessed Father Luigi — I would say to myself — *may God forgive him! Precisely Maria Cristina he wanted to send here. Patience, everything passes, this too will pass!* »

The sisters, at the telling of these adventures, laughed heartily, and continued with the questions.

« *Mother, tell us, what did they give you to eat? Was it German or Italian cuisine?*

Ehhh!! German, German!! Large plates of pasta, for example round gnocchi, bigoli, and very often a large plate of macaroni. Cospettina di Diana, it took the stomach of the forester Margoni (a character proverbial for his appetite) to digest all that stuff. »

Another sister asked her:

«*Mother, with all that work did you have any time left to pray?*

Certainly I prayed, but when I went to the chapel together with them, I understood nothing else than "*Bitt für uns, bitt für uns*" *(that is, pray for us).*

Tell us, mother — the religious women continued — *something also about Maria Orsola (Del Medico), who was with you in the same ward. Did she have to do the same things?*

« *Ohhh! To her, who was a lay sister, they made her scrub the floors all day. They had entrusted her to a sister who spoke a broken Italian. Every now and then the latter, looking with compassion at our lay sister who was dripping with sweat and pointing to heaven to encourage her, would exclaim:* "*Bel Paratis, Manie Orzule, bel Paratis!*" *(that is,* "*Beautiful Paradise, Maria Orsola, beautiful Paradise!*"*).*

Finally — Mother Cristina concluded — *Father Luigi came to pick us up to bring us back to Udine. Ohhh! that was indeed a day of celebration for us, cospettina! However, I will never forget those excellent sisters and I will always be grateful to them for the good they did us. Golly! I would be an ingrate if I were not.* »

Departure for Portogruaro

The municipal council of Portogruaro resolved, on August 19, 1857, to entrust to the Sisters of Providence « *the service, food, medicines, maintenance and renewal of*

furniture and utensils, etc., necessary for the setup » of the hospital; the provincial delegation of Venice ratified this decision on September 25. On October 9, at the bishop's palace, in the presence of Monsignor Casasola, the district commissioner, the representatives of the municipality, and the honorary director of the hospital, Father Scrosoppi signed the contract with which the assistance to the sick and the internal administration of the *nosocomio* (hospital) were entrusted to the sisters. The reopening of the facility in its new form was planned for November 15.

While in Portogruaro they proceeded with the bureaucratic approvals of the contract before the higher civil authorities, Father Luigi returned to Udine to prepare for departure the small group of seven or eight sisters destined for this new field of mission and to implore from the archbishop — without whose consent he took no step — his paternal blessing. In a letter of October 14, Monsignor Trevisanato expressed his full agreement with the request advanced by Monsignor Casasola:

« *I desire* — he wrote among other things — *that the Lord bless this holy enterprise and maintain our brave sisters in health, so that they may dedicate themselves with enthusiasm to a work so useful and devout.* »

In a postscript, he instructed the Father to deliver another enclosed letter to the bishop of Concordia.

It can therefore be assumed that the departure took place between Thursday 15 and Saturday 17 October.

It was necessary to set out on the journey in the heart of the night, around three or four in the morning, since it was necessary to cover fifty-six kilometers on rickety carts along the bumpy and dusty roads of the era. It was a matter of an entire day of travel.

The founder celebrated Holy Mass and offered the "*Bread of the strong*" (that is, the Eucharist) to those dear spiritual daughters. Finally, amidst a murmur (buzz) of endless greetings, the moment of parting arrived. We can easily imagine that many faces, both among those who were leaving and those who were staying, were streaked with tears. Sister Cristina will certainly have tried to lift morale with one of her usual jokes: — « *Come on, come on, let's not start whimpering now, cospettina!* »

Having received the blessing from the superior, Mother Serafina Strazzolini, the caravan set in motion in an atmosphere of prayer. Father Luigi traveled with them.

At the rising of the sun they were already near Codroipo. They then continued toward the Lower Friuli, beyond the Tagliamento river, among the fields of corn already harvested and the vines with leaves speckled with yellow and red at the edges of the road. Although autumn was breathed in the air, in their hearts it was full spring!

A prophecy to begin

Once arrived in Portogruaro, the sisters could not settle immediately in the hospital, since the premises were not yet completely ready; they were therefore hosted for a certain period in the bishop's palace. This detail is passed down to us by a deposition that dwells

on describing a « *prophecy* » of the founder concerning the future vocation of a little girl, a certain Maria Liva from Latisana, born in 1850 to Giovanni Battista and Anna Mazzolini.

« *The little Maria Liva* — it is read in the document — *, a girl of only seven years old, was in Portogruaro with her mother and was affected by quartan fever (that is, a form of malaria that manifests every four days). The Sisters of Providence had entered that hospital only a few days before; since their lodging was not yet finished, they had to go to sleep in the bishop's palace. This good woman accompanied the religious women in the evening and went to pick them up in the morning.*

One day, while she was in the company of the little Maria, she met the good Father. As soon as he saw the little girl, he placed his hands on her head and said: Keep her, because she will be my daughter. On several occasions he had the opportunity to meet her and every time the good Father repeated the same refrain: Keep her, because she will be my daughter. Yet the thing appeared impossible, she being an only daughter with four brothers. The girl grew up and every now and then reflected on the meaning of those words, without being able to get to the bottom of it, since in her mind the difficulties increased. Maria felt no attraction for religious life; she was a lively girl and the idea of closing herself in a convent did not please her at all.

After a few years, God called her good mother to Himself. On her deathbed, she said to her husband with an almost imperious tone: It is not appropriate for Maria to remain here alone in the midst of four brothers. Entrust her therefore to Father Luigi, in the Institute of the Abandoned in Udine, handing over to him her share of the inheritance. The father promised it to her and the woman died serene regarding Maria's future. The husband kept the promise and entrusted his fifteen-year-old daughter to Father Luigi, who, with her exuberant character, was very far from thinking of becoming a sister.

However the good God, who wanted her all for Himself, soon made her hear His call. She welcomed it and sought to correspond with prayer and the sincere desire to give herself to God. She was nineteen years old when, together with two other companions, she presented herself to Father Luigi asking him to be admitted to the probandate (that is, the trial period). They were presented to the mother general and accepted; with immense joy they were admitted among the aspirants. Behold, the prophecy of the good Father came true. The young Maria — the testimony concludes — *passed the years of trial with merit, received the habit and professed her vows; not only that, she became one of the favorites of Father Luigi and lived happily for over fifty years of religious life among the Sisters of Providence, under the name of Mother Ottilia.* » [(5)]

Mother Ottilia was for thirty years the sacristan in the house of Udine, where she passed away on January 8, 1927. During the diocesan process, Sister Eustochio Dorigoni cites her as one of the most convinced witnesses of the sanctity of Father Luigi.

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[5] The narrative is of a remarkable historical precision. In fact, from the registers of the house of Udine it appears that Liva was welcomed there as an orphan on June 4, 1862; and in the autograph lists of the founder she appears admitted among the aspirants on December 10, 1869, together with Maria Mayerhoffer, Sr. Perpetua, and Margherita Dorigo, Sr. Brigida.

Yet, the Father had inflicted several punishments on her due to her somewhat careless nature.

Right in front of his study, on a shelf, there was a small statue of Saint Louis. Towards evening, Sister Ottilia, in her role as sacristan, had to light a small oil lamp there and leave beside it one of those wicks soaked in fat that candle manufacturers call "*igniters*"; this served so that the Father or the sisters could draw fire to light all the other oil or petroleum lamps of the house. Often, however, the igniter disappeared. Father Luigi pointed out these failings to the young sister; she guaranteed him the maximum precision, attributing the blame to some distracted sister who left the wick around the house.

« *And the Father: Pay attention, because whoever forgets truly deserves a punishment.* »

« *Yes, Father, but a serious punishment! answered the sister.* »

« *And what punishment would you give her? the Father asked her.* »

« *To stand there under the statue for a while with open arms.* »

« *Very well, so we shall do, the Father concluded.* »

A few days later, the igniter was missing again. Father Luigi, stationed behind the half-closed door of the study, discovered that the forgetful one was precisely Sister Ottilia, caught while she was returning on tiptoe to furtively replace on the shelf the match forgotten who knows where. It was then her turn to remain there with open arms while the other sisters went to dinner.

Another time, while she was lighting the lamp in the refectory, she pulled the cord of the mechanism (the sash-window style pulley) with too much eagerness, causing the lantern to plunge and shatter, spilling the petroleum onto the floor. Desperate, she ran to ask the Father for forgiveness for her carelessness; from the fright, she managed only to call him amidst sobs from the base of the stairs: — « *Father, Father!* » The founder, having learned of the accident, consoled her by offering her his own lemonade and then told her: — « *Now go to the choir and recite a De Profundis with open arms.* »

These are minimal episodes, from which however emerges how demanding Father Luigi was even in small details, with the purpose of instilling in the religious women the love for order, discipline, and the spirit of poverty in the care of the community's goods.

But let us return to Portogruaro and observe how that first small group of Sisters of Providence behaved. They will concretely show the measure of heroism imprinted in their souls by the solid formation received from their Father.

Labor and prayer until immolation

« *Mother Giovanna, Countess of Colloredo* — writes Tinti — *, in her capacity as vicar and directress of the hospital, together with other sisters of hers went to settle in the house of pain and charity, with immense consolation of Bishop Casasola and of the city clergy, and to the supreme benefit of the poor sick, who very soon experienced how much*

relief to body and spirit is brought by the maternal care of someone who, in the patient, intends to serve the person Himself of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of the new arrangement of the hospital, the number of patients doubled, so that the few sisters sent were no longer able to bear the enormous fatigue. It was therefore necessary to request others from Father Luigi, as emerges from the following letter, which constitutes a splendid testimony of the zeal of those sisters toward the sick and of their total disregard, out of a spirit of sacrifice, for their own health. »

« *Most esteemed Father Luigi,*

Portogruaro, 11/12 December 1857

Monsignor Bishop has given me the express order to write to you and to beg you warmly, in his name, not to refuse this time to condescend to his wishes. The entire city has nothing but words of praise for the beautiful effect produced so far by the zealous and excellent Sisters of Providence; anyone, among fellow citizens and strangers, who visits the hospital leaves it marveled and moved. Let us thank the Lord for it and give Him praise!

It is however a fact unanimously recognized by everyone that, given the conditions of the premises and the multitude of the sick, the sisters are numerically insufficient. It is the firm will of Monsignor, therefore, that they be increased by at least two units: a lay sister and the other a tertiary or, in the worst-case scenario, two aspirants who can carry out the necessary tasks, both for the service at the door and for errands in the city, for the direction of the laundresses, and for very many other duties; but above all because it is easy to foresee that the current ones cannot, without an evident miracle from God, preserve their health for long...

Today Monsignor Bishop imposed on me to assemble them (call them to chapter), to hold a conference for them, and to impose on them by obedience to moderate themselves regarding the continuous and uninterrupted night vigils, which are never compensated with an hour of rest during the day. The fervor of the sisters and their behavior arouse the admiration of everyone, and the hospital has been truly transformed into a religious house.

By way of information, do not believe that the bishop's request arises from even the slightest complaint or suggestion of the sisters; on the contrary, they have never opened their mouth to ask for anything or to complain about anything, and I had to impose the authority of obedience to obtain that the most fatigued grant themselves the necessary rest. We are therefore awaiting both your coming and the invoked help; the rest we will report to you by word of mouth when you are among us...

Embracing you in the Lord, I am your

Most affectionate Fr. Pietro Serravalle » [6]

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[6] Most pious priest, born in Viscone (Udine) in 1820; he was master of the chamber of A. Casasola bishop of Concordia and spiritual director of the Sisters of Providence in Portogruaro; he then followed Mons. Casasola to the see of Udine, he was director of the Pia Unione delle Figlie di Maria. He passed into the diocese of Gorizia at Viscone al Torre as confessor at the sanctuary of Madonna di Strada, he died in Medea in 1896.

An old coat

« *Father Luigi Scrosoppi* — Tinti continues — *hastened solicitously to Portogruaro with the invoked help of other sisters, since for him even the simple desire of a bishop was worth as much as an absolute command.* »

Since the letter of *don* Serravalle dates back to December 12, the journey of the founder — which took place probably in that very month or, at most, in the first days of the following January — was carried out during the coldest season of the year. Perhaps it was precisely on such an occasion that the episode narrated by Tinti happened:

« *Having arrived once in Portogruaro in the middle of winter, lightly dressed and all trembling from the cold, he did not give signs of complaints. A priest, having noticed the situation, offered him as a gift an old overcoat, which he accepted with joy to identify himself with a poor little one in need of the charity of others.* »

His love for holy poverty was, moreover, proverbial.

« *No one ever succeeded* — Sister Filomena Angeli related — *in making him wear a pair of new shoes. The attempt was repeated several times, but he desired and preferred his slippers patched to infinity, which by then had lost even the shape of footwear. When the shoemaker handed them back to him with new patches, he thanked him as if he received the most precious gift in the world.* » And Tinti adds:

« *In dressing he was extremely poor, so much so that the clever tricks of the sisters to convince him to discard a worn and consumed habit were of no use; if he noticed a secret substitution, he immediately returned the new habit to have back the old patched one, constantly reminding his daughters of the poverty that reigned in the grotto of Bethlehem and in the holy little house of Nazareth.* »

When, without his knowledge, they succeeded in making him have a new habit or coat, he immediately identified, in the nearby seminary of Udine, a poor cleric whom the garments would fit well; and he went back to covering himself in rags, since he truly considered himself "*a rag of the good God*".

He demanded from the sisters an identical spirit of poverty in everything, sometimes with rather resolute gestures.

In a letter of March 12, 1878 — written after the visit to a hospital, probably in the Trentino region — he laments that the sister assigned to the kitchen prepared too much soup and polenta, so much so as to have to throw the leftovers « *even to the animals and the chickens* »; and he admonishes: — « *No, it is necessary to prepare little and do well what is done, well cooked and seasoned with moderation.* »

Once, having gone down into the kitchens of Udine, he saw a large fire lit pointlessly. Without saying a word, he poured a fine bucket of water over it.

Precisely at the hospital of Portogruaro he began to practice poverty in a particular way, which he then maintained for his whole life during visits to the "*nosocomio"* (hospital) managed by his religious women. At that time, usually the poorest and loneliest sick, devoid of a family capable of assisting them, were hospitalized in hospitals. Well, Father

Luigi asked out of charity from his sisters to be able to exchange his own shirt with that of the most wretched patient, or perhaps the handkerchief, if they possessed one. He did not do this only for love of poverty, but because in the poor person he truly saw Jesus and felt he was wearing the garments of his beloved Lord. The saints sincerely believe in the identity between Christ and the poor person. Perhaps we state it too, believing ourselves sincere, but at the proof of facts our words reveal themselves as rhetoric, since an exchange of the kind we would never make. For the saints, instead, it is a deeply felt and lived truth.

Father Luigi wanted his religious women to be intimately convinced of this truth. Therefore, when he arrived in Portogruaro — and later elsewhere — and met a young sister starting out, he would ask her: — « *Have you kissed the feet of the sick? Do you know that they are the feet of Jesus!* » The sister perhaps had washed them, but had not arrived at such a gesture of devotion. Then he would lead her with him into the wards, personally kiss those feet, and then ask the religious woman to do likewise.

That blessed staircase

It is humanly impossible to recognize and serve Jesus in the figure of the poor and the sick without possessing a supernatural spirit, nourished and watched over without ceasing.

For this reason, the founder took care that the sisters combined the most extreme dedication to work with an intense life of prayer, and that they could find in their residence an oasis of peace similar to that of a cloistered convent.

The « *continuous and never interrupted night vigils* », cited by *don* Serravalle in his missive, were in reality vigils of prayer: they served partly to recover the community religious practices that the heavy workload prevented during the day, and partly to carry out the cyclic hours of perpetual adoration that Father Luigi had introduced in the congregation (and which he abolished for the night hours only in the final years of his life). One could state that the Father did not mind seeing the religious women consume themselves like candles in the binomial of labor and prayer. The heroic impulse he had imprinted on his first spiritual daughters, and which was shared by them with generosity, made him almost forget the inevitable wearing out of physical strength. Moreover, in those early times, it was not even thinkable to spare oneself. A greater moderation will become possible only later, with the increase in the number of sisters; and it will render itself necessary when the Father — as he himself will write in a letter — will see the mother house transform into a sort of infirmary for the "*victims of charity*".

How much he cared about creating a sort of small, tranquil convent — even within the frenetic context of the hospital — where the sisters could find recollection again and live the spiritual joy of common life, emerges clearly from an episode that deserves to be narrated in detail. The fact in itself is of modest magnitude, but it provides a precious light on his method of government and on his personality.

On January 12, 1858, Father Luigi wrote to the district commissioner of Portogruaro:

« *As is known to this imperial royal office, from the very moment it was established that the reverend Sisters of Providence should assume the internal direction of this civil hospital, the indispensable and urgent necessity was recognized of building in the establishment a second staircase which, starting from the room on the ground floor marked as no. 8 on the map, should ascend to the second floor.*

This necessity is confirmed by daily experience, so much so that the undersigned director must insist that it be executed immediately. The lack of this staircase causes the sisters excessive fatigue in the service to the sick, obliging to increase their number by a good two units, with an evident damage to the central house; furthermore, the sisters do not enjoy the freedom necessary for the religious practices provided by their institute.

For these reasons, and desiring to put the premises in order, the undersigned offers to personally assume the wooden construction of the staircase in question, asking for a compensation of only 300 lire upon completed work, and requests the necessary authorization. »

The authorization was granted by the provincial delegation of Venice on February 19 and communicated by the *podestà* of Portogruaro, Doctor Fabris, on the 27th, with only two clauses: that the work should not compromise the stability of the building and that it should not exceed the expenditure estimate.

The Father immediately gave start to the construction of that "*blessed staircase*". However, even before it was completed, the district commissioner raised objections to the Municipality and the latter wrote to the Father on April 22, declaring that « *this municipal administration has the displeasure of having to define the work as arbitrary and irregular, ordering its suspension pending further higher decisions.* »

Father Luigi replied on April 30 with a letter that is a crystalline testimony of his character:

« *The note of the 22nd of the current month no. 939 from this honorable municipal administration, concerning the construction of a staircase in the civil hospital, surprised and grieved me* — he writes — . *It surprised me because I am accused of having almost completed the staircase without agreeing with the Municipality and of having built it in a position different from the one agreed upon.*

The municipal ordinance no. 464 of February 27 last clearly excludes any further formality, explicitly stating: "*This much is communicated for your guidance, so that you may proceed with the execution of the work*". *The only conditions set were not to harm the stability of the building and not to exceed the expenditure of 300 lire; conditions that have been strictly respected.*

Moreover, the accusation of having changed position is singular, after the repeated fiduciary agreements and after having clarified the reasons for the change: namely the lesser loss of useful rooms, the greater convenience, and the lower cost. With the original project the expenditure would have been 821.08 lire; with the proposed modification it fell to only 300 lire.

A savings of 521.08 lire was thus obtained, guaranteeing at the same time the maximum possible convenience to the poor Sisters of Providence.

It then grieved me deeply because I, proposing this work with the sole purpose of rendering a useful service, could not imagine undergoing the humiliation of receiving reprimands for alleged arbitrary acts or irregularities, being treated in the same manner as a common contractor of public works.

I therefore pray the honorable Municipality to reconsider my proposals, made and accepted in good faith, and to present these sincere justifications to the competent authorities. »

From the letter emerges the scrupulousness of Father Scrosoppi in respecting hierarchies, but also the firm, almost proud, vindication of the correctness of his own actions. One perceives his aversion to every form of ambiguity and the defense of mutual loyalty, of « *good faith* ». Since the pacts were not being honored, he had taken upon himself the economic burden after having obtained the permits; and if he had at heart the serenity of the sisters, he had not neglected the interest of the hospital. The firmness of the tone finally softened into a gesture of humility and respect toward the institutions.

The dispute was resolved by a decree of the provincial delegation:

« *The internal staircase of the hospital, being by now almost completed, may be completed, all the more so since, according to the technical opinion of the royal engineer and the inspection of the imperial councilor, it turned out to be fully compliant.* »

Behind this small affair was probably hidden a hostility of a secularist stamp toward the religious women, which manifested itself with other similar hindrances in the years to come. Fortunately, guiding the sisters in Portogruaro was Mother Cristina Borghese, who knew how to extricate herself from every difficulty with practical wisdom and a touch of humor.

Sister Cristina, exceptional superior

The founder had placed Sister Giovanna di Colloredo at the head of the first group of sisters in Portogruaro, certainly so that the prestige of her aristocratic name would act as a check on the inevitable and creeping opposition. For the same reason, he would also name her superior for the first few months in the house of Cormons, at its opening in 1866. Colloredo remained always deeply attached to the hospital of Portogruaro, where she piously passed away on October 4, 1871. However, already from 1858, she had been succeeded in the role of superior by Sister Cristina Borghese.

Under her guidance and thanks to the generous dedication of the sisters, the activities proceeded so well that the provincial delegation — as Tinti reports — « *on September 12, 1859, given the importance assumed by the hospital..., declared it a general public civil hospital.* »

Not even she was spared from troubles and adversities. The "*Cenni biografici"* report an amusing example of how she knew how to extricate herself from a difficulty.

« *The management of the hospital had planned some structural modifications in the wards of the sick which Mother Cristina did not like at all. Not wishing however to enter into open conflict, she personally accompanied the director, Mr. Boriero, who together with the mason had to establish which window to wall up or which door to close. Mother*

Cristina let them speak and arrange things for a good while; then, to herself, she pronounced the following monologue, but in such a tone that the director could hear her: Cospettina, I am truly curious to see how it will end: close here, bar there, the hall will become darker and darker. Oh well! ... It will mean that we will use Mr. Boriero as a lamppost.

Faced with that unexpected joke, Mr. Boriero retired in silence to his office, definitively abandoning every project of modification. »

Monsignor Tinti, who had the opportunity to know her and associate with her for many years as canon and vicar general in Portogruaro, writes of her:

« *One admired in this excellent superior the two qualities recommended by Jesus Christ: the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent. Affable in her manners, indulgent in judging, but always firm both in obeying and in demanding obedience, she masterfully managed, with a careful and searching eye, the internal administration of that great family of suffering people, earning the esteem of everyone. Always calm and serene, even in the greatest difficulties, she demonstrated by her example how sweet is the yoke of Christ and light His burden.* »

On February 2, 1887, the sisters — in the presence of the authorities and of many citizens — celebrated her fiftieth anniversary of religious life. On that occasion Mother Cristina, a worthy follower of Father Luigi in her love for poverty, wore her first religious habit, half a century old and made glorious by countless patches and mending's.

In the final years of her life, many people went to visit her because the dialogue with that venerable religious woman instilled an uncommon peace and serenity, enriched by savory memories or witty observations; she, meanwhile, continued to knit or to attend to other small feminine chores, even if her interlocutors were bishops, canons, or high personalities.

In obedience to the superior general Mother Cecilia Piacentini, she left Portogruaro on October 15, 1890. It was not a date chosen by chance: exactly thirty-three years earlier she had arrived from Udine with the first sisters. She returned to the mother house, where she was an example for her sisters with her extraordinary virtues and cheered them with her stories punctuated by her typical « *cospettina* ». There she died serenely in the Lord on September 5, 1891.

Another prophecy of the founder

Father Luigi never traveled much. Being a man inclined to recollection and hiddenness, as he himself deeply desired, a true necessity was required to push him to move from Udine. However, the community of Portogruaro had the privilege of seeing him with a certain frequency; the citizens themselves could admire his virtues, competing with the people of Udine in venerating him as a saint.

The memory of these rapid movements has not come down to us through formal chronicle reports, but rather through edifying or instructive anecdotes that the sisters loved to recount.

Among these, we remember one in particular, in which they wished to discern another prophecy of his.

To narrate it to us is the protagonist herself, Filomena Angeli [7].

We are at the beginning of 1870, when this poor sister became so gravely ill in Portogruaro that the doctor suggested administering the last sacraments to her.

« *Her only desire* — reports an ancient deposition — *, in those extreme moments, was to see Father Luigi for the last time. The superior wrote to the Father telling him of the illness and of the sister's desire, but he too was ill and could not get out of bed.*

Finally, on the thirty-seventh day of illness, the sister had the great consolation of the unexpected visit of the good Father. That day her conditions were more serious than ever, yet the good Father, having approached the bed, said to her: My daughter, I have come to lead you to the house of Udine; for today begin to eat everything they bring you; tomorrow you will get up and then we shall see.

Upon hearing the voice of obedience, the sister promptly replied: With you, Father, I am ready to go wherever you wish, because if I die I am certain that you will recommend my soul to God... The following day she took heart and, to obey, made an effort to get up. However, she fainted and was taken back to bed; fearing the worst, Communion was brought to her as viaticum. The venerated founder, meanwhile, continued to pray and to hope.

Two days later he wished to lead her with him to Udine; the sisters lifted her by weight to transport her into his carriage, where she fainted again. The Father and Sister Orsola Del Medico, who was traveling with them, lavished every possible care on her during the long journey from Portogruaro to Udine. After some time the sister came to and the Father interrupted his unceasing prayer to make her drink a few sips of milk.

Extraordinary thing! Suddenly the Father turned to Sister Orsola [8] — who was a bit weak but certainly not exhausted like Sister Filomena — *and said to her: You, my daughter, prepare yourself to die holily! Then, turning to Sister Filomena: You instead prepare yourself to manage the breeding of silkworms in our country house.*

And so it happened. The good Sister Orsola, after a few months, flew to heaven, while Sister Filomena, after about a month of care, recovered her health; in due time the task of the silkworms was entrusted to her, which she carried out for eight consecutive years. »

Sister Orsola Del Medico died, in fact, on July 3, 1870. Sister Filomena, instead — a tiny woman coming from the Val di Non, who looked as if she could fly away at the first

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[7] Filomena Angeli (Sister Filomena dei ss. Cuori, lay sister) born in Campo Denno (Trento) on August 7, 1835, entered the congr. 18-11-1867. In the autograph register the founder describes her as a « tertiary » and does not list her among the novices or professed sisters. From another register of the congregation it appears that she received the clothing in 1870 and made her profession in 1876. She died in Udine on December 6, 1922.

[8] Del Medico Maria (Sr. Maria Orsola degli Angeli, lay sister), born in Tarcento (Udine) on January 22, 1832, entered the congr. on June 16, 1855, received the clothing on February 2, 1857, professed on January 6, 1861, died in Udine on July 3, 1870.

breath of wind — was for decades the concierge of the house of Udine, remaining perhaps closer to the Father than anyone else and becoming a fervent witness of his sanctity.

In this story, the directness with which the Father warned Sister Orsola of the imminent end might be striking. It seems, however, that he possessed the gift of infusing, together with the grave announcement, a mysterious serenity. Sister Filomena herself narrates:

« *A poor sick woman, ignoring the gravity of her state, continually put off the moment to receive the last sacraments. A sister who assisted her was very worried, since the danger increased and she did not want to grieve the sick woman, to whom it displeased so much to die. She reported therefore the matter to the Father, who went immediately to the sick woman and, with an almost prophetic manner, said to her: Yes, prepare yourself, because soon you will die. This was enough for the poor thing to find peace and prepare herself with immense fervor for the great step toward eternity. Two or three days later she was no more.* »

The word « *death* », when it is pronounced by a saint, loses every harshness and fills itself with celestial light. He says « *death* », but in reality he means « *Jesus* ». The soul that listens, forgetting suddenly every fear, is invaded by a great peace and disposes itself with docility to the ineffable flight toward God.

That famous coat

We have mentioned the coat given to Father Luigi in Portogruaro while he was trembling from the cold. It seems that later on he preferred the cloak to a heavy jacket, to protect himself during the harshest seasons.

But, whether it was a coat or an old cloak, the garment served him excellently to put into action some salutary "*Philippine-style*" prank (that is, in the joyful and humbling style typical of Saint Philip Neri).

Sister Osanna Tisot, when she was still a novice, went one day from Udine to Portogruaro together with the Father and the mother vicar. She was not a vain woman, but — as they said — she possessed a somewhat exuberant « *son qua mi* » character (that is, a person who tends to show off), so much so that later she was nicknamed « *the commander* ». Perhaps during the journey she had given proof of her bold temperament and the Father thought it appropriate to give her a lesson in humility. Having arrived at the sanctuary of the Madonna di Rosa, near San Vito al Tagliamento, a mandatory stop was scheduled, both to let the horses and travelers rest in the nearby inn, and naturally to address a greeting to the Virgin. Father Luigi ordered her to wear his cloak, so as to expose her to the laughter and jests of those present. She did not have to be told twice: dressed up like that, she went quietly to the inn and into the church. Afterwards, the founder questioned her to know what she had felt about that treatment. She replied:

« *I thought that the Father wants to make me celebrate carnival even though it is not.* »

To that same legendary coat, instead, Sister Angela Rodaro [9] attributed a thaumaturgic (miraculous) power, general assistant since 1899. Sister Angela, having arrived one day in Udine coming from Trento, sat in the parlor all curled up because of the severe stomach disorders from which she habitually suffered during journeys. Father Luigi came down, gave her a restorative liqueur and then said to her: « *Wait, Maria Angela, wait until I cover you* »; and he placed his faded cloak on her shoulders. From that moment on, the sister no longer suffered from her usual disorders during her travels.

Sister Angela was a person anything but inclined to whining or fantasy: she distinguished herself, on the contrary, by her cheerfulness and her practical sense. Yet, she firmly believed in that healing: an irrefutable proof of her faith in the sanctity of the venerated father founder.

We cannot conclude this chapter without mentioning the humble Sister Maria Agnese Candetti [10], who died in 1878 at the hospital of Portogruaro as a victim of charity, during one of the then-recurring epidemics. Tinti wrote in 1897 that the memory of her was still very vivid, alongside that of Sister Giovanna Francesca Colloredo, « *both having died* — he stated — *on the breach (that is, remaining at their post until the last) in that civic hospital.* »

Portogruaro (VE). Civil hospital where the Sisters of Providence entered in 1857.
Ancient church of S. Giovanni Evangelista annexed to the civil hospital. In it some of the first Sisters of Providence emitted their religious vows after the approval of the Holy See.

[9] Rodaro Domenica (Sr. Maria Angela del ss. Redentore) born in Avasinis (Udine) on October 3, 1833, entered the congr. on January 25, 1858, received the clothing on August 15, 1859, professed on September 24, 1862, died in Cormons on May 29, 1911.

[10] Candetti Maria, (Sr. Maria Agnese del Cuore di Maria) born in Udine on February 16, 1821, entered the congr. on January 30, 1858, received the clothing on March 19, 1859, professed on August 2, 1862, died in Portogruaro (Venice) on June 6, 1878. For notes on her see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 198-201.

Chapter 4

THE FOUNDER WRITES THE CONSTITUTIONS AND THE RULES OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE (1858-1862)

The war of independence of 1859

The Sisters of Providence had barely settled in the hospital of Portogruaro when, on April 26, 1859, the Second War for Italian Independence broke out. On this occasion, alongside the *Piemontese* army — among whose soldiers numerous Venetian and Friulian volunteers fought — an imposing French contingent guided by Mac Mahon, under the direct command of Emperor Napoleon III, fought against Austria.

With the beginning of the conflict, Father Luigi had no other objective than that of putting holy Christian charity into practice.

« *The same zeal* — writes Tinti — *that the venerable founder had demonstrated with his sisters for the poor wounded during the uprisings of 1848, was also shown by him in 1859, when the Austrian soldiers, wounded in the battle of Custoza, were in large part transferred to Udine, a city situated on the border. Even in that circumstance his sisters hastened with the same solicitousness to provide their admirable assistance in the military hospitals, demonstrating once again how much benefit is brought to the health of the soul and the body by the presence of the sister at the bed of the sick, especially if it is a matter of a suffering soldier.* »

The war concluded, as is known, with the armistice of Villafranca of July 11, agreed upon by Napoleon III with the Austrians without the knowledge of the *Piemontese*. On the basis of this agreement, only Lombardy was annexed to the Kingdom of Sardinia, while the Veneto region remained under Austrian dominion. In that context, the ideal, already dear to the Neo-Guelphs, of a federation of Italian states presided over by the Pope, in which the Emperor of Austria was also to participate in his capacity as sovereign of the Veneto region, was proposed again.

However, events rapidly took a different direction: in 1859 the duchies of Parma and Modena, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Papal Legations, and Romagna were annexed to *Piemonte*. In the course of 1860, the Kingdom of the Two *Sicilies*, overwhelmed by the Garibaldian expedition of the Thousand, and Umbria and the Marche, invaded by *Piemontese* troops, suffered the same fate. At the end of the year Italy was no longer only a « *geographical expression* », but a true political unity. To this imposing and inevitable unification movement only the pontifical dominion — reduced to Lazio alone — and the Veneto region, still subject to Austria, by now resisted. On March 17, 1861, the Parliament assembled in Turin solemnly proclaimed the birth of the Kingdom of Italy under the Savoy dynasty; a few days later, Camillo Cavour declared it necessary and indispensable for Rome to become the capital of the new State.

The so-called « *Roman question* » thus emerged into the foreground, which will culminate with the occupation of Rome on September 20, 1870, and will find a definitive solution only with the Lateran Pacts of February 11, 1929. Seventy years of religious laceration opened between the sons of the same homeland, a period of hardship and humiliation for Italian Catholics.

The tricolor cockade worn on his breast by Father Luigi in 1848 testified in an eloquent way to his pure and fervent patriotism. But how will he behave now, in the face of this complex question?

Father Luigi indefectibly faithful to the Pope

Is it perhaps necessary to reiterate that the inner impulse of the Christian, and above all of the saint, cannot be exhausted exclusively in the historical events in which he finds himself living? The priority concern for the Kingdom of God inspires in him a particular detachment — and we would almost like to say a sense of « *humor* » — toward earthly kingdoms, subject to changing political institutions and continuously moving geographical borders. The aspiration toward the Kingdom of Heaven confers upon his journey in this world the irrepressible feeling of the exile, who knows he does not possess a stable homeland here below, but seeks a future and eternal one. In simpler terms, the worship due to God, the freedom of religion and of the Church, and the spiritual good of souls find in his spirit a more immediate and powerful resonance than any political, economic, or social question. While remaining deeply embedded in his own time, it is in the light of such principles and spiritual impulses that his feelings are formed and his choices are made. This, at least, was the thought of our Father Luigi.

The situation that emerged in the years 1859-61 placed the Venetian clergy before a double perspective: one of a limited and practical character, the other which touched upon an extremely grave and delicate problem.

The first perspective concerned the question of whether it was « *opportune* » for the Catholic Veneto to adhere to the movements of annexation to Piedmont and the Savoy State, given the concrete political framework of the moment. For many, the answer could only be negative.

On October 3, 1859, the Archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Trevisanato, sent a « *most confidential* » circular to the clergy, in which he stated:

« *I am reassured by the higher authorities that the opposing faction, which seeks by every means to fuel also in the Venetian provinces the desire for annexation to Piedmont, is attempting to bring the clergy to its side as well, knowing how influential it is thanks to direct contact with the people... I deem it appropriate to warn individual clergy of this plot with the utmost confidentiality... Let us meanwhile continue to pray to God unanimously so that, in His mercy, He may guide and protect His holy Church, sustain and comfort the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX, and restore to all of us days of peace and serenity.* »

The reason for refusing annexation to Piedmont was, therefore, of a purely religious nature. The laws of ecclesiastical policy (the Siccardi Laws), the exile and arrest of

several bishops — in 1860 even Cardinal De Angelis, Archbishop of Fermo and future president of the First Vatican Council, was imprisoned —, together with the declared hostility toward the Church or the irreligion of some Risorgimento currents, could certainly not attract the sympathies of the clergy.

Austria, in this context, played a marginal role. Half a century of Austrian government had not created an unconditional feeling of loyalty in the Veneto: the uprisings of 1848 had been the proof of it. On the contrary, many behaviors of that government had rendered it rather unwelcome. The accusation of being "*austriacanti*" (pro-Austrian) was directed at some almost as a reaction to the reckless Italian religious policy, favored also by Austria's ability to progressively propose itself as a bulwark of religion and the Church.

However, over Father Luigi — as over the large majority of the clergy — the second perspective prevailed: that is, the project of a complete annexation of the Papal States to the new Kingdom. The Pope had launched an excommunication against anyone who invaded the territories of Saint Peter and claimed his own territorial sovereignty as a guarantee of independence in the exercise of his supreme magisterium. For Father Scrosoppi this was sufficient: therefore, he remained immovably aligned with the Pontiff.

He remained faithful to the Pope with an unshakeable faith in the Vicar of Christ. He used to define him as « *the mouth of God* » and his emotion in speaking of him was such that — as witnesses report — « *he seemed to dance* ». He made the special prayer for the Pope composed by Pius VII be recited every day and appeared visibly happy every time he could recount a triumph or a consolation received by the Supreme Pontiff.

He had a filial tenderness for Pius IX, considering him in life as a martyr and venerating him after death as a saint, resorting personally and inviting others to resort to his intercession.

On March 19, 1860, the Archbishop of Udine issued « *a moving archiepiscopal encyclical* — write the acts of the chapter [1] —, *with which His Most Reverend Excellency excites all the clergy to generously offer the Peter's Pence to help the Holy Father placed by the revolution in the gravest constraints.* » For this purpose, the Confraternity of Saint Peter the Apostle was established, which was to spread to every parish. Among the donors of Udine, two exemplary priests deserve to be remembered: Father Pietro Benedetti and Father Luigi Fabris [2], who each offered their own watch!

Father Luigi was second to none in this devotion toward the common Father. In addition to participating in public collections to set a good example, he found the way — despite the pressing necessities of his charitable works — to subscribe to the pontifical public debt for the sum, considerable at the time, of 1500 lire.

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[1] Acts of the chapter, vol. X (1839-1858), c. 16 (A.C.U.).

[2] From Udine (1812-1879), he carried out his activity in the seminary as a professor of grammar and humanities, and as prefect of studies until his death. After 1866, he promoted the Catholic revival in Friuli by founding La Madonna delle Grazie, the first small newspaper of Friulian Catholics, initiating the Catholic Action movement, of which he was the first assistant. Straightforward in his thought: for the freedom of the Church against Josephinism, with the Pope and the Church in every field. He was in his time one of the most cultured Friulian priests with a vast literary production. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Sacerdoti distinti..., pp. 36-38).

Sister Gioacchina Gremese related of him:

« *His respect and his love for the Church and for the Holy Father were immense. He suffered and wept when the Church was persecuted, intensifying prayers and penances. He asked the sisters and the young girls to do the same. These — and Gremese was among them — went so far as to deprive themselves even of the piece of bread of the afternoon snack in order to save and send a few more coins as an oblation to the Holy Father.* »

Tinti writes furthermore:

« *The sensitive heart of the father founder, so attentive to every misfortune of the neighbor, was equally struck by the travails of the Catholic Church and its visible head. The open persecution against religious congregations, the spoliation of the temporal dominion of the Pope and of ecclesiastical property, the triumph of freemasonry taking control of the press, the school, and social institutions, were deep wounds for the soul of Father Luigi. For the Roman Pontiff he would have given his life, if only to sweeten the bitterness caused by his enemies.*

Father Luigi suffered, did penance, and offered himself as a victim of reparation for the sad events that struck the Church in Italy between 1859 and 1870. He participated so deeply in the ecclesial mourning that, from that moment on, he forbade the orphan girls of his institute the customary carnival celebrations, as he considered it unacceptable for the children of the Church to celebrate while their head suffered in tribulation.

For this reason, he ordered special prayers, frequent communions, and fervent visits to the Most Holy Sacrament from the sisters and the girls; moreover, he personally or through the congregation sent his generous economic contribution accompanied by affectionate letters to the illustrious prisoner of the Vatican. »

Anyone who is not able to understand from within the drama experienced by the Catholics and the Venetian clergy of that time — called to adhere to a movement that seemed to want to strike the Church and the independence of the Pope to death — might formulate superficial or presumptuous judgments. However, believers, even in a context very different today, can only remain moved. It was not a political mania that moved Father Scrosoppi and the humble priests of the time, but rather a sacred fervor of fidelity to the Papacy. It is easy to respect the Pope when he enjoys a universal prestige, but to love him and follow him in the darkest hours is the true proving ground for every Catholic. And Father Luigi would have done it — as Tinti recalls — until the extreme sacrifice.

Why Father Scrosoppi set about writing the constitutions and the rules

The profound love toward the Pope must have played a fundamental role in pushing Father Luigi to draft the constitutions and the rules for the congregation of the Sisters of Providence. He ardently desired the blessing and approval of the successor of Peter so that, as for Saint Paul, his work would not be in vain. In an era in which many were moving away from the Church or betraying their faith, he wanted his spiritual daughters to be bound by an indissoluble bond to the Roman See.

Naturally, the fact that the congregation was growing also influenced this: with the opening of the house of Portogruaro, it was leaving the boundaries of the archdiocese of Udine, assuming an inter-diocesan character of which, however, Father Luigi seemed almost to forget in the drafting of the documents.

It was not the number of sisters that dictated this necessity — they were then barely some thirty among choir sisters, lay sisters, tertiaries, and novices — but rather their inner progress.

Those women, initially a heterogeneous group of oblates of charity, had transformed into a true religious group.

Until that moment, the spiritual life of the group had been guided by three main documents:

1. The regulation for the House of the Abandoned (1840), containing the first norms for the teachers.
2. The rules for the teachers (1848), which Abbot Pirona had judged too close to the monastic style.
3. The « *Convocato a Capitolo* » (December 23, 1848), which had sanctioned the communion of goods.

However, these norms were no longer sufficient to contain the spiritual flame radiated by the founder.

Thus, after having attended to the restoration of the Oratorian congregation between 1854 and 1856, Father Luigi dedicated himself from 1857 to the "*pouring*" of all this spiritual material into the code of the constitutions and, most importantly, into the golden mold of the rules. At the sunset of 1861, the work was concluded.

Tinti reports to us in a concise way how they arrived at the definitive drafting of the rules, putting well into relief that the greatest impulse was dictated by the desire to obtain the approval of the Pontiff.

The collaborators and the author of the rules

« *Father Luigi* — writes Tinti — *ardently desired that the congregation of the Sisters of Providence receive definitive approval from the Roman Pontiff. For this reason, he dedicated himself to the drafting of the constitutions and rules which, according to his judgment, could best respond to the development of his charitable work. To get help in this undertaking, he called the cultured priest Francesco Fantoni, who had been an esteemed teacher in the seminary and who then dedicated his whole life to preaching and to the delicate task of spiritual director of the ladies Dimesse and of other pious institutes...*

Scrosoppi and Fantoni, animated by the same desire to sanctify themselves through service to the neighbor, remained always bound by a deep fraternal friendship, which brought to both great spiritual benefits.

It might seem an easy task to write constitutions and rules for a congregation, if one stops to look only at the small size of the book that contains them or if one erroneously believes that it is men who must serve the laws, and not vice versa.

The two wise priests spared no labors: they initially undertook numerous journeys to visit and study institutes similar to the congregation of Providence; they obtained the legislative texts of other religious families and finally, consulting with the mother superior (Sister Serafina Strazzolini), the vicar, and the mistress of novices (Sister Teresa Fabris), they patiently drafted the norms suited to the purpose of the institute. Only God, as an elderly sister testifies, knows how many labors, privations, sufferings, humiliations, prayers, and constant penances this work cost our venerated founder! »

We do not have precise details about the « *many journeys* » mentioned by Tinti, but we can certainly assume that Father Luigi, with his proverbial prudence, informed himself extensively and treasured the experience and advice of others.

However, the rules — and in a particular way these — gushed directly from his heart. In this regard, a letter that he wrote many years later, on October 21, 1881, to a superior is extremely revealing:

« *...My only desire is to see them all precise in observing the holy rules. Before writing them I prayed at length to the Madonna (the Mamma), Saint Joseph, and Saint Cajetan so that they would enlighten me to draft them well. I desired that their observance would lead to a continuous practice of the virtues, accumulating merits for eternity and making the souls of the sisters ever dearer to Jesus, their divine spouse. Behold the reason why I insist so much on this point, convinced that it lies close to your heart as well. May they be like many little angels, and they will certainly be so if they practice these holy rules exactly.* »

Considering the profound humility that characterized the founder, one can only remain surprised by the importance and efficacy that he attributed to the rules composed by his own hand: between the lines clearly emerges his conviction of having been assisted by Heaven during the drafting and of having received almost a divine guarantee on their capacity to sanctify whomever observes them.

Historical background of the constitutions and the rules

On February 15, 1861, the constitutions and rules were sent to the Roman Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, accompanied by letters from the Archbishop of Udine, Mons. Trevisanato, and the Bishop of Concordia, Mons. Casasola.

A few days before, on February 2, the Sisters of Providence had sent one hundred and twenty gold lire to the Pope with the following address:

« *Most Blessed Father,*

The poor Sisters of Providence in Udine, your most devoted and most loving daughters, grieving and afflicted to see you immersed amidst so many most bitter tribulations and anxieties, do not cease day and night to warmly supplicate the Sacred Heart of Jesus, their divine spouse, to wish to deliver you from this lamentable state with the longed-for

triumph of your beloved Spouse! Ah! Holy Father, bless the vows of these daughters of yours, and the sad days will change into days of gladness. Accept, Holy Father, the oblation that these daughters of yours offer you and deign to impart to their congregation the apostolic benediction, so that it may best succeed to the greater glory of God and the sanctification of souls. »

The pontifical brief of thanksgiving and blessing dates back to the following March 6.

Father Luigi and his brother Father Giovanni Battista sent their own oblation separately, accompanied by « *most respectful letters* », in which allusion must have been made to the charitable works, since the Pope replied on April 13, 1861:

« *We render you deserved thanks, O beloved sons, praying supplicants to God, the author of all goods, so that He may lavish upon you and your institutions every spiritual and temporal prosperity.* »

To secure a prompt approval, Fr. Scrosoppi counted heavily on the support of Card. Fabio Asquini [3], a native of Fagagna in Friuli, who was then prefect of the Congregation of Rites; and, though he did not personally go to Rome, he maintained a correspondence with Mons. Rizzari, who at the beginning of February 1862 assured him that the matter would be successfully concluded within a few days. The waiting became agonizing.

On March 23, Fr. Luigi wrote to Mons. Jacopo Tomadini, canon of Cividale, who at that time was in the capital of Christendom:

« *Most esteemed Don Giacomo and dearest friend,*

to wait and not to come is a thing to die of. Precisely in this position do I find myself. Every day seems a month to me. I do not doubt your great interest and your great promptness to see the end of the affair of our sisters, wherefore I should not write in this regard. »

But still he wrote to him, begging him to expedite matters so that the pontifical approval would arrive before Easter, which that year fell on April 20. Indeed, something new had occurred: the Archbishop of Udine, Mons. Trevisanato, had been preconized Patriarch of Venice.

« *Since our Archbishop* — Father Luigi stated — *immediately after the holy feasts of Easter must leave our archdiocese to go there to assist at the canonization of the holy Japanese martyrs and then pass to his residence as Patriarch of Venice, if before the holy feasts of Easter the approved constitutions do not arrive, it will not be possible to carry out the so much longed-for function for the blessing of the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon this new religious congregation with the solemn renewal of vows by means of the Most Ill. and Rev. Mons. Archbishop, to whom this congregation of spouses of the divine Lamb lies so close to heart. These and other reasons try to put forward to that Most Ill. and Rev. Mons. Rizzari to move him to finish the affair before Easter.* »

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[3] Born in Fagagna in 1802, died in Rome in 1878. Vice-delegate to Ferrara, delegate to Ancona, nuncio to Naples, secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, titular patriarch of Tarsus, he was created cardinal in 1845. He obtained from Gregory XVI the restoration of the archdiocese of Udine (bull of 14-3-1847); he contributed to the recognition of the cult of Blessed Elena Valentinis. (Cf. G. BIASUTTI, Ibid., pp. 5-6).

The founder did not know it, but everything had already been done. On February 7, 1862, His Holiness Pius IX had caused the so-called « *decree of praise* » to be issued, deferring however the approval of the constitutions « *to a more opportune time* ». And on March 22, the Roman Congregation had sent the decree to the Archbishop of Udine, with this postscript:

« *The same Holiness of His furthermore wished that some observations made on the constitutions of the said institute be communicated to you, which, as they are, cannot be approved: which observations are contained in the enclosed sheets, so that Your Lordship may inform the sisters of them for the opportune amendments.* »

Father Luigi, with immediate docility, made the requested corrections post-haste, and sent the amended constitutions back to Rome on April 6, in the naive hope that they would be just as swiftly approved. However, the packet never arrived in Rome, perhaps an innocent victim of the political confusion of the time.

In Udine, the loss became known almost seven years later; and Mons. Casasola, having become its archbishop, sent another copy to the Sacred Congregation on March 15, 1869, urging the approval of the corrected constitutions with an amply laudatory letter dated October 25 of the same year, and a similar letter had been sent by the Bishop of Concordia. On September 22, 1871, Pius IX « *approved and confirmed, according to the form of the sacred canons and the apostolic constitutions, the mentioned pious institute..., deferring to a more opportune time the approval of the constitutions, regarding which in the meantime he prescribed some observations* »; and on September 30, the Sacred Congregation sent this second decree along with thirteen « *observations* » for further amendments.

After that, the founder made no further insistence to see those blessed constitutions approved. He docilely obeyed the will of the Holy See which required « *a long experiment* » and, though he may perhaps have been sorry for it, he certainly recognized the wisdom of such a request.

Only more than six years after his death, under the government of the superior general Mother Cecilia Piacentini, a much broader text of the constitutions and a shorter one of the rules were finally approved by Leo XIII on August 28, 1891, with a decree of the Congregation dated the following September 23.

The emission of vows of August 7, 1862

Although the decree of praise had arrived in Udine toward the end of March 1862, the ceremony initially planned for Easter did not take place. In all probability, Father Luigi preferred to await the approval of the new text of the constitutions, sent back to Rome the previous April 6.

Sometime later, despite not yet having news of the new text, the founder was encouraged to proceed anyway with the solemn function. On that circumstance — perhaps during an audience granted to Monsignor Trevisanato — Pius IX is said to have pronounced the fateful words: « *Crescat pusillus grex* », formulating the wish that the

small core of the congregation might grow and expand. Of this pontifical exhortation Monsignor Casasola makes mention in a letter of October 25, 1869.

We believe that to this wish of the Pope is connected the second sending of the Peter's Pence by the sisters; a gesture of gratitude to which the Pontiff replied with a brief of thanksgiving dated June 25. « *Faithful to your institution and to the vocation to which you have been called* — it is read therein —, *with the study and the practice of all the virtues render God propitious and merciful toward those who find themselves in tribulation.* »

By now, therefore, one could proceed with a secure step, strong in the name and the blessing of the Pope.

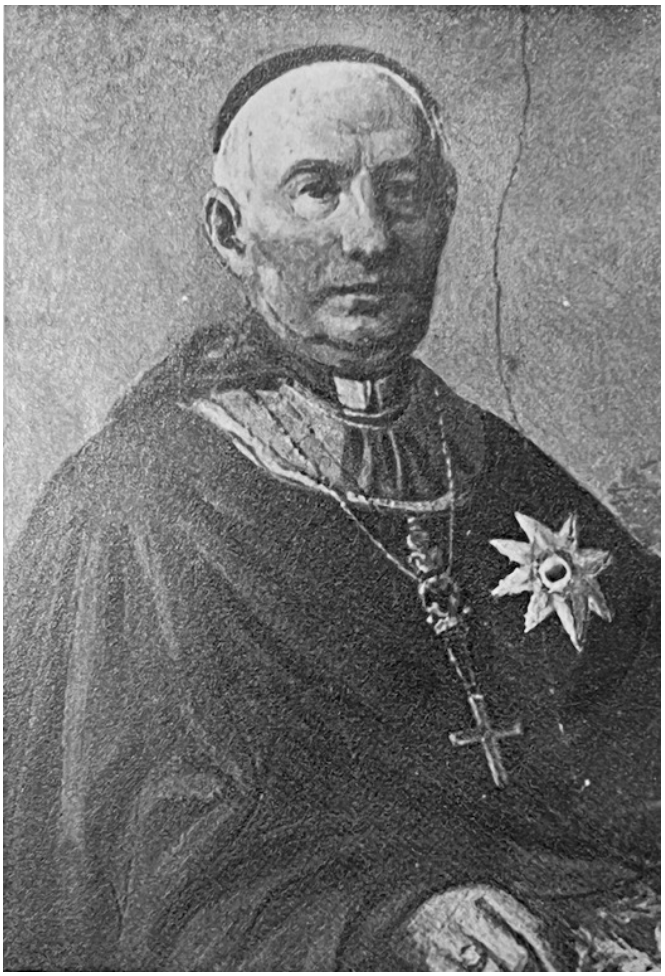
« *Therefore* — writes Tinti — *the meritorious founder had his daughters instructed with much care regarding the duties of religious women, the importance of the profession of the three simple vows, and the diligent observance of the new rules. Afterwards, he declared to all the sisters that they were in absolute freedom to leave the congregation should they not feel ready for the new arrangement. Marvelous to say! Although they had been left free to decide autonomously (in manu consilii sui), the sisters not only all accepted with enthusiasm, but exulted from their hearts seeing finally realized their own ardent desires, happy to emit publicly those holy vows which already previously they renewed in private. After having celebrated with fervor the spiritual exercises according to the method of Saint Ignatius, on August 7, 1862, feast of their celestial patron Saint Cajetan, twenty sisters emitted the profession of the three vows in their graceful little church, receiving the sacred bridal ring from Monsignor Giuseppe Trevisanato, Archbishop of Udine.*

It was a feast of paradise for the entire community: immense was the joy of the new professed sisters with the wreath of brides on their heads, equally great the holy envy that the novices felt! The tender Father Luigi shed tears of joy, and the surviving sisters still remember with deep emotion that memorable day. »

Monsignor Trevisanato, in fact, was still in Udine; he would make his entry into the patriarchate of Venice only a month later, on September 8.

The founder himself left written that at the moving rite was « *present his most illustrious and most reverend excellency Monsignor Giuseppe Luigi Trevisanato, Patriarch of Venice, who gracefully accepted to preside over this solemn profession at the request of the most illustrious and most reverend Monsignor Niccolò Frangipane, vicar capitular of the archdiocese of Udine.* »

« *An equally sweet spectacle* — Tinti continues — *was repeated on September 24 of the same year in the church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Portogruaro, where Bishop Casasola received the profession of the three simple vows from five sisters of that civic nosocomium. It was precisely on the occasion of this profession that the congregation of the sisters, under the patronage of Saint Cajetan, adopted its own ceremonial for the clothing and the profession, establishing furthermore to regularly continue the psalmody in choir with the office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.* »



Cardinal Trevisanato, Patriarch of Venice. Still Archbishop of Udine, he received into his hands the first religious profession of the Sisters of Providence in 1862

In the meantime, on August 10, the chapter had elected as superior general Mother Teresa Fabris, who for four years also maintained the office of superior of the house of Udine. Mother Serafina Strazzolini was named vicar general, while Sister Luigia Dario became mistress of novices; in Portogruaro, Sister Cristina Borghese was confirmed in the role of superior.

From this moment the congregation had its first protector in Cardinal Fabio Asquini who, during a brief visit to his native Friuli, visited the house of Udine, carrying back a profound esteem and veneration for Father Luigi and for his religious women.

General observations on the constitutions and the rules drafted by Father Scrosoppi

After the conclusion of the diocesan process aimed at the beatification of Father Luigi, the Congregation of Rites instructed two theological censors to examine his writings.

Among these documents was a note in which the first of the censors identified « *not slight inaccuracies* — these are his exact words — *regarding the definition of rules and constitutions of institutes and religious orders. In this text it is asserted* — continues the censor — *that the constitutions would represent* "*the fundamental laws of the order*" *and that the rules* "*are but the explanation of the constitutions*"*, when in reality the exact*

opposite is true! We do not know however — he concludes — *whether these theoretical notes regarding the constitutions are the work of the one or the other of the two co-founders* » [(4)].

The Roman censor had before his eyes the typewritten copy of those notes. However, the analysis of the handwriting of the original text reveals that it belongs neither to Father Carlo — deceased by then for several years — nor to Father Luigi. It is evident that the author was a figure who remained unknown, to whom Father Luigi had turned to obtain clarifications and advice around 1858, precisely before beginning the work of drafting.

In any case, the founder established between the constitutions and the rules this precise distinction: the former had the task of outlining the essential traits and organizational structure of the congregation; the latter, on the contrary, were to safeguard its profound spirit and suggest, consequently, the lifestyle, the virtues, and the ascetic tools (that is, the practices of spiritual perfection) from which the typical spiritual profile of the Sisters of Providence would emerge.

It is entirely natural that Father Luigi dedicated himself principally to the rules, into which he transferred all of his own spiritual intensity. Regarding these, the second theological censor expressed a judgment that could not be more eulogistic:

« *They represent an example to be faithfully taken up for the creation of other possible institutes, since within them he neglected nothing, not even the most minimal details, of everything that can be necessary for the spiritual growth and formation of a religious woman* » [(5)].

It is important to note that this evaluation was expressed over seventy years after the drafting carried out by Father Luigi.

The content of the rules remained substantially identical even in the small volume published in 1892, although the expressive form and the subdivision of the chapters had been sensibly modified. Once the citations of the Sacred Scriptures in the Latin language, on which Father Luigi had leaned with great conviction, were eliminated, and certain passages of an exhortatory nature were removed, the rules gained in fluidity and in precision from the point of view of canon law and of external form; however, this occurred not without losing, in our opinion, a little of that spiritual fragrance of the origins.

As far as the constitutions are concerned, the Father had condensed them into nine brief chapters, which then became twenty-eight in the version definitively approved in 1891. That synthetic schema conceived by the Founder transformed into a well-structured juridical code, which clearly shows the intervention of his successor, Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, an expert in canon law and future bishop of Vicenza.

In recent times, the constitutions have been subjected to a profound reform. However, the rules of 1862 — in a particular way as far as their demands for spiritual commitment

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4 Positio super scriptis, p. 4, in Positio..., Roma 1975.

5 Ibid., p. 13.

are concerned — should maintain an eternal value, acting as a bulwark to safeguard with fidelity the originality of the religious ideal proposed by the founder.

If the rules received from the very beginning an extremely positive judgment, being defined as "*golden*", toward the constitutions the Congregation of Regulars put forward instead sixteen proposals for modification in 1862 and another thirteen in 1871.

It is not our intention to report them here in an analytical way, since this volume does not represent the suited place for a comparative examination so detailed.

It is however indispensable to treat some of these points. Through the analysis of a topic that might appear, on the surface, dry and boring, we shall see fragments of intense light shine, capable of showing us a Father Luigi in the role of precursor and innovator in the vision of consecrated life.

The Roman amendments to the constitutions of Father Luigi

We mention briefly two corrections of a strictly juridical nature.

In his original constitutions, Father Luigi had continued to consider the Archbishop of Udine as the president and father of his own religious family. The Roman congregation rightly opposed this approach, since the sisters had to depend on the bishop under whose jurisdiction the individual houses were located; it was granted only that the general chapter be presided over by the bishop of the place where it would meet, but with the formal function of apostolic delegate.

Afterwards, the congregation had the figure of the priest director removed from the governing bodies, a role which up to that moment was held by the founder himself. Father Luigi, in his profound humility, did not feel resentment at all; on the contrary, from that moment on he was glad to grant full freedom of action to the superior general and her councilors, that is — as it is commonly said — to « pass the keys » (yield the management and command). In this admirable gesture of stripping himself of the authority of founder, to make room for an extremely discreet vigilance as a stepped-back father, he applied to himself the words of Saint John the Baptist:

« *She must increase and I instead must decrease.* »

In both the cited cases, Father Luigi, while understanding the new developments of his own work, had simply adhered to the original organization of the House of the Abandoned, whose pillars were precisely the bishop of Udine as president and the priest director.

Other amendments proposed by the Roman congregation appeared to him, however, of greater importance.

He had conceived integral charity as the ultimate purpose of his congregation, both because charity appeared to him as a duty by its nature unlimited, and because he absolutely did not want the sisters to remain shut in the convent should any calamity occur. And thus he had operated during the revolution of 1848, the cholera epidemic of 1855, and the war of 1859. For this reason, the constitutions bound the sisters to offer

their services « *in any work of charity compatible with the condition of religious women and commanded by circumstances, always however at the judgment of their own ordinary.* » Rome requested instead that the purpose and field of action be delimited with precision, but Father Luigi did not feel up to making such restrictions. Only in the definitive text of 1890 will this passage be removed.

The founder was convinced that the Lord could call anyone, at any moment, to serve Him in the figure of the poor and the suffering. For this reason he had extended to thirty-five years the maximum age limit for admission among the sisters: this because he believed that, past that age, candidates would more easily be in need of assistance rather than having the capacity to offer it. Furthermore, he did not exclude widows. However, the Roman amendments reduced the limit to twenty-eight years and of widows no mention was made any longer.

Another question lay particularly close to the heart of Father Luigi. Fully aware of the sublimity of the vocation, he would have given his life so that every religious woman of his would remain faithful until death in total dedication to the divine Spouse. He was, however, equally aware of the fragility and mutability of the human soul. For an infinity of reasons, even a holy and initially sincere purpose could later weaken or vanish altogether. Well, according to him there was no cause for scandal; nor should those dramas linked to forced or betrayed vocations absolutely be created. With a vision decidedly ahead of his times, Father Scrosoppi desired that the « service of charity » remain always a joyful offering and never transform into an unbearable yoke. The young woman or lady was to remain free to withdraw with ease, without bureaucratic delays and without feelings of guilt, should she for any reason no longer feel capable of continuing or not be deemed suitable. She would leave serenely, happy to have given some years of her life entirely to God and to the poor. For this reason he had written: « *the vows are emitted for an indefinite time.* » With the amendments, instead, a duration of three years was established for the vows of the choir sisters and of one year for those of the lay sisters.

In the original 1861 text, the Father had divided the sisters into three categories: choir sisters, lay sisters, and tertiaries. The Sacred Congregation, in the corrections requested on March 22 of that year, had observed:

« *It will be necessary to reflect seriously on whether it is opportune to admit tertiaries, so that they form almost a distinct grade from the lay sisters.* »

At that time, the only tertiary was Domenica Batigello, whom Father Luigi called the « *visible providence* ». The Father reflected on the question and deemed it appropriate to maintain them, changing only their name.

« *To the choir and lay sisters* — he wrote in the corrected text — *let the house-chore sisters (sorelle faccendiere) be added, who, besides the humblest internal offices of the houses, shall also carry out external duties, such as those of purchasing agents, questors for alms-seeking, and other modest services.* »

He was convinced that even some poor creatures, perhaps considered « *scraps or rags* » (people on the margins of society) in the eyes of the world and apparently unsuited for

community life, could become equally precious servants of the Lord. On the other hand, Father Luigi desired that the sisters, although not bound to strict traditional enclosure, have the least possible contact with the external world; in this context, precisely those collaborators became almost indispensable. We know, moreover, that precisely among these elements the congregation saw splendid examples of spiritual life. Father Luigi, while wishing to obey the supreme authority of the Church, sought to protect those poor daughters to whom he did not have the heart to say: « *You are no longer part of the community!* » However, in the constitutions of 1891, no mention will be made of these figures anymore.

Another singular aspect that aroused surprise was the article in which the Father recognized the right of the lay sisters to participate in the council with the same rights as the choir sisters. « *It is an absolute novelty* — the Sacred Congregation pointed out — *that even a simple lay sister be admitted to the general council.* » Evidently, the Father did not like overly marked distinctions among the religious women. What did it matter if the lay sisters were illiterate or poorly educated? Love for God is not measured by the ability to read, write, or count. He was certainly inspired by the evangelical saying according to which the humble and the ignorant would conquer the kingdom of God. He himself paternally encouraged some of these simple souls to study and closely followed their progress — as happened with Sister Filomena Suoch [6]. Afterwards, he promoted them from the grade of lay sisters to that of choir sisters. In this attitude one cannot but admire his extraordinary goodness toward the humblest religious women and his profoundly modern spirit.

Regarding the delicate question of the sacraments as well, the founder manifested original ideas that make him a precursor of the practice of frequent communion. In the constitutions he had established:

« *They shall approach communion on all Sundays and holy days of obligation, as well as on the feasts of our Lord and of the Most Holy Virgin even if not of obligation, on all Wednesdays and Fridays of the year, on the day of their patron saints, and on the anniversaries fixed by the congregation. Should a sister wish to receive communion outside the established days, out of a necessity or for particular devotion, she must receive permission from the superior or from the local vicar.* »

The Sacred Congregation observed in this regard:

« *It is required that the sisters receive communion three times a week, besides the festivities. This being considered too burdensome for the sisters, it is established that communion must take place at most twice a week, leaving to their will and to the counsel of the confessor the possibility of a more frequent practice.* »

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[6] Suoch Marianna (Sr. Filomena di S. Luigi) born in S. Pietro al Natisone (Udine) on 19-3-1834 (or 7-3-1836), entered the congregation on 17-5-1856, received the habit on 15-8-1859, made her profession on 7-8-1862 and died in Udine on 13-5-1901. Thus the Founder wrote to her on 20-1-1882: « Your sweet little letters have been very dear to me, and I was consoled to find that you have greatly improved your character, and that your writings too express your ideas well. » (L. TINTI, o.c., p. 352, let. 24). For biographical notes on her, see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 226-276.

Father Scrosoppi obeyed. And following the decree of 1871, the habit of receiving communion on Thursdays and Sundays was introduced among the sisters. On Wednesday evenings, the sisters used to sing a melody in Friulian of which we preserve the incipit: « *Joibe l'è il dì d'amor — Thursday is the day of love* ».

However, the Father, seconding the requests of the sisters, went often to his friend and vicar general, Monsignor Someda, to ask permission to add some days. And, according to tradition, he returned home filled with joy to announce the news: « *Tomorrow we shall have holy communion!* » In Father Luigi there was truly no trace of that Jansenist mentality (that is, a rigorist doctrine that saw God as a severe judge and made it difficult to approach the sacraments) [7].

In the uncorrected version of the constitutions, he forbade the sisters from confessing more than once a week. The Sacred Congregation removed this prohibition and inserted an article on the necessity of an extraordinary confessor. In this detail too it is easy to note how the Father sought to prevent the development of consciences tormented by anxiety or by excessive scruples, and that exacerbated need to seek advice or reassurances to which the feminine soul can sometimes be inclined. He desired a solid, but serene and trusting spirituality, as his two favorite saints, Saint Philip Neri and Saint Francis de Sales, would have suggested.

The Sacred Congregation had furthermore specified that the so-called « *accusation of faults* » (the public confession of one's external failings against the rule) in public was not to be admitted except on a voluntary basis. In the corrected text, Father Luigi maintained nonetheless the following article:

« *Every Friday, with the exception of Good Friday and of that on which a holy day of obligation falls, the sisters must assemble for the accusation of the failings committed against the rule or against other particular dispositions imposed by the superior or by the vicars, and to verify the progress or hindrances in the acquisition and practice of the virtues.* » This article remained, with slight modifications, also in the constitutions of 1891.

Evidently, in the original thought of the Father, there existed the obligation for every sister to perform this public act of humility, since he attributed a great educational importance to such gestures. If every sister, no matter how elderly, had to ask forgiveness on her knees perhaps from a novice for a failing of private courtesy, how could she not perform the same gesture for offenses caused to the common rule? We shall add that, besides these « *accusations* », the sisters used to practice the discipline with the cord (a small cord provided with knots), a thing which did not fail to arouse some smile among

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[7] In the course of the cause for beatification, the second censor of the writings of Fr. Scrosoppi had observed that a few passages contained « inaccuracies, at least apparent, which seem to manifest a somewhat Jansenist mentality », but added that the doctrine preached by our subject « is perfectly orthodox, although it tends toward rigorism, as was customary at that time in northern Italy ». Later, those « few passages » were seen as a reflection of the rigorism of the time « with which teachers, theology manuals, and sermon books used in seminaries were infected ». Indeed, it was noted that he diffused since 1828 the antidote to Jansenism, namely devotion to the Sacred Heart, that he practiced and inculcated frequent confession and communion, devotion to the Madonna, the practice of the Way of the Cross, and filial love for the Pope—elements sufficient to dispel any doubt on the matter. (Cf. Relatio et Vota, Rome 1977, p. 58).

the more vivacious novices starting out. The Father intended to transmit, along with humility, the spirit of penance. And if some sister struggled to understand the importance of these two virtues, he found the way to clarify her ideas well!

In the thirteenth observation of 1871, the Sacred Congregation pointed out that in the constitutions « *there is no mention... of the spiritual and material assistance that must be offered to sick sisters, nor of the prayers of suffrage to be recited for deceased sisters.* » And it is true that the constitutions were silent on this point, but the rules were not, precisely because of the personal vision of the founder cited previously. It is worthwhile to report what he wrote in this regard, to savor a small example of the rules that gushed directly from his heart.

To the sick he had dedicated Article 11 of Chapter VI:

« *The sick sisters shall be the object of particular care and attention; the nurse sisters, guided by the purest charity, shall offer them with affection and promptness the best services.* »

However, faithful to his principle of educating for strength of spirit, he had this Warning follow immediately:

« *Since an excessive concern for the health of one's body could easily induce the sisters to seek remedies and treatments for every minimal indisposition, which could be harmful rather than useful to their health, they shall not use medicines, nor consult doctors or other persons without the permission of the mother superior or of the local vicar, except in the case of a sudden and serious ailment, such as for example a violent colic, a pernicious fever, a spitting of blood, etc.* »

Father Scrosoppi was certainly not the type of man who indulged those who loved to linger over illnesses and pharmaceuticals! Yet his solicitude toward sisters who were genuinely sick remained legendary. He demanded that one should not economize on two things: the care of the church and everything that was necessary for the sick.

He would not have been himself, however, if he had not addressed one of his characteristic exhortations to those directly concerned as well. He did so in Articles 15-18 of Chapter IX.

« *The sick* — he writes among other things — *shall strive to be an example to anyone who visits them; they shall give proof of authentic humility and of religious patience; they shall use devout and constructive words, demonstrating in this manner that they accept the suffering that afflicts them not only as the will of their Creator, but as a precious gift from heaven, destined to enrich and further perfect them.* »

He himself set the example: he guarded his own ailments with jealousy, as if they were precious treasures, without letting them leak out except rarely to those who were close to him. Who knows how many times he must have repeated:

« *My daughters, to remain serene when one is in health anyone is capable; it is our faith that must give us peace at the moment of trial.* »

And the sisters raised at his school demonstrated that they had learned the lesson well. The biographical texts speak little of their apostolic works, but are filled with accounts of their heroic patience during illnesses.

Regarding the suffrages (the prayers for the deceased), Father Luigi had dedicated Article 14 of Chapter VI of the rules:

« *Out of a spirit of fraternal charity, all must, if possible, participate in the funerals of deceased sisters; for their soul they must offer seven communions, hear seven masses, and recite seven rosaries: all this in addition to the prayers for the deceased usually provided for in the congregation.* »

We have already recalled how dear the devotion to the souls in Purgatory was to him. When a sister died, sometimes immediately after having imparted the last blessing to her, he hastened to write to the superiors of the various houses:

« *Execute immediately the prayers of suffrage prescribed by the rules.* »

He could only desire the immediate ascent of his daughters into Paradise, he who had made a vow to remain in Purgatory until the day of the last judgment, if only to see them all saved.

The founder recommends the observance of the rules

At the conclusion of this comparison between the original constitutions drafted by Father Luigi and the proposals for amendment received from Rome, the attentive reader will have drawn from it — we believe — a completely particular impression.

The Roman amendments will appear without doubt sensible, although they feel very much of a purely theoretical and bureaucratic perspective and remain linked to the mentality of the era. In the constitutions of the founder, instead, charity and reality pulse free and courageous, sustained by the wings of a spirit in love with the good and decidedly ahead of its time.

As far as the rules are concerned, it would be necessary to read them in their entirety to be able to taste their sweet and at the same time vigorous, realistic, and fervent character: a truly complete essence. One clearly perceives therein the hand of someone who possesses the gift of guiding souls toward the highest peaks of sanctity.

However, the already cited judgment of the Roman theologian may suffice for us, who considers them exemplary even for our times. We wish rather, through a rapid review of his correspondence [8], to show how fundamental Father Luigi considered the observance of the rules, which he did not feel as his own creations, but as born from the prayers addressed to the Madonna, to Saint Joseph, and to Saint Cajetan.

« *Be faithful* — he writes to a sister on December 18, 1875 — *in the execution of the holy rules, and you will be a saint.* » And on September 30, 1881, he added:

[8] We refer to Tinti, who includes in the appendix 117 letters of Father Scrosoppi, in addition to another three inserted in the biography. (Cf. L. TINTI, o.c., appendix VIII, pp. 332-433; pp. 111, 165, 221).

« *Before dying, I intensely desire to see in all houses an exact observance of the holy rules, so that your holy congregation may consolidate itself ever better.* »

« *I recommend to all of you* — he writes on May 8, 1882, to a superior in the Trentino region — *the exact observance of the holy rules, to correspond worthily to your holy religious vacation, and I pray and beseech you not to give the slightest occasion so that anyone may move the smallest criticism toward you.* » A few days later he wrote to another superior: « *It lies close to my heart that you provide me with precise information on all these daughters of mine, both regarding the religious spirit and the observance of the holy rules, and as far as concerns their devotion, the exercise of the virtues, and their external character and behavior.* »

On November 14, 1882, he expressed a sweet consolation since « *the most reverend mother general reported to me that in that house a good order reigns, that all can dedicate themselves to religious practices, that the holy rules are faithfully observed, that there is peace and contentment, and that all carry out their duties well with an authentic spirit of charity. May the Lord grant that holy perseverance never be lacking and that every day you may grow ever more in these virtuous practices.* »

Twelve days later he addressed these words full of affection to a young sister of the house of Cormons:

« *I pray you, dearest daughter, to wish to be an example in the observance of the holy rules and not to let even a day pass without having performed some act of humility or of absolute obedience toward whoever, in that house, represents God.* »

The end of his earthly life was by now approaching. One cannot read without emotion the last admonitions of the holy elderly man.

On July 28, 1883, he writes to a superior of the Trentino region:

« *To these good daughters of yours and my dear little sisters, daughters and ladies, what could I say? I console myself in knowing that all are well and I recommend to them the perfect observance of the holy rules; in it they will find the continuous exercise of the virtues which will allow them to accumulate merits for holy Paradise, making them holy spouses of the divine Lamb.* » And on September 9 of the same year he expressed what was almost the last desire of his heart:

« *Let us remember what our divine Spouse says: "Estote perfecti, sicut Pater vester perfectus est" (that is: Be perfect as your Father is perfect). Therefore, always forward in the virtues, without ever being satisfied with what we do; our progress toward perfection we must find in the perfect execution of the holy rules, which the Lord has given us as an extremely efficacious means for our sanctification. Therefore, beloved daughter in the Lord, be vigilant and full of zeal so that these rules may be executed perfectly by your loved daughters.* »

He continued to recommend and to implore until the moment of his decease, since « *the bed of his sorrows* — as Tinti, an eyewitness, recounts — *had become a chair (that is, a place of solemn teaching) from which one learned the true science of the saints.* »

The « Directory » of Father Fantoni

The year 1861 represented a year of particular commitment for the Sisters of Providence. In expectation of the longed-for papal approval, the founder, as we have already mentioned:

« *had his daughters instructed with much care regarding the duties of religious women, the importance of the profession of the three simple vows, and the diligent observance of the new rules.* »

He desired indeed that the sisters arrive at a choice that was as free as it was conscious.

He entrusted this task to Father Fantoni, who held numerous instructions for the religious women « *to illustrate the excellence and sanctity of your vocation, so that you may love and esteem it more.* »

These are teachings that he had printed in Monza, at the printing press of the institute of the Paulines. Three fascicles were published in 1861 and two in 1862. At the end of that year, he gathered them into a single volume entitled: "*Direttorio per uso della Religiosa Congregazione delle Suore della Provvidenza in Udine*" (Directory for the use of the Religious Congregation of the Sisters of Providence in Udine), dedicating it to the new superior general, Mother Maria Teresa di Gesù Nazareno.

« *That good God* — writes Father Fantoni in the preface — *who inspired the birth of your pious union and who willed it for some years to be very small like the grain of mustard seed (ref. Matthew ch. 13) and modest like the fountain recorded in the book of Esther (ch. 10), is He not perhaps the one who for some years and in the present has rendered it great and beautiful? So much so that today, under the shadow of this plant, many innocent turtledoves (that is, the sisters) take refuge, repeating the lament of love, and along the course of the fountain, now transformed into a river of clear waters, so many mystical doves (that is, consecrated souls) purify and beautiful themselves... It remains for me therefore* — he concludes — *only to pray God so that He may visit this chosen vineyard, planted by His powerful and loving hand, with continuous celestial dews; that He may fecundate it, make it prosper, transplant it, and fill it with rare flowers and precious fruits, protecting it always through the harsh adversities of the times, and indeed dwell in it like the Beloved among the lilies..* »

Unlike the preface, in which the emotional transport allows itself a comprehensible rhetorical tone, Father Fantoni in the body of the text uses a simple, clear, and precise style; on every page one senses the fervor of a mild and encouraging spiritual master.

Today, both because it feels of the historical period in which it was written, and because copies of the *Directory* have by now become a rarity for collectors (a bibliographical rarity), the work of this holy priest is no longer used as a reading manual in the congregation; no mention of it is made, for example, in the "*Costumanze ad uso delle Suore della Provvidenza"* (Customs for the use of the Sisters of Providence). However, it could still be read and meditated upon with great benefit. In any case, upon this text the sisters of the first decades were formed.

It is worthy of note how Father Fantoni never makes any reference to the founder. Without doubt this occurred by explicit will of the most humble Father Luigi. The latter, moreover, gave proof of his humility by leaving to his « *brother of soul* » the spiritual direction of the small community in that delicate period of transition; probably he chose to keep himself aside also so that his strong personality would not condition in any way the free decision of the religious women.

Only in the first fascicle does Father Fantoni insert some allusions to the life and functioning of the Institute of the Abandoned, which in one passage he defines as « *founded and grown almost miraculously.* »

On the ways of the Lord

In this way, precisely starting from the storm that in those years seemed to violently shake the Church of God and caused many hearts to waver, the congregation of the Sisters of Providence emerged consolidated and strengthened. Filled with joy for the blessing and the wish expressed by the Pope, and nourished by the sap of extraordinary rules, it had only to walk with courage on the ways of the Lord, obeying another magnificent exhortation addressed by Pius IX to the Sisters of Providence:

« *Sequimini Sponsum quocumque ierit — Follow the Spouse wherever He shall go.* »

They will follow Him.

Chapter 5

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CONGREGATION (1862-1866)

The Infant Asylum of Udine

In the oration for the inauguration of the *House of the derelitte* , held in 1837, Dr. Zambelli had hinted at the fact that a priest present was preparing to visit the asylums established by the famous Abbot Ferrante Aporti in Cremona and other localities, with the intention of founding one in Udine as well. The priest to whom Zambelli made reference was without a doubt *don* Pietro Benedetti.

While the latter visited the asylums of Aporti, a methodical school for the formation of asylum teachers was being established in Udine, an initiative without precedent in other cities. The promoter and director was Professor Giovanni Codemo, at the time a teacher of literary subjects in the schools of Udine and shortly after appointed professor of humanity in Padua. Codemo, a « *worthy disciple* » of Aporti, was — together with the latter and Abbot De Grandis of Venice — one of the main promoters of infant asylums in northern Italy.

At the school of Codemo, inaugurated on March 1, 1838, twelve young women of the city enrolled. While Codemo imparted lessons in pedagogy and methodology, *don* Benedetti deepened the religious instruction, *don* Giovanni Battista Zorzi taught music and singing, and Dr. Zambelli took care of hygiene and physical education. Later, Codemo would remember with satisfaction that first experimental experience, writing three years later:

« *The progress of this female seminary could be fully recognized and praised during the examination held in the presence of an authoritative commission.* »

The asylum of Udine was inaugurated on August 6, 1838, under the direction of Marianna Flaibani, assisted by Anna Maria Nigg and Anna Maria Zorzutti. After the departure of Codemo, *don* Benedetti was appointed « *inspector* », while Zambelli took over the cultural formation, dedicating to the asylum, as if it were a second family, « *affectionate and wise cares* ».

Since during its first twenty-five years of life the asylum did not fall directly into the activities of Father Scrosoppi, we will not retrace its entire history, which is moreover already known thanks to a consistent bibliographical documentation [(1)]. We will recall only that its first see was established in some rooms — today demolished — of the old

[1] Bibl.: Relazione e proposte sull'Asilo infantile di Udine, Udine 18..., pp. 4; P. BENEDETTI, Stato della Scuola infantile di carità in Udine sul fine del I anno di sua esistenza esposto dall'ispettore, Udine 1839, pp. 46; S. PELLICO, La scuola infantile di carità - versi, Udine 1839, pp. 6; G. ZAMBELLI, Alle educatrici dell'asilo di carità per l'infanzia di Udine - allocuzione, Udine 1840, pp. 30; G. ZAMBELLI, Breve storia dell'Asilo infantile di Carità narrata da un fanciullo ai suoi compagni, Udine 1847, pp. 42; A. PICCO, Cenni storici sull'Asilo infantile di Udine dal 1838 al 1890, Udine 1890, pp. 16.

civil hospital of the city, situated next to the facade of the Church of *San Francesco*. In 1858 the institute had to move and for two years found hospitality in a municipal building adjacent to the old gymnasium, in the street that still today preserves its name, near *XX Settembre square*. On June 8, 1860, the asylum moved to *Cicogna street*, in a house rented by *don* Francesco Rossi. Finally, on December 31, 1862, it was possible to purchase a definitive see — thanks to a capital gathered through stock subscriptions — at the Ballico house in *Prampero street*, a building which for the occasion was extensively renovated and raised on a project of the architect Zandigiacomo.

Initially the institution, created for the benefit of poor children, had assumed the name of « *Infant Asylum of Charity* », to which, after 1854, the dedication « *of the Immaculate* » was added.

Until 1862, *don* Benedetti had entrusted the custody and instruction of the children to pious lay women. However, the management became difficult for several reasons: the salary due was higher than the scarce revenues of the asylum, the women struggled to endure the enormous sacrifice required by the care of such a large multitude of children of tender age and, not least, it would seem that one of the teachers had remained involved in secret anti-Austrian movements. For these reasons, on November 10, 1863, *don* Benedetti had to invite the *Ancelle di Carità*, who for about ten years had been operating in the nearby hospital, to assume its direction.

However, those sisters, being of Lombard origin and not knowing the Friulian dialect, had great difficulties making themselves understood by the children, who belonged to the poorest classes of the city. For this reason they had to renounce the assignment. It was then that *don* Benedetti turned for help to his intimate friend Father Luigi Scrosoppi, who willingly granted him four *Sisters of Providence*.

The contract was formalized on July 31, 1864, and the sisters began their service on August 10. The directress of that time, Maria Felicita Lorio, assisted by her sister, was aggregated on November 1 among the « *tertiaries* » of the congregation; a short time later, however, for reasons of charity, she had to return to her paternal house.

Although Father Luigi had permitted his religious women to assume the management of the asylum so that the work in which *don* Benedetti had invested heart and capital would not be lost, the institution maintained its own legal autonomy. *Don* Benedetti remained inspector until his death, which overtook him after a brief illness on November 19, 1869.

There was thus extinguished an extraordinary priestly figure, brilliant for intelligence and literary production, but above all for devotion and spirit of service. In the register of the deceased of the metropolitan church he is justly described as a man « *full of days and merits, among which there shone especially charity and mercy in succoring and nourishing the poor, and in a particular way needy children, of whom he could by right be considered the second father* ».

However, due to his unshakeable fidelity to the Church and to the Pope on one hand, and to the spiteful anticlericalism of the era on the other, his funeral was almost deserted. *Don* Benedetti had been for many years a highly esteemed teacher of religion in the city gymnasium. With the help of Monsignor Francesco Cernazai, he had reopened to

students the Church of *Santo Spirito*, which had passed under the control of the State following the Napoleonic suppressions. It can be affirmed that the best youth of Udine had had him for decades as an irreplaceable advisor and friend. To generations of children he had offered a truly enlightened education, as emerges from the profound pedagogical insights present in his works. And yet, his disappearance was announced by the *Giornale di Udine* with a very brief short article; at his funeral no authorities were present, nor the crowd of those he had benefited, and even the clergy was scarce. Political tensions not only pushed people to desert the homage due to such a benefactor, but rendered that homage itself ill-regarded and suspect.

Someone, however, walked with reverence and emotion behind the remains of the holy priest: it was the faithful Dr. Zambelli, together with the inseparable friends Father Luigi and *don* Fantoni. The latter, indeed, would gather his spiritual inheritance, holding the office of inspector of the asylum for fourteen years, until his death.

In a world too often malicious and petty there shine sometimes miracles of spiritual nobility. One of these was certainly that group of chosen spirits, united by a deep feeling of friendship and moved by a same and holy passion for good, of whom we love to repeat the names as in a prayer of thanksgiving: Benedetti, Zambelli, Scrosoppi, Fantoni...

Udine, via Prampero: first see of the Infant Asylum of Charity

The see of *Prampero street* was not ideal for the asylum, since it lacked the necessary courtyards for the game and recreation of the children. Already in 1869 Tinti wrote:

« *The Sisters of Providence trust in divine help and in civic generosity to be able to offer to the ever-increasing number of children a larger and healthier place, endowed*

with an outdoor area for the diversion of those dear children, thus rendering even more effective a work of such value. »

In fact, in 1898, the Superior General Mother Cecilia Piacentini decided to transfer the asylum to the current see, situated in front of the college of the *Provvidenza*, where at one time was found the Institute of the Deaf-Mutes and subsequently the so-called Administrative House. The project of renovation was entrusted to the pious and esteemed engineer Lodovico Zoratti, while the works were executed by the contractor Angelo Agosti.

A morning of July 1901 the children, gathered in *Prampero street* and having put on the regulation small apron, were accompanied two by two toward the new see. Guiding them was the Superior Mother Silvina. Having arrived in *Ronchi street* — today *padre Luigi Scrosoppi street* — they found a special meal prepared by the Reverend Mother Eustella Pedrazzoli, who assumed in that moment the office of Superior. In the afternoon, His Excellence Monsignor Zamburlini, Archbishop of Udine, assisted by the director Monsignor Zucco and by the confessor Monsignor Pugnetti, proceeded to the solemn blessing of the premises and of the chapel.

After 1919, during the first years of his priesthood, the future Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti [2] held for some time the office of chaplain-inspector of the asylum, who remained always bound by a deep affection to this beneficial institution.

Still today, from time to time, the small guests ascend the flight of steps that leads to the small Church of *San Gaetano* and stop in prayer before the tomb of Father Luigi, to whose great heart the asylum owes its own salvation, in the time when it was the only one of the city and, due to the malice of those difficult times, seemed destined to disappear.

The little flowers of Mother Cherubina

And here we allow ourselves a sweet parenthesis. Even if we were to be accused of having gone off-topic, we would not regret it at all.

We wish to dedicate a few pages to a sister who labored for a long time in the asylum, leaving there a most dear memory. It has been written, in fact:

« *The children became so attached to this sister that, more than forty years later, they still remembered her and returned to the institute to visit her.* »

We want to speak about her at length, since the figure of Father Luigi appears often in the account and because this chronicle will show clearly what kind of religious woman grew under his guidance, as firm as it was amiable.

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[2] Born in Nimis (Udine) in 1898, graduated in theology, he was a teacher of ecclesiastical history in the seminary of Udine. Started in the diplomatic field, he was secretary to Cardinal Costantini, apostolic delegate in China, auditor of the nunciature in Portugal, apostolic delegate in Albania where he was consecrated titular archbishop of Synnada; by Pius XII he was sent to Spain during the civil war, subsequently he was for 15 years apostolic delegate in Canada. Created cardinal, he was prefect of the sacred congregation for religious. By Paul VI he was defined « a clear figure of a faithful servant of the Church ». He died in 1974. (Cf. il Gazzettino di Udine, August 4, 1974; Avvenire, August 2 and 3, 1974).

Lucia Filomena Voncini was born in Udine, in the parish of *Le Grazie*, on September 16, 1838. She lost her father in 1849, remaining an orphan with numerous little brothers and sisters. For this reason, Dr. Zambelli had her received into the *House of the derelitte* on April 7, 1850.

She easily excelled among the orphans for her intelligence, lively character, and beauty. « *She was, however, a little vain, as she herself admitted. She liked tight-fitting clothes, shiny little shoes, and high little heels. She was of small stature, but she liked to make a good impression and show off.* » Well then: this somewhat vain child would become a sister so loving of poverty that her example remained memorable. When in 1907 she returned from Primiero, the trunk of her trousseau was sent to Cormons. Sister Marcella Rotta, Councilor General, « *was not content with admiring alone the most rigorous poverty that transpired from every single garment, but also called the novices so that they might observe and learn concretely holy poverty... In a particular way, attention and admiration were drawn by a skirt composed entirely of patches of every quality and color, so worn out that one could not understand how she could still have worn it.* » And yet Mother Cherubina held those rags most dear, considering them banners of her victory over youthful vanity. « *Let it not be believed, however, that she was untidy or careless... On the contrary! She remained always, until an advanced age, clean and orderly like a little dove. She made cleanliness an act of devotion.* »

As a young girl she was, moreover, rather fond of sweets. One day she received a few little coins as a gift and thought of buying herself some sweets. « *But how to do it? Clever as she was, she ran to one of the windows overlooking the street, waiting for some trustworthy person to pass by to conclude her great business. Finally she saw an acquaintance passing and began to shout in Friulian: "Oilà, che cjali, che sinti, che torni indaùr!" (that is: Hey, look, listen, come back!).* »

By dint of insisting, she was heard. « *Then she started running toward the stairs to reach the trustworthy person... But, poor little one, she suddenly felt herself grabbed by an arm by Father Luigi, who had been an unobserved spectator of the scene: Ah, roguery, wait now... Let them look, let them listen, let them come back... Ah, roguery! And he scolded me and punished me in an appropriate way — Mother Cherubina used to say — as I deserved, but always behaving as a good father.* »

The father founder, who had guessed the excellent qualities of that future spiritual daughter, kept an eye on her and, like a good papa, loved her tenderly — she herself used to relate — seeking to educate her to virtue with that serious and mild pedagogy typical of those early times. If she drew benefit from such an education, she demonstrated it later, never seeking choice foods and adapting herself to the simplest and poorest fare. When, in an advanced age, she went to Cormons for the spiritual exercises, she asked that for breakfast they serve her a little cold polenta instead of bread.

She too fell ill with cholera in 1855 and seemed on the point of dying. Sister Blandina Leonardelli wrote in 1932 of having heard from her very lips how:

« *our venerable Father being called to administer to her the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, the Father went close to her and said in her ear: — Listen dear, promise the dear Madonna to become a Sister of Providence and you will recover. She did so and immediately began to feel better.* »

Was there perhaps, in this singular call, a prophetic and prodigious element?

In any case, from the registers written by hand by the founder, it appears that she was admitted as an aspirant to the congregation only three years later, on February 2, 1858; she clothed herself in the religious habit in 1861 and made her profession in 1863, assuming the name of Maria Cherubina of the Sacred Family.

She began as a teacher in the asylum on September 10, 1867, and from 1871 to 1882 she was its superior. Subsequently, for a brief period, she was a substitute mistress of the novices. In 1884, shortly after the death of Father Luigi, she became superior at Primiero; from 1907 to 1911 she held again the role of superior of the asylum of Udine in the new see.

Later she was placed at rest. However, remaining always very active although she suffered much from pains related to arthritis, she had the sewing machine put in her room and, saying to herself: « *Courage, Maria Cherubina!* », she made it work at full speed. She died full of merits on March 29, 1925, at the age of eighty-six and a half years and after sixty-seven years of religious life.

She arrived therefore at the asylum in 1867, in the period of the most heated anticlericalism. The chronicles relate that the mayor of that time — since the commune had a certain influence on the management of the asylum — and with him *don* Giovanni Vogrig [3], who later abandoned the priestly habit, wanted to force the sisters to take off their religious habit. Father Luigi and his daughters opposed with determination. And it was then that the most serious difficulties began. There followed, in fact, a diabolical infestation that lasted three years. The biography of Mother Cherubina describes in detail a series of truly extraordinary phenomena. One reads there, among other things:

« *It was he, the accursed devil, who set fire to the chapel. The flames completely burned the wooden altar. But the altarpiece — a canvas of value depicting the Madonna as* "*Mater Amabilis*" *in half-length* — [4] *did not burn and suffered no damage; it did not fall, although the frame that supported it was burned. It remained as if suspended in the air, to the consolation of the sisters for the miracle that occurred and in seeing safe their dear little Madonna whom they loved so much. Finally — continues the biography — after three years of sufferings, the priest don Pietro Serravalle performed the exorcisms and drove away the demon, who from that moment made himself neither seen nor heard.* »

Considering that Archbishop Monsignor Casasola permitted *don* Serravalle, his close collaborator, to perform the exorcisms; that they waited three years before granting such authorization; that at the time they were not at all inclined to permit similar practices,

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[3] Born in Clastra (Udine) in 1818, after various duties he was a professor in the gymnasium-high school in Udine, a post reconfirmed to him by the Italian government in 1866. The political-national question, and in particular the temporalist one, although he was a fierce proponent of these, had secondary importance compared to his religious rebellion. Suspended a divinis, he did not submit and declared himself independent. In 1874 he began the publication of the reformist-protestant periodical L'Esaminatore Friulano; he attempted the foundation of a separate Friulian church. With another apostate priest he filed lawsuits, directed in different forms against Archbishop A. Casasola, at whose death he suppressed his weekly; a repentance then seemed possible, which did not happen. He died in 1904. (Cf. G. COPOLUTTI, o.c., pp. 95-102).

[4] The canvas is preserved in the Dell'Immacolata nursery school (former Infant Asylum of Charity) of Udine.

especially in a climate of derision toward what were called religious superstitions; and seeing that, effectively, after the exorcisms every disturbing phenomenon ceased, it must be admitted that the alleged diabolical infestation had some foundation.

Moreover, not to believe in the existence of demons one would have to despise men too much, attributing exclusively to the human species all that immense load of perversity, atrocity, and madness that poisons the history of the world. It is, instead, almost consoling to think that the monstrous mysteries of evil find in part an explanation in a power external to man and more wicked than he. But if someone prefers to believe that diabolical wickedness resides entirely within the human being, let them do as they believe.

Sister Cherubina possessed an enchanting simplicity, united with an immense goodness and gentleness. The lively children of the asylum had noticed it too, taking advantage of it to play tricks on her, without however ever succeeding in making her lose her patience. She demonstrated this simplicity of hers on very many occasions. For example in this one.

As her biography relates further:

« *At the asylum of Udine, when they celebrated the six Sundays dedicated to Saint Aloysius, they displayed on the altar an image of the saint cut out from an old cardboard calendar. The poverty of the house did not allow anything better. Well, one Sunday a little disrespectful wind made poor Saint Aloysius fall. The sisters present, who were praying with downcast eyes, did not notice it; they heard, however, the exclamation of their mother superior: "Ah, puar frut, al è colat!" (that is: Ah, poor little one, he has fallen!). Once they had left the chapel, Sister Cherubina called them to herself, saying with sincere humility: When I am dead, tell everyone what I said in the chapel, so that they may laugh and be merry at my expense and know my foolish blundering.* »

Here is who Sister Cherubina was: and we have wished to fulfill her desire.

The *Biographical Sketches* conclude her profile with these words:

« *This dear little old lady of ours... was always an example to us: fervent, humble, kind, and helpful. With her pleasant simplicity she was always a relief and comfort to us. Fortunate were our first mothers who had the grace to know and frequent our venerated father founder, nourishing themselves thus with that simplicity, charity, humility, and poverty which he himself lived.* »

Monsignor Giovanni Maria Teloni

Around the years 1860-62, Father Luigi made the acquaintance of the canon baron Monsignor Giovanni Maria Teloni: between the two there was born, from that very moment, a profound and holy friendship which remained firm until the passing of the founder.

The Teloni was an apostolic missionary of clear fame, whose figure characterized the entire second half of the nineteenth century thanks to an untiring work of preaching carried out in northern and central Italy, in the Trentino and in Istria, accompanied by the

publication of numerous ascetic pamphlets (short treatises dedicated to the spiritual life and to Christian perfection) [5].

He preached also in Udine and certainly directed some courses of spiritual exercises for the Sisters of Providence. From such experience he matured an esteem so profound for Father Luigi and for his religious women, that later he recommended the settlement of those sisters almost everywhere he went to preach.

It is due precisely to his influence if, in 1863, negotiations were initiated to open a house of theirs in Venzone and, in 1865, another in Castellavazzo, although both projects did not later find implementation. It was always thanks to him that the first steps were taken for the opening of the house of Primiero in 1866 and of that of Rovigno d'Istria in 1882.

The two unfulfilled works in Venzone and Castellavazzo

Venzone is a characteristic medieval fortress, although of Roman origins, situated in a strategic position of control between the outlet of the Carnic Alps and the beginning of the Friulian plain. It still preserves in large part its circuit of walls endowed with towers, along whose western slope runs the « *Pontebbana* » state highway which from Friuli ascends toward Austria; the small town is rather well known for the famous « *natural mummies* » preserved in a special museum [6].

At the time of which we treat, various causes rendered the civil and religious situation of the place rather turbulent. Precisely in the attempt to restore a climate of serenity there, a mission preached by Monsignor Teloni was announced. This initiative, begun on Ash Wednesday, February 18, 1863, had a positive development and concluded with the establishment of a confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus intended exclusively for the female youth; such association was sanctioned by an official document of Pius IX on March 3 of that year.

The good monsignor, taking advantage of the numerous manifestations of affection received from the population, addressed an appeal to the representatives of the commune, in which he suggested two instruments to obtain the desired spiritual revival: the opening of a house of the Sisters of Providence — who would take care of a free school for poor young girls, of the teaching of Christian doctrine on Sundays and during Lent, of a festive female oratory, and of the direction of the confraternity of the Sacred Heart, assisted by

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[5] The Civiltà Cattolica of April 27, 1878 (on p. 317) returning to the apostolate of the word and of the pen of Mons. Teloni, enunciated the general title of his pamphlets: Reminders and admonitions to preserve the fruit of the holy missions and live happily, explaining then that each one had a special title; they were directed to persons of every age and of every category. It recalled also that these writings were praised by Pius IX. Subsequently they were praised by Leo XIII. (Cf. the letter of the Archbishop of Udine, Mons. A. Casasola of April 24, 1882, placed in the preface to the pamphlet of Teloni, published in Udine in 1882, The art of always enjoying your work ..., pp. 262). Along the years 1874-1893 Teloni published at least fifty of such pamphlets. We cite some reported in the various years of the aforementioned magazine: Believe in God; Believe in the Holy Church; Listen to the divine word; Love your neighbor as yourself; Keep holy the feast; Invitation to frequent communion. Thirty-four difficulties and... solutions; To husbands and wives; To mothers and teachers; To clerics who aspire to the priesthood. Very useful admonitions; The soldier's little library (12 pamphlets); Flee dishonesty; etc.

[6] Until the earthquake of 1976 these mummies were found in the « *Rotonda delle Mummie* », the former baptistery; currently they are placed in a special protective structure (box).

a lay vice-president — and the hiring of a priest who would collaborate with the elderly parish priest, *don* Tusini. Both proposals were accepted.

The same Monsignor Teloni had then gone in all haste to Udine to supplicate Father Luigi so that, for the love of Saint Joseph and of the souls of that village, he would send the sisters making himself entirely in charge of the expenses, both for the furnishing of the house and for the maintenance of the religious women; he asked that the village limit itself to providing the premises and the annexed vegetable garden, the community being completely incapable of establishing funds or compensations. Father Luigi consented. This gesture represents a luminous proof of the generosity of the founder and of the influence that Teloni exercised upon him. Teloni, moreover, knew well how to touch the right chords praying « *for the love of Saint Joseph* »: Father Luigi could not have denied anything to anyone who implored him in the name of the one he loved to call « *the papa* ».

Monsignor Teloni wrote later from Gemona, Friday, March 13, inviting the Father to go to that locality « *to strike the iron while it is hot and to enjoy myself also your coming to Gemona, having to move on Tuesday for the other missions* ».

We have no confirmation whether Father Luigi actually went there. However, the negotiations continued in a favorable way, since on May 9 the municipal administration of Venzone invited the Father to present a plan or a project of institution from which one could deduce with precision the rights and duties to be assumed reciprocally. The Father sent such plan on May 20. The same administration, in a letter sent to the curia of Udine on June 5, hints at the future female school under the direction of the Sisters of Providence, arisen later, as it is said, from a most generous offering of their well-deserving founder.

The motives that later led to the failure of the negotiations remain unknown, which certainly did not depend on Father Scrosoppi, who had proposed conditions of an even exceptional generosity. Perhaps the reason is to be sought in the ever-increasing and confused tension inside the village. On June 23 there had arrived on the spot, sent by the curia, a collaborator priest with functions of teacher to help the parish priest. The latter, however, remained only one year; almost simultaneously with his departure, the parish priest himself, *don* Tusini, on April 2, 1864, was forced to give his resignation.

The entire affair of Venzone had as its single result that of making enter into the congregation of the Sisters of Providence, in that period and a few years later, two young women coming from that place.

Equally fruitless, although more complex, were the negotiations to open a house in Castellavazzo, in the diocese of Belluno.

Castellavazzo is a large inhabited center situated about a mile from Longarone. In the terrible disaster of 1963, when a portion of Mount Toc plummeted into the artificial lake of Vajont and the shockwave destroyed a large part of Longarone, Castellavazzo also, situated higher up, suffered considerable damages.

From 1846 the care of souls was entrusted to *don* Girolamo Barpi. He had established, in a house of his property, a small female religious nucleus composed of four pious

women, who managed a free school for young girls, taught Christian doctrine on feast days, and visited the sick at home.

However, at the beginning of 1865, the work was passing through a moment of difficulty. In that period Monsignor Teloni was in those areas, who wrote to Father Luigi on May 9: « *It seems to me, if I am not mistaken, that the Madonna has led me among the mountains of Cadore to prepare there a foundation of the daughters of Providence* ». To the letter he attached a message from *don* Barpi, in which the latter offered the property of the house and indicated what furnishings and provisions he could provide to the desired branch of the Sisters of Providence.

The founder went to Castellavazzo together with *don* Fantoni and decided to accept the proposal. Rather, some renovation works were immediately agreed upon so that the building would be more suitable to house a religious community.

Having obtained on June 22 the enthusiastic approval of the Bishop of Belluno and Feltre, Monsignor Giovanni Renier, and having overcome some new difficulty thanks to a further journey of the Father at the beginning of August, on October 25, 1865, the contract was signed with which *don* Barpi sold to the pious *House of the derelitte* of Udine a house with a vegetable garden situated in Castellavazzo. Simultaneously, Father Scrosoppi delivered to him a private declaration with which he committed himself to return the house gratuitously to the parish priest in office at the moment, if, for any reason, the institution had not been effectively opened or had been closed.

Everything seemed by then ready when the war of 1866 broke out. With the union of Veneto to the Kingdom of Italy, there presented itself the serious problem of establishing whether the *House of the derelitte* was to be considered subject to the laws on religious congregations of 1855 and 1862.

Both *don* Barpi and the Father sought every possible way to overcome or circumvent such obstacles. Father Luigi was precisely in Castellavazzo for this purpose when he received the news that the Church of *Santa Maria Maddalena* had been definitively confiscated by the State. He therefore returned in all haste to Udine, pointing out to *don* Barpi that, in that situation, it was impossible to think of new foundations. In fact, in the following September, a new contract was stipulated with which the *House of the derelitte* resold to *don* Barpi what it had previously purchased.

Of the four devout women of Castellavazzo, two entered among the Sisters of Providence with the qualification of tertiaries. The relations between Father Luigi and *don* Barpi, appointed later monsignor, remained always very cordial, so much so that the latter entrusted shortly after a niece of his to the sisters as a boarder, first in Udine and then in Cormons. The young woman herself later became a sister; however, two years after her profession, she left the religious life to return to civil life, maintaining however a most tender filial devotion toward Father Luigi, as some letters addressed to him testify [(7)].

[7] Anna Monticolo of Agordo (Belluno), born on 19-8-1858, made her profession on 24-9-1880 with the name of Sister Maria Faustina and left the congregation on 3-8-1882. Before her departure, the founder recommended her as

The founder opens a house in Primiero

If Monsignor Teloni loved to sign himself « *sinner* », *don* Giuseppe Sartori, parish priest of Primiero, sometimes signed himself as « *poor priest* », but more often wittily added the by no means mysterious initials « *g.g.g.* ». This was not at all enigmatic because he himself provided the explanation for it in a letter sent to Father Luigi on November 10, 1865, announcing his arrival in Udine, as he himself wrote:

« *When you see a priest who is grand, great, and gross, say indeed: this is the dean of Primiero.* »

Primiero is a famous tourist resort in Trentino, situated about fifteen kilometers from the even more renowned San Martino di Castrozza. Positioned on the right of the Cismon torrent, the village rises in a pleasant valley, closed to the north by the famous Pale Dolomitiche of San Martino and to the south by the feltrini mountains.

In the autumn of 1865, Monsignor Teloni had gone to that locality to preach a mission (that is, a period of intensive preaching and prayer). It was he who suggested to *don* Sartori to call the Sisters of Providence to give new life to a small and suffering municipal hospital, of which the dean was then president. *Don* Sartori wrote immediately, on October 18, to the direction of the sisters and his request was accepted. On October 25, the Superior General Mother Teresa Fabris wrote to the Bishop of Trento to request his consent and blessing. The Bishop granted his clearance on the 29th of the same month, inviting however the parish priest of Primiero — in conformity with article 18 of the concordat between the Holy See and the Austrian government — to produce a copy of three documents: the pontifical authorization of the sisters, the approval of the same by the Emperor of Austria, and the agreement between the administration of the hospital and the superior of the congregation of Providence.

The first authorization was already available. To obtain the second, the procedures were immediately started, availing themselves of the help of a cousin of *don* Sartori, who held the office of councilor at the office of the lieutenant (the highest civil authority) for Tyrol in Innsbruck. On November 15, the dean of Primiero came down to Udine where, the following day, a draft agreement was drawn up, signed by him, by Father Scrosoppi, and by the superior, and immediately ratified by Archbishop Monsignor Casasola.

To reach Primiero starting from Udine was at the time anything but simple or comfortable: it required nearly three days of travel. It was necessary to take the train to Treviso and spend the night there. The next morning one departed with the mail coach for Feltre and from there with the « *veloce* » (that is, a faster carriage for passenger transport) as far as Fonzaso, where another overnight stop was necessary. In that place one looked for the « *pedone* », that is, the mountain guide who would accompany travellers on foot or on donkey back along the mountain paths..

For the return journey, *don* Sartori had as companion *don* Fantoni, charged by the Father with verifying that everything was prepared in the best of ways for the arrival of the religious women. The good and simple *don* Fantoni was so struck by the jovial hospitality

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an orphan to a family of relatives who welcomed her cordially until she had found an honest occupation. Three letters addressed to Father Luigi are preserved from the former sister. (A.L.S., fasc. 33, documents 122-124).

of the dean, by the wonderful spectacle of alpine nature, and by the song of a nightingale that *don* Sartori raised in a cage, that he returned to Udine providing the widest reassurances. To these, however, the reality of the facts did not correspond, so much so that later Father Luigi always wished to verify in person the subsequent foundations in Trentino; he indeed used to say, referring precisely to Primiero, that « *the cat does not put itself twice into the bag* » (that is, that one must not let oneself be deceived twice by the same mistake).

In any case, on February 3, 1866, four nuns, accompanied by the vicar general, Sister Strazzolini, left for their new destination, comforted by the good wishes of their fellow nuns and the solemn blessing of the founding father, as Don Sartori had written:

« *At Fonzaso I will wait for you with a caravan of donkeys* » (that is, an ironic reference to the biblical journey of Mary and Joseph toward Egypt).

The astonishment felt by those sisters was entirely natural, as Tinti writes:

« *the wonder arisen in those sisters, never accustomed to similar journeys nor to the strong emotions of mountaineers, in seeing the steep path they had to ascend and in having to ride for the first time. Overcoming in part the reluctance toward that way of traveling, some sat on the backs of horses, others on modest donkeys and then, amid innocent laughter, they set off up the rough and almost impassable ascent, characterized by continuous differences in height and always situated on the edge of a deep and dark ravine, guided however with safety by the expert mountain guides. In certain more dangerous stretches they had to dismount and proceed on foot, climbing among dry branches and brushwood, until, by the grace of God, they reached the Austrian border.*

From there they continued the journey in small carriages and, crossing those villages, especially at Imer and Mezzano, the passing of the sisters was celebrated with the sound of bells, the firing of firecrackers (mortaretti), and other manifestations of joy, since it was the first time that those simple and good mountaineers saw sisters of charity. Thanks to these signs of gladness and even more thanks to triumphal arches and celebratory inscriptions (epigrafi), they were welcomed in Primiero, which served to alleviate the not few hardships suffered by the religious women during that fatiguing journey. »

They arrived in Primiero on the evening of February 6. The following day, as the *Voce Cattolica* of Trento of February 27 narrates:

« *they were conducted in procession from the parish church to the hospital, where, the ceremony of the blessing of the temporary chapel having ended and having listened during holy mass to some words of comfort improvised by the reverend dean in the emotion of his moved heart, they remained in that place to offer also to our eyes the admirable spectacle of that sacrifice which can be understood only by those who, in the wounds of the poor, see those of Jesus Christ.* »

The Tinti adds further details:

« *However, the moral and economic state of that hospital was truly wretched: at that time it counted only four or five sick people entrusted to the care of a poor man who, according to what was reported, left the infirm in a state of abandonment, so much so that they died without the due assistance, to the great sorrow of that worthy dean. From*

this derived the scarce number of inmates, because of the understandable loathing arisen in the villagers at the idea of going to that place managed so badly. The sisters found moreover the hospice deprived of the most indispensable things, both for the sick and for themselves.

In the first evenings they were housed elsewhere, since neither the straw mattresses (paglericci) nor the furniture were ready; during the day, while they exerted themselves to arrange the hospital, they tried to adapt themselves as best they could, contenting themselves with eating using their own knees as a table.

Those courageous daughters of Providence did not lose heart at all, since Father Luigi had well trained them to every sort of privation and to true religious penance, so much so that these devout souls remained always cheerful and content even in the midst of so much poverty. With the help of devout and generous persons of the village, they prepared in a few days straw mattresses, mattresses, sheets, and blankets, limiting themselves however to the strictly necessary. »

However, the environment of the hospital was very inadequate and almost depressing; nor did the council of the heads of the communes of the district show itself generous in providing the sisters with the necessary. Fortunately, the Vicar General, faithfully interpreting the generous spirit of the father founder, intervened personally, utilizing those economic resources with which the far-seeing Father Luigi had endowed her for every necessity.

The Tinti continues in the narrative:

« *Notwithstanding everything, the sisters, happy to have Jesus present in the sacrament of their house, would not have exchanged it for a royal palace, and grew from day to day in the strength of the spirit, both to reorganize the hospital in the due way, and to succeed in educating and instructing the simple minds of so many young girls.*

And the Lord God benevolently granted the desires of those dear spouses of his, so much so that two months later, other schoolmistress sisters having joined them accompanied by the priest Francesco Fantoni, the faithful friend of Father Luigi, they were able to open the school with the full approval of the scholastic authorities and of the devout population. The hospital was then arranged and improved thanks to their maternal cares, so much so that today — in 1896 — it welcomes on average sixty or more infirm. In the same way, the sisters established in Primiero a festive oratory for girls, which even today is very frequented and very solid. »

The founder followed from afar, with prayer and with the most paternal solicitude, that little family of his transplanted among the mountains. Not even a month after the departure, he asked *don* Sartori for news about them. The dean replied on March 8, 1866:

« *You wish to know from me how I welcomed the sisters?... I will tell you that I regret not being a thaumaturge or a grand seigneur so as not to be able to prepare immediately everything that may render less bitter to the sisters their first stay in Primiero. I will tell you finally that the hospital has changed aspect and begins to look like a sacred place; that the sick men and women are convinced of it, and of the people let us not even speak; only to the administration the expenses that had to be faced for the first time will not have gone down easily, but which nevertheless have been made, as far as our mountain*

situation permits it. For the rest, their behavior is exemplary, and already this by itself has a great value for the common spiritual growth: I would not know how to desire more. »

Mother Strazzolini remained in Primiero for a considerable period, until she saw the community well organized; then she left as superior Sister Gioseffa Luigia Visentini, then thirty-two years old, who had been one of the first sisters sent to the hospital of Portogruaro.

Shortly after their arrival in Primiero, the sisters had the occasion to demonstrate the heroic spirit of dedication transmitted to them by Father Luigi, showing themselves worthy rivals of the older sisters who had spent themselves during the bloody days of 1848 and the cholera epidemic of 1833. There spread in fact a violent epidemic of smallpox and the sisters dedicated themselves untiringly to the assistance of the infected. The superior Sister Visentini gave the example to all, but she herself was struck by the disease, which brought her to the point of death.

She succeeded in recovering, but from that moment her character changed profoundly. She had always been of delicate health, since *don* Serravalle, in his letter to the Father from Portogruaro in 1857, had mentioned her first among the religious women exhausted by fatigue: the pale and gaunt face and the persistent cough indicated a beginning of tuberculosis, although she did everything to hide it. Later she had recovered.

However, the after-effects of smallpox left her with a certain harshness of manners and the tendency to suspect and to interpret everything malevolently. Of this attitude a poor converse sister, Sister Crocifissa, suffered the consequences, who that same year was even dismissed from the congregation; she was readmitted there later, when her innocence appeared clear.

From this had to suffer not a little also the future Superior General, Sister Cecilia Piacentini, who arrived in Primiero as schoolmistress in the autumn of 1867. Her biography recounts in detail the difficulties lived during the three years of permanence in that place. The founder himself, basing himself on the information provided by Visentini, put to a severe test the virtue of her who later would be considered the co-foundress of the congregation. However, Father Luigi changed his mind, thanks also to the intervention of *don* Fantoni, and wrote her a letter with maternal love, promising her that soon he would transfer her to another house so that she might find relief from her long moral and physical sufferings. He transferred her in fact to the new house of Tesero on September 20, 1870.

In both cases, Father Luigi provided a remarkable example of the humility and wisdom necessary to a superior. Faithful to discipline, at a first moment he acted with firmness toward those spiritual daughters of his; but later he was capable of recognizing the error of evaluation and restored to them the fullest and most consoling trust.

Such example is even more admirable if one considers that he maintained a high esteem for Visentini, who, for many reasons, deserved it. She nourished a great love for the congregation and for the mother house. However, she exceeded in an unbalanced zeal and in an excessive punctiliousness, so much so that the founder had to recall her several times. The letters sent by the Father to her — Visentini is the person who has preserved

the greatest number of them — are true small masterpieces of goodness, firmness, and wise spiritual counsels on how to govern with serenity, through which the Father sought to moderate and sweeten that geographically distant superior.

The latter, among its various merits, also had that of attracting numerous vocations to the congregation, which introduced an important group of nuns from Trentino into the group composed largely of Friulians. Visentini remained superior in Primiero until the spring of 1881; she was then recalled to the house of Udine, where she died in 1886 at the age of fifty-three years, concluding her existence in a climate of tranquility and peace.

A new house in Cormons

Two weeks earlier than the opening of Primiero, the Sisters of Providence had inaugurated a new house in Cormons. In this narrative we have not strictly respected the chronological order since this new institution did not owe its origin to the initiative of Monsignor Teloni, but probably to the work of the Jesuit Father Antonio Banchich, coming from the Friulian Slavia (the region of eastern Friuli inhabited by populations of Slovenian language), who was then negotiating with Father Scrosoppi to open a residence of the Society of Jesus in the house of the Filippini in Udine.

Cormons is a small town in eastern Friuli, situated twenty-two kilometers east of Udine, along the road that leads to Gorizia; it rises lying on the southern slope of Mount Subìda, on whose summit runs today the border between Italy and Slovenia (at the time of the biographer's writing, Yugoslavia).

In that city, the noble cormonese Orsola de Grotta [8] had founded in 1714 a religious congregation denominated « *Sisters of Charity of the Christian Doctrine* », building for them a special convent. Next to this building, between 1774 and 1778, a church dedicated to Saint Catherine of Siena had been built.

The church and the convent had been confiscated when the Italic Kingdom of Napoleon had extended to the Illyrian Provinces and, consequently, had been sold at auction. The convent had become property of the Stua family, while the church had been purchased by the nobleman de Cattanini, who intended to donate it to the commune. The latter, however, neither then nor later wished to take upon itself the conditions placed by the donor, so much so that in 1863 the church had fallen into a pitiful state of abandonment; this occurred despite the fact that a prodigious small statue of the Madonna was venerated

[8] Bibl.: Istituto delle sorelle della Dottrina Cristiana: fascicolo di lettere e documenti vari (A.C.A.U.); SIMONETTI G.I., Commemorazione di suor Orsola de Grotta (1691-1747), Cormons 1956, pp. 19; ROSSI GIUSEPPE, Orsola de Grotta e l'istituto della Dottrina Cristiana in Cormons - Memoria storica, ms., fascicoli 6, cc.n.n. (Arch. ex casa generalizia, suore d. Provvidenza, Cormons); ROSSI GIUSEPPE, Maria Santissima venerata in Cormons nella chiesa di santa Caterina - memoria storica, Padova 1822, pp. 106 - II edizione pp. 81 con Cenni sull'istituto delle consorelle della Dottrina Cristiana, pp. 83-207, con Appendice pp. 208-224, Cormons 1931; La solenne incoronazione di Maria ss. Rosa Mistica, in supplemento al n. 9 del periodico La voce di Maria ss. Rosa Mistica, 1931. (Arch. ex casa gen. suore d. Provv., Cormons).

there, called « *Mystical Rose* », which was said to have exuded on her right hand between mid-January and the first days of February of 1837.

Cormons (GO). Church of s. Catherine of Siena, currently sanctuary of Mystical Rose

It seemed that heaven itself was calling the Sisters of Providence to that place: in the altarpiece of the high altar, next to the titular Saint Catherine, there were in fact depicted Saint Joseph and Saint Cajetan of Thiene, the two main patrons of their congregation, and on the images and medals of the Mystical Rose the Madonna was invoked as « *Mater providentiae* » (Mother of Providence).

The negotiations between the parish priest-dean of Cormons, *don* Antonio Marocco, and Father Luigi had a rapid and positive development, so much so that on December 21, 1864, the dean could request from the Archbishop of Gorizia, Monsignor Andrea Gollmayer, the consent to call the Sisters of Providence. However, only on July 10, 1865, did they succeed in signing the contract, with which the spouses Antonio Stua and Anna Maghet sold for six thousand florins the greater part of the former convent to the *House of the derelitte* , represented by Father Luigi and by the Superior Mother Teresa Fabris. The latter committed themselves to establish in those premises « *a section or branch house with four or five schoolmistress Sisters of Providence, who take care of the instruction and education of the poor young girls of Cormons and of the neighboring villages* ».

To the purchase had contributed with a generous offering the Baroness Ernesta Locatelli, born Countess Strassoldo. Three years later, precisely on April 20, 1868, in the fear that the *House of the derelitte* would be suppressed by the Italian government and that its assets would be object of confiscation or legal disputes, the house itself — declaring itself unable to pay the remaining debt to the Stua family — resold the former convent to Father Luigi Scrosoppi.

Once the contract was signed, renovation works were immediately begun so that the premises would be suitable to house the new religious community. The events, however, did not proceed at all without obstacles.

Although a large part of the population of Cormons was happy about the arrival of the sisters, there were also those who opposed it, because of the aversion toward religious institutions nourished by the liberal party of the time, which in Cormons exercised a strong influence. Of such hostility the secular press of the area made itself the spokesperson, to which Father Luigi could not be pleasing as he was considered « *papist and reactionary* » according to the polemical language of that time.

Don Marocco would have moreover desired that the institute of the sisters integrate within itself the municipal female school. The commune, however, did not consent. This divergence of views caused for many years problems and tensions; in the end the sisters had to resign themselves to seeing their own school considered as a simple « *private and popular* » school.

To these motives were added the customary gossip, fueled by rivalries between different regions, regarding the reliability of those « *poor sisters of Udine* ». On August 8 *don* Marocco requested an official declaration from the Archbishop of Udine « *ut obstruatur os loquentium iniqua* » (that is, so that the mouth of those who utter iniquity may be closed) in those so turbulent years. Monsignor Casasola released the document on August 16 with these words:

« *Knowing by personal experience and that of others the great benefit that derives to the faithful people from their intelligent and loving work in the different exercises of charity to which they dedicate themselves by vocation, and especially in the education of young girls, we congratulate you and the estimable population of Cormons, who in such a way see assured for the new generations the advantage of a solid Christian and civil education.* »

Fortunately, on September 27 the news arrived that Ferdinand and Marianna of Austria had granted a subsidy of five hundred florins in favor of the Sisters of Providence of Cormons; such help was obtained thanks to the interest of Monsignor Gaspardis, confessor to the Empress. The sum had a value superior to its economic amount, since it rendered it more difficult to calumniate those who had been honored by the support of the sovereigns.

In the meantime the Superior General had addressed to the Archbishop of Gorizia, on August 15, 1865, the formal request to open the house, writing with profound humility:

« *The education offered by our sisters is not of a high level nor destined for the elevated classes of society, since the main purpose is the education and instruction of the poor and middle classes, and it is therefore aimed at forming good Christian women and useful housewives.* »

Monsignor Gollmayer granted consent only on December 2, both to found the new religious community and to open the school, recommending that the religious women should, as far as possible, adapt themselves to the local regulations under the direction of the school inspectorate of the district.

A few days later, on December 19, an imperial resolution established that to the sisters should also be « *ceded gratuitously the church and its appurtenances, with the special faculty to register legally the property in their name* ». However, once again, the bureaucracy made its weight felt. The sisters obtained legal possession of the church only on May 16, 1867, committing themselves to keep it always open to divine worship, to care for its maintenance at their own expense, and to abide by the diocesan prescriptions for sacred functions, avoiding in particular disturbing the activities of the parish church. As the historian of the sanctuary of the Mystical Rose will write later:

« *From that day begins the rebirth of this church and above all the renewal of the worship dedicated to the great Mother of God, here venerated in her twin-prodigious statue under the title of Mystical Rose.* »

In January 1866, the founder went to Cormons to supervise personally the last preparations. He was extremely meticulous not only in organizing everything necessary so that the community life would follow rigorously the rules, but also in caring for the minimum details so that the entrance ceremony — like every other celebration of the congregation — would result perfect. He never stopped making them try and try again every step. However, he gave once again an extraordinary example of his desire to remain in the shade and of his humility: he departed from Cormons on the eve of the ceremony, happy to return to his silent work and to his recollected prayer.

The Venice newspaper "*La libertà cattolica"* has handed down the chronicle of this happy event, celebrated on January 23, 1866:

« *At 8 o'clock in the morning the Sisters of Providence gathered in the public chapel of Count Del Mestri, dedicated to the Espousal of Mary (a feast that occurred precisely on that day). After having listened to holy mass, accompanied in procession by the clergy, by the noblewomen, and by the other ladies of Cormons, as well as by the pupils of both sexes and by a large crowd, they were introduced into the church of the convent and accompanied into the presbytery.*

Shortly after, the Archbishop arrived in the church who, after having blessed the people with holy water, went to the high altar where, after having adored the Most Holy Sacrament, he ascended the throne prepared for the occasion.

In that moment, the reverend parish priest-dean presented the sisters to the Archbishop, supplicating him to be willing to welcome them as his daughters and to impart to them his paternal blessing. This being done, the reverend superior of the mother house of Udine presented herself at the feet of his most reverend highness [(9)] to thank him for the goodness demonstrated toward them and to render him homage by kissing the sacred ring; the same was done by all the other sisters, to whom the Archbishop immediately addressed a speech, reminding them of the solemn vows and their mission as educators of female youth.

Subsequently the Archbishop put on the sacred vestments to celebrate holy mass, before which the hymn Veni Creator was sung. During the principal parts of the eucharistic

[9] The Archbishop of Gorizia and the Bishop of Trento had the title of « highness » because they were considered princes of the Austrian Empire.

sacrifice, the sisters sang with single voices most devout hymns composed by the famous master of Cividale, don Giacomo Tomadini, who directed the moving ceremonies. »

« *One cannot describe* — proceeds the chronicle with an evident polemical tone — *how much the inhabitants of Cormons and of the neighboring villages rejoiced for this benefit and how all the ladies of Cormons competed in providing the sisters with furniture and provisions. This is the proof that religious families are desired and loved, and that their utility for Christian education is recognized. Let this serve to refute those who would like the destruction of religious communities to drag more easily the people toward a complete loss of moral values.* »

At the head of the religious community of Cormons the founder placed Sister Giovanna Francesca Colloredo, as he had already done at Portogruaro and for the same reasons, while the direction of the school was entrusted to Sister Eletta Cucito. The latter succeeded in winning in a short time the esteem of all, both of the people and of the authorities.

In July 1866 the final examinations were not held since the outbreak of some cases of cholera imposed the anticipated closure of the schools. However, at the beginning of 1867, the new lieutenant of Trieste remained so satisfied by the visit to the institute that he promised his full support; he granted it effectively on October 3, when he authorized the addition of the fourth elementary class to the three already existing and promoted the school of the sisters to the rank of « *principal school* » (a reference school center), as one used to say at the time. The final examinations of July of that year had an excellent outcome, in the presence of many local personalities, including the praetor Wincler, who was always an energetic and passionate supporter of the school against the opposition of the liberal party. The evaluations of the female pupils were even published in print, thanks to the generosity of the benefactors.

Unfortunately, however, precisely in those days the house of Cormons was struck by a heavy mourning. On July 11, 1867, after a few days of illness, Sister Eletta Cucito died, leaving a most sweet memory. To replace her arrived from Udine, as directress and teacher of German and French, Sister Maria Gioseffa Fabris, born in Trieste, she too a devout and very capable religious woman.

We conclude these notes on the origins of the house of Cormons by remembering that the religious community — after a brief period entrusted to the Polish priest residing in the city, *don* Carlo Pniewski, and subsequently to the retired teacher *don* Paolo Fabris of Sevegliano — had as confessor, since the very beginning of January 1867, the Jesuit Father Giuseppe Rossi [10], who maintained the assignment for over twelve years. Father Scrosoppi was happy to entrust to hands so expert the spiritual guidance of his daughters,

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10 Born in Modena in 1820, he spent a large part of his life in the education of youth as a teacher and minister in boarding schools, as well as spiritual director of the seminary. From 1879 he was in Cormons as chaplain in the Church of Santa Caterina, spiritual director and confessor of the house of the Sisters of Providence which, from 1866, had become the generalate house of the congregation; he spent his last years in Padua as director of the house of exercises, where he died in 1883. Most devout to Saint Joseph, he collaborated in the publication in Modena of the periodical "*Il Divoto di san Giuseppe*". Of his untiring work in favor of the citizens of Cormons and of the Sisters of Providence speaks the Tinti, and at the death of Father Rossi, Father Scrosoppi wrote to the sisters exhorting them to pray « for this soul unforgettable by our grateful hearts ».

and between the two there was born a profound mutual friendship which only death could interrupt.

Legal recognition of the Sisters of Providence

The founder, far from insistently requesting legal recognitions for his works, and in particular for the congregation of the sisters, rather felt a certain fear toward it. He firmly based himself on the so-called approval of 1839, which had recognized the private character of the *House of the derelitte* and had exempted it from the control and guardianship of the civil authority. Regarding the sisters, his thought was approximately this:

« *In fact they exist and concretely provide their beneficial work. What more could one want?* »

Naturally, such a position was no longer sufficient.

In a memorandum from the end of 1865 it is recognized that, without a legal recognition:

« *if these schoolmistresses, called Sisters of Providence, were invited to assume the charge of other schools in different places, or to provide elsewhere their charitable cares, they would not have been able to go there regularly.* »

The negotiations for Primiero and for Cormons therefore obliged Father Luigi to seek civil approval for his congregation as well.

It was in this circumstance that a rather significant fact occurred. When the government of Innsbruck received the request for approval for sending the Sisters of Providence to the hospital of Primiero, it immediately went on alert, since in Trentino and Tyrol that name was associated exclusively with the Rosminian sisters, and the figure of Antonio Rosmini was not well-regarded by the Austrian police. For this reason, the government of Innsbruck requested information from the authorities of Friuli, who asked the Father for clarifications, recalling the attempts made twenty years earlier to bring the sisters of Rosmini to Udine, as we have already mentioned in its place.

Once the suspicions were cleared up, the procedures for legal recognition had to face the customary and fatiguing bureaucratic path among the various offices, until on December 19, 1865, Emperor Franz Joseph approved « *the foundation of the religious family of the so-called Sisters of Providence under the patronage of Saint Cajetan, already concretely initiated and existing in Udine.* » On January 3, 1866, the ministry of Vienna gave communication of it to the government of Venice, which on the 11th of the same month informed the Archbishop of Udine. At the same time, the news was communicated to the government of Innsbruck and the cousin of *don* Sartori wrote to him on January 12 that « *the papers had finally reached their destination.* » The pleasant dean of Primiero, in a letter to Father Luigi, commented with wit:

« *But they certainly made us sigh for them!* »

The first « certified schoolmistress » sisters

The perspective of opening female schools in Primiero and in Cormons brought a further novelty inside the congregation. As Tinti writes:

« *At the origin of the institute Father Luigi content himself that the schoolmistress sisters knew little more than reading and writing; he sustained indeed that this was more suitable for a hidden and humble life, and probably this was sufficient in that era of fewer pretensions. But the far-seeing Father understood that the times were changing, that instruction required different methods and that for the schoolmistresses a diploma was by now necessary.* »

His great love for Saint Francis of Assisi made him perhaps remember that point of the Franciscan rule in which it is written:

« *And those who do not know how to read let them not care to learn; but let them consider that above every other thing they must desire to possess the spirit of the Lord.* »

Such a criterion was perfectly in line with his nature and with his spiritual orientation. However, he did not ignore how much the times had changed and he himself encouraged the illiterate sisters to learn to read and write. When then a law of the Austrian State imposed that, even in private institutes, teaching had to be imparted by certified schoolmistresses, he promptly obeyed.

Fortunately, in 1863 a certified schoolmistress from Trieste had entered the congregation, the already mentioned Giuseppina Fabris, who assumed the name of Sister Maria Gioseffa of the Holy Spirit. The founder seized this precious opportunity and opened in the house of Udine a school for the formation of teachers to permit some sisters to obtain the elementary teacher's certificate. As Tinti writes again:

« *The good schoolmistress Sister Maria Giuseppina from Trieste with literary studies, Father Luigi with geography and astronomy and the priest Fantoni with catechesis and methodology, prepared six sisters to undergo the examinations before the scholastic authorities on March 21, 1865; all succeeded in obtaining the imperial royal elementary teacher's certificate with great honor and with notable advantage for the institute.* »

Among the six promoted was Sister Cecilia Piacentini, who at the time was still a novice.

Subsequently, the activity of the elementary teacher's school continued in the house of Cormons, initially under the direction of Fabris — who died at only forty-six years old on October 10, 1872 — and later of Sister Costanza Murero; however, this did not happen without strong resistances on the part of those who would have liked to exclude religious women from the scholastic field. The Jesuit Father Rossi has handed down to us bitter pages regarding those sad oppositions. But even more serious difficulties arose for Father Luigi and for his works due to the political events of 1866.

Chapter 6

GOD AND CAESAR (1866-1870)

Father Luigi's relations with the administrative authorities

The municipal administration of Udine noted day after day how socially useful Scrosoppi's work was. For this reason, the relations between the commune and the Father, in that period, were marked by mutual respect.

On August 11, 1863, a municipal official announced to the meritorious direction of the *House of the derelitte* an upcoming visit of his, expressing the desire to know in person that place of charity. On February 11, 1864, the same official — after an outbreak of smallpox had manifested itself among five inmates in the *Casa del Provvedimento* — invited the director to exhort all the guests and pupils to undergo the new vaccination, toward which strong distrusts still existed. On the following March 23, the municipality assigned to the house an offering of one hundred florins on the occasion of the birthday of Emperor Franz Joseph. Father Luigi thanked for the donation received in support of that poor house.

More than a year later an event happened which deserves to be mentioned.

In the fear of a new cholera epidemic, on September 20, 1865, the municipality asked the Father to be able to use as a lazaretto the farmhouse of the *derelitte* situated outside *Ronchi gate*, offering in exchange an adequate rent. He consented immediately.

The premises were vacated on January 13, 1866, and Father Luigi gave notice of the return, replying to a municipal note of December 21; he affirmed, among other things, that the house would consider itself satisfied with whatever compensation the representatives of the commune should consider appropriate to offer. The latter, however, did not pay a single cent. And he said nothing.

Two years later, however, on August 3, 1867 — when by now much water had passed under the bridges — the municipality renewed the request to create, as it was explained, a place of temporary deposit and observation for those who arrived indisposed by railway, due to the feared spread of cholera. For the rent, the administration made reference to the conditions already established in the minutes of September 1865.

Father Luigi replied on August 5:

« *The undersigned willingly welcomes the request and also accepts the conditions established in that minutes regarding the compensation. However* — he continued — *since the sum due to the House of the derelitte for the occupation of the premises in 1865 has not yet been paid, the writer prays this honorable administration to interest itself so*

that this matter may be resolved as soon as possible. Certain of a favorable reply, I thank you in advance. »

He certainly did not care about that little money; but the occasion was ideal for a polite scolding and a pinch of good-natured irony. Between the lines, he intended to say:

« *You are so hostile toward priests and you are creating problems of every kind for me, yet for us priests to do charity is a pleasing duty; you however should feel the obligation to keep the word given.* » We do not know what outcome this subtle reminder had.

The one who instead continued to behave as a troublesome presence was the Tax Office of the province of Udine. The coffers of the Austrian State had a desperate need for funds to keep the empire united against the dangers that arose everywhere. For this reason taxes increased and the bureaucracy watched over every cent to prevent even the slightest evasion. Some episodes of this period are decidedly curious.

They persisted as in the past, with an almost oppressive insistence, so that the « *great spinning mill* » of the *derelitte* should pay taxes like a normal industrial enterprise. The Father was forced to present supplications and appeals, while the Austrian tax authorities sent final warnings and threats of fines. In a document of October 15, 1863, he demonstrated that the spinning mill was in reality a loss for the house, and concluded:

« *For charity's sake, let it be understood once and for all that this is not a common factory, but a simple school for needy young girls.* » Finally, on January 29, 1864, a decree of exemption was issued. And since the Father had already had to pay the tax, he had then to present a new application to obtain its refund.

Another troublesome disturbance came from an Austrian law of December 13, 1862, on the basis of which there were subjected to an equivalent tax on movable property « *not only communities, unions, and institutes, but also all other corporations and societies, whether they be public or private, to whose members a share of the social capital does not belong.* »

Father Luigi had then to exert himself, making strength upon the sovereign resolution of 1839, to demonstrate that the *House of the derelitte* was nothing of the sort and least of all a society, but rather a simple private dwelling: « *since any other private house that does charity to poor people* — he concluded — *is not hit by the law of December 13, 1862, of the equivalent tax, so the humble undersigned has every reason to believe that the private House of the derelitte is not subject to it either.* » The Austrian financial administration, however, did not wish to hear reasons; consequently, there arose other appeals without end.

But here are some authentic pearls.

The house had purchased, on October 18, 1863, a field and a half on the periphery of Udine from the nobleman Guglielmo Rinoldi; the contract had been signed by Rinoldi and, on behalf of the house, by the Father and by the Superior Mother Teresa Fabris. The finance office noticed that the legalization stamp for the signatures was 75 soldi, a correct figure if the signatures had been two; since instead they were three, warning was given to pay another 25 "*soldi*" for the third signature, besides a fine of 50 soldi. Father Luigi

had to demonstrate that every contract regarding the house had to be signed, for its validity, both by the director and by the superior:

« *although they are two persons* — he observes — *and have affixed their signatures to the contract, they must by law be considered as one single person... Therefore, considered as one single firm, the stamp applied by the notary is regular.* »

This time the finance department gave up.

Shortly after, Father Luigi was forced to subscribe to two forced bonds of the Austrian treasury and was invited to deposit them at the financial office in exchange for a « *receipt on paper without stamp.* » However, the treasury had pretended that his signature be authenticated by a notary, and the Father had executed the order. And behold, he was intimated to pay 50 "*soldi*" for the missing stamp on the legalization, besides a florin of fine. « *If the receipt* — protested Father Luigi on October 2, 1864 — *by law is exempt from stamp, consequently the authentication also will be exempt from stamp. For such reason the undersigned has had the authentication executed on plain paper and not with the intention of defrauding the rights of the treasury.* » In this case too the complaint was accepted. To subscribe to forced bonds and to see oneself moreover extorted was truly the limit.

A limit that will be however surpassed when, after the annexation to Italy, the Father will be reproached for having subscribed to those very bonds. As if he had done it with pleasure!

In this last episode he demonstrates his scrupulous conscience also in the fulfillment of civic duties, where he affirms that he never intended to defraud the rights of the treasury. For the same reason he defended himself with extreme vigor when, on September 14, 1864, the finance department reproached him for the lack of notification of some lands registered in the name of the house, as if he had wished to evade the tax on real estate. The Father was able to demonstrate that part of those lands had been regularly declared; that for another field there had been an error of registration, corrected later on May 12, 1863; and regarding the remaining ones — a house in Udine and half a field outside the city — he specified that « *they are the exclusive property of the schoolmistresses.* » These last assets, in fact, did not appear among the real estate of the *House of the derelitte* and, through particular researches, we have ascertained that it was a house owned by Mother Teresa Fabris and two plots belonging to other religious women. From this contestation it emerges that for at least a decade the congregation of the sisters had constituted a *de facto* society with assets of its own, of which still in 1864 De Giorgio, deceased in 1855, Gaspardis, deceased in 1862, and Colloredo, at that time still living, appeared as administering nuns.

We find no document indicating that the finance department of the Kingdom of Italy later tormented the Father as the Austrian finance had done. The problems, in the new order of things, had an origin, so to speak, higher up, since they sprang from the Italian legislation regarding religious institutes.

The War of 1866

On June 19, 1866, the Kingdom of Italy, allied with Prussia, declared war on Austria with the objective of reuniting Veneto with the motherland. On June 24, the two armies clashed in the bloody battle of Custoza. In that combat fell, at only twenty-six years of age, Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi, son of Giuseppe and cousin of Father Luigi, who had enlisted as a volunteer among the Italian ranks. As a descendant of that fallen man reports, to whose memory the silver medal was conferred, Father Luigi would later go several times to those places to celebrate holy mass in suffrage of his relative.

Charity pushed the founder once again to offer the work of his religious women for the assistance of the wounded. The *podestà* of Udine requested six of them for the nursing home, where one hundred and sixty sick and wounded people were counted, and the *podestà* replied on July 1:

« *I reserve to myself to come personally to render to you the due thanks for the principles of authentic altruism of yours, who by right enjoy the esteem of the entire city.* »

Unfortunately, how changeable is the esteem of men!

On July 26, the udinese Augusto Berghinz, at the command of a small troop of lancers of Aosta, entered triumphantly into the small square that still today bears his name, situated in front of the current Temple-Ossuary dedicated to the fallen of the 1915-1918 war.

The entrance of the Italian troops into Udine was accompanied by hostile demonstrations against the clergy and religious institutes. The chronicles of the era recount a priest who, surprised on the street by the enraged crowd, was loaded onto one of those crate carts (that is, coop carts, those used for poultry) used to transport animals to the market or to the slaughterhouse, and dragged through the city amid public derision. As happens in the most vile and dark recesses of the human soul, not a few were those who sought in an improvised patriotism and in a noisy anticlericalism a pretext to cover their own hidden faults: and the old informants and denouncers of the Austrian police shouted louder than all:

« *Down with priests! Long live Italy!* »

The foolish rage of the sectarians did not spare even the white female and religious veils of those who spent themselves to assist the suffering, so much so that the Sisters of Providence had to withdraw frightened. However, on July 28 the new *podestà* Beltrame wrote « *to the most reverend don Carlo Scrosoppi* », praying him to send back immediately six « *Sisters of Mercy* » to the Nursing Home; on August 7 the physician Sguarzi, operating in that hospital, would request that two of them be left to continue the assistance to patients in most grave conditions.

Finally peace was signed in Vienna on October 3 and on the 22nd of the same month the populations of Veneto and Friuli expressed through a plebiscite their will to unite with the Kingdom of Italy. Since the first days of August Quintino Sella had arrived in Udine, in the capacity of governor with full powers in the name of the King of Italy. On November 15 there arrived in the city, amid a waving of tricolors and the enthusiasm of

the crowd, Vittorio Emanuele II; at the former Belgrado palace, current seat of the province, Archbishop Monsignor Casasola read an address of homage in the presence of the colleges of priests (that is, the chapters) of Udine and Cividale and of the city clergy. The King much liked the homage and wished the Archbishop at his right during the banquet that followed shortly after: acting with the noble, though vain, intention of placating anticlerical hatreds and favoring the pacification of minds. However, during the same dinner, there was someone who fueled the contrasts with an inopportune ostentation of patriotic zeal [1].

The mother house and the novitiate transferred to Cormons

It is necessary to recall to memory the laws of suppression of religious entities enacted by the Kingdom of Italy to understand fully the state of profound anxiety in which the religious communities of Veneto lay at the moment when the Italian army arrived. Nothing else was to be expected except the closure of houses and the confiscation of assets by the State, as effectively happened.

For such reason, as Tinti reports:

« *Father Luigi acted with wise prudence and firm determination and, in full agreement with the sisters, decided to transfer to Cormons the mother house, requesting to this end, through the Superior General, the consent of the Bishop of Udine, from whom he detached it, and of that of Gorizia, to whose authority he subjected it.* »

On the date of June 30, in fact, Mother Teresa Fabris wrote to Monsignor Casasola:

« *Most grave circumstances, which cause me an unutterable sorrow, require that I communicate to Your Illustrious and Most Reverend Lordship the decision which, together with the senior sisters, I have considered myself obliged to take: that of departing from Udine, where the congregation does not possess a house of its own, to go to Cormons. There I intend to settle in the convent which is property of our congregation, leaving however in Udine, for the houses that find themselves under our direction, the number of schoolmistresses and of personnel necessary for assistance and education.* »

In addition to the opinion of the two archbishops, from subsequent documents it emerges that the clearance of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in Rome was requested, which would have granted it only temporarily (*ad tempus*), until the political situation had cleared up and stabilized.

Mother Fabris therefore left with a heart full of anguish her beloved native city and the *House of the derelitte* , the place in which she had consecrated herself to God more than thirty years before; she transferred to Cormons together with other sisters and five novices. For the latter the ceremony of clothing was celebrated on February 26, 1867, by the venerable scholastic canon Monsignor Domenico Castellani, delegated by the

[1] It was Monsignor Gianfrancesco Banchieri, canon primicerio of the chapter, who together with the dean of the same chapter and with the Archbishop had welcomed the King at the station and were invited to the royal banquet. But the dean Monsignor Giovanni Paolo Foraboschi had gotten himself excused (cf. Part I, Chapter 4, paragraph The studies of the young Luigi). At the table Banchieri improvised a sonnet in which he greeted Vittorio Emanuele as « redeemer » of the « Italian soil » and made wishes for Rome as capital of Italy. (Cf. Atti del Capitolo, vol. Xl (1859-1891) f. 71, A.C.U.; Ricordi storici in Pagine Friulane, 11-1-1891, p. 177).

Archbishop of Gorizia. That was the only ceremony of such kind celebrated in Cormons. Starting from 1868 and until the death of the founder, all other clothings were held again in Udine, where, in the meantime, the novitiate had been brought back. Simultaneously, the *House of the derelitte* remained entrusted to the care of Mother Strazzolini, who on March 7, 1867, was formally elected « *superior* ».

In this passage it must be understood that, with the election of March 7, Strazzolini assumed also the role of superior general for the houses situated in Italian territory: namely the *House of the derelitte* , the house of Orzano, the hospital of Portogruaro, the *Opera di santa Zita*, the Institute of the Deaf-Mutes, and the Infant Asylum. On the contrary, Mother Fabris maintained the office of superior general for the houses in Austrian territory, that is, Cormons, Primiero and, starting from 1869, Tesero.

This apparent splitting of authority, rendered inevitable by the wretched diplomatic relations between Italy and Austria, had an end in October 1873, when Strazzolini returned to being the superior general of all the houses and Mother Fabris was able to re-enter Udine, where the assignment of mistress of novices was assigned to her.

Father Luigi did not even have the possibility of greeting the small group of poor departing exiles, since at that moment he found himself forced to bed by fevers in the house of the Filippini.

Father Luigi arrested

In the meantime, the Jesuits, whom Father Luigi had hosted for about nine months, had departed from that house; into that same house arrived his brother *don* Giovanni Battista, removed from his post as archpriest of Sacile. For that building and for the annexed church there began that painful Calvary which would conclude with the confiscation and with the suppression of the order of the Filippini.

But Father Luigi himself personally experienced the effects of the prevailing anticlericalism.

We have already mentioned Barbara Mayerhoffer [2], daughter of a Hungarian officer, who had been received together with her sister among the *derelitte* in 1852, at only four years of age, and who later became a sister with the name of Sister Tranquilla. Of her there remains to us a long report, in which she begins by saying that from the age of 17 or 18 she nourished the desire to become a Sister of Providence, but she had not spoken of it with anyone except with her confessor; she had not spoken of it because her precarious health appeared as an obstacle to acceptance. And behold, one day the Father said to her words similar to these:

[2] Regarding the Mayerhoffer sisters, Maria and Barbara, a certain confusion or inversion is found between the two. In the register of the founder and of the congregation, Maria (born in 1845) is identified as Sister Tranquilla and Barbara (born in 1848) as Sister Perpetua. If instead we consult the Register of the deceased of the udinese parish of the Carmine, Maria would result to be Sister Perpetua, who died at 50 years of age on March 16, 1896 (born therefore in 1845). Consequently, the Sister Tranquilla who appears in this episode would be identifiable with Barbara, born in 1848. The exact identification does not, however, have a determining value, even if the narrative seems to adapt itself better to the young woman born in 1848 rather than to that of 1845.

« *I know what you desire, but for now remain cheerful and do not think about it. I assure you that you will recover and you too will become a sister. I myself will teach you, at the proper time, what you must do to be accepted.* »

Up to this point Sister Tranquilla wished to emphasize how Father Luigi had the gift of reading hearts and of foreseeing the future.

But she continues by offering us the account of the detention and interrogation of Father Luigi by the police, which took place on an unspecified day toward the end of 1866 or at the beginning of 1867. We report it faithfully:

« *Once I made a journey from Udine to Portogruaro with him; someone had accused him of having begun to transfer the sisters. No sooner had we gotten into the carriage, just as we came out of the large gate — which at that time was mounted here in the courtyard, because we kept the animals and the carriages here — just as we came out, behold two guards who stopped us and asked the Father where he was going. He, entirely calm and tranquil, replied with frankness: I am going to Portogruaro. They insisted and said that it was not true and that he must tell the truth. But yes, blessed men, I am going precisely there.*

Well then, — they said — *let us proceed.*

They conducted us into the courtyard of a large barrack; there they told the Father to get down from the carriage and to go up to the upper floors. He remained there more than an hour with these soldiers.

Then, when they considered it appropriate, they came to ask us also if we minded getting down from the carriage. We, most ready, replied no and made to get down. Then, seeing us so determined and indifferent, they left us inside and made the horse advance step by step. Our good Father proceeded on foot, in the midst of the soldiers; he seemed precisely blessed Jesus going to Calvary, surrounded by an immense multitude of people who followed him shouting frantically: To prison, to prison!

I know not how to describe how agitated I felt; I wept bitterly at seeing the good Father and at hearing those voices. It seemed to me as if I were going to hell.

Finally they brought us to court, and there we were interrogated by several persons, always under surveillance. There arrived at last the last official charged with the examination. This one called first the reverend Father; then, for fear that the good Father might suggest to me what to reply, he ordered that I enter immediately after him. I was very afraid and did not want to go; I told that gentleman to call the sister first, because I did not know what to tell him. I did not know his astuteness then. But the good Father, who understood everything, said to me: Go dear, reply to everything he will ask you.

This gentleman invited me to sit near him and treated me with such kindness that I immediately took courage. Then he began to interrogate me and said to me: Listen, dear, do you know how to tell me where Father Luigi is going? I replied to him that he was going to Portogruaro.

To do what?

To find the sisters, as he has always done, to see if they need anything.

And the sister?

The sister perhaps will stop there, and another one will come back.

And you, are you going to stay?

I hope not, as they told me: I am going because I am not very well and for this reason the superiors are taking me to get a little movement and to take a little air.

And when will you be back?

Perhaps Saturday.

Listen dear, have you ever heard it said by your Father that he must transfer the nuns? I replied to him no, that I had never heard it.

Tell me, who is it that commands in the place of Father Luigi until his return?

It is his brother, the vice-director, or the superior.

Do you know what there is in the carriage?

In the carriage there will perhaps be the clothes of the sisters, sheets, shirts, and what is necessary for the sick.

Tell me, do you love Father Luigi very much?

If I do not love him, whom should I love?

Do the superiors and the nuns love you? Do they ever punish you?

They love us so much that they have sacrificed their whole life to do us good, and they love us like true mothers; and if sometimes they are forced to give us some punishment, they do it in a way that their interior sorrow is perceived, and one cannot help but love them even then.

Is it a long time that you are in the convent?

I went there as a child.

Would you also like to become a nun?

Oh, about this I do not think, because if I have no health I cannot even take it into consideration.

Well, courage, goodbye dear. Continue to be good, I will come to visit you in the convent. Send the mother inside to me. — And with her he settled the business in a few words —.

We remained there from five o'clock in the morning until half past ten. Then he inspected the carriage to see if I had told the truth; finally he dismissed us.

No sooner had we gotten back into the carriage than the Father began to pray in thanksgiving. Then he asked me what I had said for so long to that gentleman, and I related everything to him. He comforted himself on hearing that I had known how to reply so well and that, thanks to me, he had escaped prison. »

The Tinti, in reporting the account, makes Sister Tranquilla say:

« *The accusation moved at the Police Headquarters was that Father Luigi was transferring the funds of the congregation out of the State. But, seeing that the alleged*

treasure had transformed into a sack of bandages and gauze for the infirm, that employee dismissed us courteously. »

And he concludes by affirming that it became known later that the one who vilely denounced and calumniated Father Luigi was a person helped by him, whose daughter he maintained gratuitously in his institute. Unfortunately, in those times of political agitations, easy credit and welcome listening were given to the enemies of the clergy and of religious communities.

While the Father remained for over five hours under the interrogation of the police, the news of his arrest reached the *House of the derelitte* ; one can easily imagine the dismay of the sisters. When the next day he returned from Portogruaro, all pressed around him weeping. He scolded them good-naturedly and closed the affair with these tranquil words: — *Everything is the will of God!*

It must be recognized that, at least in this case, the anonymous employee used civil manners. A part of the population, instead, did not use them.

For example, there was a poor laborer who insulted Father Luigi every time he met him on the street. The Father endured patiently for a long time. But one day he approached him and knew how to win him over to such a point that he conducted him to the *House of the derelitte* , listened to his sufferings, and compensated him for the offenses received by giving him five florins. The poor man was transformed by it. From then on he began to frequent the Father, who instructed him and led him back to the sacraments.

In that same climate it happened then that the boys — with the typical cruelty of the small ones, learned from the grown-ups — derided him, shouting behind him « *hunchback* », when age had bent him a little, or more commonly « *sack of coal* ». It will take more than sixty years before this hatred against the priest attenuates.

But these hardships common to all priests were a small thing in comparison with the shouts and public demonstrations against the Pope, the Church, and the Archbishop: unworthy scenes which in those years followed one another incessantly, and every occasion was good to provoke them.

On March 15, 1867, the archbishop's palace was invaded and sacked, and Monsignor Casasola barely saved his life. This happened because in the ceremony for the birthday of Vittorio Emanuele II there had been recited, according to the instructions of the Pontiff, a common prayer instead of the specific one for the King. In the same year, Giuseppe Garibaldi delivered from the balcony of the Mangilli palace, on the square that now bears his name, a most harsh speech against the Pope, the priests, and the friars; there followed a procession that shouted against the Church. An evening of 1869, in protest against the death sentence of Monti and Tognetti — those responsible for the bomb attack on the pontifical Sirtori barracks — there broke out a demonstration even more violent than usual; in front of the archbishop's palace the effigy of Pius IX was burned amid unimaginable shouts.

It is useless to add that on September 20, 1870, and subsequently every year on that date, true celebrations of anticlericalism were held.

Sometimes those clamoring processions succeeded in passing also along *Ronchi street*, in front of the *House of the derelitte* . Nicoletta Zanussi, widow Antonia Comi, born in Udine in 1859, testified at the diocesan process in 1932:

« *I remember that one evening, when I was thirteen years old, we heard a crowd of men pass in front of the institute and shout: Out with the nuns, out with the friars! And we, frightened, had all taken refuge under the portico, where Father Luigi comforted us saying to us: Pray, little daughters, pray and remain with God!* »

Attempted suppression of the *House of the derelitte*

On December 21, 1866, the Tax Office of the Kingdom sent to the direction of the *House of the derelitte* a copy of a notice, dated December 14, with which the superiors and administrators of religious houses, congregations, and other similar entities were formally invited to present by the 29th of the same month the declaration of the properties of their own institute, using the forms provided by the same office. This meant that the *House of the derelitte* , according to the tax administration, fell also within the scope of application of the law of suppression.

Father Luigi replied on December 24, explaining the nature and objectives of the house and declaring that:

« *such an institute is therefore evidently excluded from the provisions of the law mentioned previously, that of July 7, 1866* — which had extended to Veneto the law of suppression of 1862 — *while if by this one wished to consider it hit, it would be necessary to say that all charitable institutes were subject to suppression, and that a similar fate should hit also the civil hospital and especially the Nursing Home, to which the Institute of the derelitte is particularly comparable, with the single difference that in its field of charity that one houses poor and needy elderly people, while this one welcomes young girls belonging to the poorest classes.* »

The Father had every reason to emphasize that the law hit « *institutions of religious order, not those of simple charity like the mentioned house.* » In the specific case, the law could have hit the congregation of the sisters; however, the *House of the derelitte* was not born from the congregation, but it had been the congregation to be born from the house.

We do not know how much he had to exert himself to convince the zealous bureaucrats of this logical distinction. We possess only a brief note, in which reference is made to an:

« *ordinance of the prefecture no. 6279, of May 14, 1867, which communicates the decree of the Ministry of the Interior under the date of April 24, 1867, no. 38530, relative to the suppression of the House of the derelitte of Udine, addressed to the local municipality, to the House of the derelitte , and to the mortgage office of Udine.* »

Evidently the decree of the Ministry had recognized the validity of the objections raised by the Father, since no further mention was made of the measure of suppression.

Recourse was then made — on the part of the civil authorities — to another law of the Kingdom of Italy, that of August 3, 1862, on the administration of pious works (charitable institutes), extended to the Venetian provinces and to that of Mantua by the law of July 28, 1866. From that moment there began a long controversy to transform the House into an entity recognized by the State (a legal entity) subject to the vigilance and authority of the civil powers, a condition which Father Luigi was absolutely not disposed to accept.

The *House of the derelitte* erected into a legal entity

The bureaucratic battle regarding this matter between the Ministry of the Interior, the Prefect, the Provincial Deputation, and the Municipal Council of Udine on one side, and Father Scrosoppi on the other, dragged on for thirteen years.

We have at our disposal as many as eighty-six index cards, each of which marks a fatiguing stage of this affair; the relative documents are preserved in a file of two hundred typewritten pages [3]. Behind these papers hide innumerable personal meetings, long private discussions, public debates in the municipal and provincial councils, extensive interventions by the local press and, above all, the profound anxieties of Father Luigi. It comes naturally to wonder whether the illustrious administrators (that is, the *patres conscripti*) of every level would not have done better to dedicate time and mental energy to the repression of crime or to the improvement of the economy, rather than obstructing a poor priest who desired only to do good and, moreover, at his own expense.

Let us briefly retrace the main stages of this difficult path. The first official act on the question was a note from the Ministry of the Interior of January 14, 1868, in which the concession of April 15, 1840 — which had exempted the House from government control — was declared lapsed, and some modifications to the regulations then in force were proposed.

On July 16, 1870, the Municipal Council established which city charitable institutions were to be considered "*pious works*" (public welfare entities), including therein also the *House of the derelitte* . For the latter, however, the application of article 25 of the law was recommended, which established:

« *The founders of institutes who personally maintain the administration of them can be exempted, in whole or in part, from the obligations and formalities provided for by the present law.* »

A similar resolution was issued on December 29, 1871, by the Provincial Deputation, which considered it necessary to dispense the founder, *don* Luigi Scrosoppi, from the administrative obligations provided for by the law. Rather, the Provincial Deputation was the only one to side with the Father, since on July 15, 1872, it revoked the previous decision, expressing the opinion that the *House of the derelitte* should be considered, for the moment, a purely private institution.

[3] A.L.S., fasc. 16-17.

However, the Prefecture did not give up and on January 4, 1873, sent Councilor Pasqualini to inspect the house. On that occasion Father Luigi, in the presence of Count Trento, had this protest entered in the minutes:

« *Not out of a lack of respect toward the civil authority, but out of the duty I have to defend the rights of this private House of the derelitte , founded by me together with my brother Father Carlo Filaferro, I do not consider that I must submit the institute to the inspection of the supervisory authority regarding administration, as happens by law in the institutes subject to it.* »

He renewed the same protest on January 16, 1874.

On June 30, 1875, the Municipal Council of Udine confirmed the decision of five years before, despite some liberal newspapers and Count Niccolò Mantica [(4)] — persons by no means suspect of sympathies toward the clergy — having requested unanimously that the Father be left in peace. It was of no use. On September 14 of the same year, the Council of State established that the house fell within the law on pious works and imposed upon the Father to present within two months an organic statute (that is, a constitutive regulation).

In vain an anonymous friend of his sought some influential intercessor so that the decision of the Council of State might be modified. He wrote in his memorial:

« *Father Luigi Scrosoppi is too well known by the people of Udine for them not to feel part of the tribulations that are caused to him, especially for the good he performs through the house opened by him and by his deceased brother for the benefit of poor young girls. Administrative guardianship, besides being an insult to those who have sacrificed their life and their own assets for the poor, would inevitably lead to the dissolution of the institute, since Father Scrosoppi considers that he has no need of supervision and because, with his retirement, the trust of the citizens would fail.* »

It seems indeed that the Father seriously thought, in the summer of 1875, of abandoning everything, rather than bending to provisions that he considered unjust and harmful to the house. Perhaps he was dissuaded, and certainly the sorrow of leaving the orphans to an uncertain destiny held him back.

However, he did not make up his mind to draw up that requested organic statute. On December 10, 1875, he wrote to the Prefect of Udine:

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[4] Born in Udine (1835-1900), of upright and industrious life, he held many offices in which he brought disinterestedness and constant search for the public good. He published many historical-statistical studies. His funeral took place in civil form. (Cf. Giornale di Udine, 22-5-1900). Tinti recalls that Mantica at the international congress of charity of Milan (August 29-September 5, 1880) made a report which he then gave to the press. In it, after having praised the administration of the Tomadini Institute and of the House of the *derelitte* he wrote: « We are vigilant; and when an administration goes badly either economically or morally, let us change it without regard, whether it be ruled by priests or by seculars, but when it goes well, let us let it continue tranquil, the heads be they seculars or priests, without continuously putting spokes in the wheels, as on several occasions it has been attempted to do precisely with the Tomadini and *derelitte* institutes, only because the heads were priests ». And with this he probably referred to the skirmish between the civil authorities and Fr. Scrosoppi to oblige him to submit the House of the *derelitte* to the law on Pious works. In the same report Mantica loyally affirmed of himself: « Anything but a friend of the priest, I shall however never know how to damn to ostracism a beneficial man who gives all of himself to the poor, because he is a priest ». (Il congresso internazionale di beneficenza - Relazione di N. Mantica, Udine 1880, pp. 147-149).

« *My usual ailments, become more frequent and stronger because of the sad situation and the current rigid season, have not yet permitted me to prepare adequately the requested statute.* »

He was urged again by the Municipality of Udine on August 17, 1877, and on December 18, 1878. Finally he presented it on January 22, 1879, to the Prefecture which, in the name of the Ministry, asked him for some amendments on February 9, 1879, and on April 7, 1880.

Sending the text again with the latest corrections, on May 7, 1880, he wrote the following letter to the Prefecture:

« *In response to your note of April 7 last, no. 5544, the writer re-presents the organic statute for the Institute of the derelitte of Udine, so that this authority may please to transmit it again to the Government for the subsequent procedures.*

Having conformed myself fully to the wishes of the Ministry of the Interior, satisfying every request, I hope that every obstacle to the definitive approval of the statute is finally removed.

Since my youth I have dedicated myself entirely to the good of the institute, founded by me and by my brother Father Carlo Filaferro of venerated memory; Divine Providence has always blessed it, since, despite the small patrimony, the number of internal female pupils has always increased, as has that of the external ones who frequent it.

Finding myself now in an advanced age, every delay in the approval of the statute is for me a source of great regret and anxiety.

In order to accelerate the approval, I declare that I renounce the credit I claim toward the institute by title of charity, provided that the Government of the King approves the present statute which, in its current form, responds better to the purposes of the institute and to the spirit of the laws in force on pious works. »

The statute was approved on June 17, 1880, by royal decree of Umberto I. On the basis of it, the administration remained in the hands of the Father — in the capacity of founder — until his death. Subsequently, the civil authority appointed an administrator; it was precisely for this reason that the former house of the deaf-mutes was renamed "*Administrative House*".

Generosity of Father Luigi

Although the transformation of the house into a legal entity had resulted very difficult for him to accept, Father Luigi did not fail to demonstrate his own disinterestedness and his generosity.

Already on November 17, 1866, the lawyer Antonio Zamparo and Count Tommaso Gallici had ascertained, through an accurate revision of the account books, a credit of the Father toward the house of over thirty-five thousand lire for subsidies provided from 1852 to 1865 for the purpose of balancing the annually losing budgets. To guarantee him at least in part such a sum — in reality to avoid the feared confiscation of assets — with the approval of the Archbishop of Udine as president of the house, the Superior Mother

Strazzolini had sold on April 16, 1868, to Father Luigi the estate of the Missionaries, the small houses purchased from the *dimesse* and the former Cremese ones used as the *Casa del Provvedimento*; four days later she ceded to him the convent of Cormons, with the burden of paying the remaining debt toward the vendor Antonio Stua. For the same reason, on April 18 the agricultural colony of Orzano had been sold to *don* Antonio Feruglio, who assumed the task of refunding the assets brought as dowry by thirteen sisters and other creditors, among whom were *don* Fantoni and Monsignor Francesco Cernazai.

On June 11, 1875 — when the question for the pious work was at its peak — Fabio Cernazai, Alessandro Biancuzzi, and Eugenio Ferrari had ascertained a further credit of the Father of about sixty thousand lire, for analogous supplementary subsidies to the budgets from 1865 to 1874.

Once the statute was approved, Father Luigi released in 1880 the declaration:

« *to consider as definitively and absolutely devolved for the benefit of the institute the disbursements made by me and by my deceased brother for the maintenance of the house for the period of many years, the revenues of the institute not being sufficient for this. These subsidies of ours* — he adds — *were held in evidence to assert upon them our reasons in case one had wished to give to the institute a direction not in conformity with our will.* »

Naturally no account had been taken of the time and total dedication dedicated by the Father to the work. And yet, if the house was considered in the likeness of public institutions, an adequate salary should have been recognized to him. Precisely to such a benefactor of the city and of society was his old age embittered with the wearing pressure of those who had not poured a drop of sweat and did not offer even a penny, but pretended every control...

However, if it is as easy as it is cruel to combine factious laws to the detriment of the generous, saints know the poetry of charity, ample and submissive in giving and ignorant of possession. Ignorant of possession, at least down here.

Why the Father opposed such tenacious resistance to the erection of the work into a legal entity

It was during this diatribe that someone addressed criticisms to the Father, to which in the memorandum of reply the qualifications now of « *injurious* » and now of « *infamous* » are given: the memorandum reveals the hand of a lawyer, but the strength of the tone must have come from the holily indignant soul of Father Luigi. The most malicious insinuation attributed to him that he had begged for recognitions and support from the Austrian government, while stubbornly opposing the interference of the Italian government. The historical falsehood of the accusation and the poison that was subtly implicit in it could not but offend the jealous sense of truth and justice with which he was permeated. Father Luigi had fought strenuously under Austria for exemption from government controls and to reclaim the sacred freedom of Christian charity. If he had acted thus under a regime at least in appearance respectful of religious values, why should

he not continue in such behavior under a regime whose laws and practice were dominated by an entirely different inspiration?

The causes of the Father's resistance are described more subtly in an anonymous and undated report to the provincial deputation, with these somewhat contorted words:

« *For whomever insisted on investigating the origins, he would be forced to recognize them in a sort of conventional aversion, which in certain spheres one seeks to infuse even into the most well-intentioned spirits — this, at least, is admitted of the Father! — against the principle of secular authority, which one sees with fear, due to old prejudices, spreading the prestige and influence of its activity in those institutions which had been believed to be an exclusive and at the same time an instrument of power for a Cause whose kingdom is not of this world.* »

Father Scrosoppi could have replied that charity is done precisely in this world, and that the true intention of the adversaries was to eliminate the priest and the sister — and therefore the religious influence — from the bed of the sick and from the side of the orphans. Naturally « *in the name of freedom* »!

But he, with his realistic spirit, loved to emphasize especially the absurd practical consequences that would have derived from government interference:

« *Let it be told to me* — he wrote in 1868 —: *supposing that now the house found itself under the supervisory authority, the director or the administrator of it, what should he do today, when the house is without a penny, without polenta, entirely deprived of what is needed? The supervisory authority should either provide it, or command that the house be closed, putting onto the street all these poor young girls sheltered in it. No one would furnish anything to the house without having a guarantee of being satisfied. And who will make this guarantee? Certainly neither the director nor the administrator could do it, upon the danger of having to succumb to the payment. This year alone I am exposed to expenses for more than 3,000 lire.* »

The founder had to suffer above all because the dedication of the sisters was unrecognized, who could not even be called sisters, but only schoolmistresses. It has been seen that for those assigned to the asylum the deposition of the religious habit was even wanted. What would have become of the work without them?

« *If the schoolmistresses left the house* — he wrote — *what would become of the house? If the schoolmistresses find themselves in the house, is it not perhaps because it is a private house? And regulated by its present statute? If modifications were made, would they continue to stay there? In my view certainly no. How then, salaried schoolmistresses, without patrimonial revenues? Can one therefore request a royal decree for the pious house, while, before this could be granted, the house might have failed?* »

The Father did not request, for himself and for the sisters, but the right to be able to sacrifice themselves in works of good; it fell to him instead also to discuss with those who disputed, but without sacrificing themselves and duly remunerated. In the end, however, he paid the tribute wanted by Caesar. Fortunately, despite many humiliations and contradictions, the works were able to survive and the nuns continued their mission;

not recognized by human law, but by someone higher up, yes. And it was this that counted.

The works of charity, although with difficulty, were saved because their assumption would have implied financial burdens that the government did not want to take upon itself. The slaughter, instead, was easy when it was a question only of taking. And Father Scrosoppi did not suffer only for his Filippini, but also for other congregations. In September 1866 — writes Tinti — at the suppression of the nuns of Saint Clare [5] and the seizure of their convent, which had already occurred in a manner and under circumstances very deplorable, Father Luigi, who extended his love and his cares to the other institutions as well, suffered most grave regret from it, and initiated all procedures, and used all possible means to obtain a premises where those sacred virgins of the Lord could shelter as best they could, continuing to live in community. From the thirteenth-century convent of the *Uccellis* they passed, in fact, into the convent formerly of the Servants of Mary near the basilica of *Le Grazie*, and the brother of Father Luigi became their confessor and spiritual director.

Nor did he feel less suffering, he a Franciscan tertiary, for the suppression of the Capuchins; and he rejoiced some years later, when he saw their convent redeemed and the family reconstituted.

The First Vatican Council and the occupation of Rome

While the Vatican Council was being celebrated in Rome, the newspaper *L'Unità Cattolica* became the promoter of a collection among priests, proposing as a minimum « *the offering of a mass* ».

In the three volumes "*Voti del Clero Italiano per la definizione dogmatica dell'infallibilità pontificia"*, under the date of June 5 we find also the names of about fifty priests of the city of Udine, of whom that of Father Scrosoppi for 5.04 lire and of his brother *don* Battista and of *don* Felice Linda, confessor of the *derelitte*, for 2 lire each. A small sign of how much the Father sighed for that halo around the papal tiara.

Shortly after, on September 20, the Italian troops penetrated into Rome and the Pontifical State had an end. Today, for us, it is entirely unimaginable the discouragement and the bewilderment that the good Catholics of the time felt from it. Father Luigi stood unshakably with the « *prisoner of the Vatican* ».

On October 8, the mayor of Udine, Count Gropplero, wrote to the Father:

« *I have the pleasure of communicating to Your Lordship that at the municipal treasury there exists a payment order of the sum of 100 lire by title of subsidy in favor of that institute, which the municipal junta has decided to arrange to celebrate the great*

[5] The monastery of s. Chiara founded in 1294 by Enrico Stanca called Uccelluto was an educational institute. Suppressed by the Napoleonic decree of 1810, it was released as a boarding school to the nuns. Having changed government, it was again recognized as a religious community until 1866, when, secularized, it was used for female education under the name of Uccellis Institute; (Cf. F. Di Toppo, Sull'istituzione della Commissaria Uccellis - Fondazione e storia del Collegio, Udine 1875, pp. 7-10).

national event fulfilled with the Roman plebiscite, which united those provinces to the rest of Italy. »

Obviously the Father did not go to collect that donation so motivated; he wrote in his own hand on the municipal note: « *Not answered* ». On March 23, 1867 — eight days after the archbishop's palace had been invaded and sacked — an equal sum had been delivered to the House: and a widespread tradition, which is to be referred to that circumstance, says that he rejected it.

In 1867 the offering was accompanied by the humiliation of the Archbishop; in 1870 by that of the Pope. Money of such a kind certainly did not appear to him suitable to buy a little bread for the poor orphans.

Chapter 7

THE CONGREGATION SPREADS IN TRENTINO (1868-1876)

The good name of the sisters of Primiero

About eighty kilometers separate Fiera di Primiero from Trento.

In the mid-nineteenth century three hours of carriage were required to cover the first twenty kilometers, from Trento to Levico; and an entire day to climb from Levico to Primiero, proceeding for the most part on muleback among the Dolomites.

The jovial dean of Primiero, *don* Sartori, traveled that road several times a year to repair to the curia of Trento. Along the way, staying overnight in some rectory or stopping in another to catch his breath, he openly praised the Sisters of Providence, who had been a true blessing for his parish. This did not fail to arouse, obviously, the healthy envy of his confreres. That mountain priest accustomed to fatigue had had an excellent intuition.

There was however no need for the praises proclaimed with a loud voice by the dean; the good fame of the religious women who arrived in Primiero from Udine spread rapidly along the valleys, especially in the Valsugana. Since, if evil on earth flies with the rapidity of a vulture, by the grace of God good also diffuses, perhaps with less fast paces but with the grace of doves.

Fiera di Primiero (TN). Panorama and s. Giuseppe hospital. The sisters began their service in 1866.

Sister Gioseffa Luigia Visentini exercised perhaps an authority a little too rigid over the religious community of Primiero; but, in compensation, the sisters offered an admirable and exemplary service, both in the assistance to the sick of the small hospital, and in the school for young girls, and in the festive oratory and in the congregation of the «

daughters of the Sacred Heart », which was so close to the heart of the dean and which Father Luigi recommended in all his letters to those distant spiritual daughters.

It is not surprising therefore that the Sisters of Providence were very soon invited to assume the management of other institutions in Levico and in Roncegno of Valsugana, although such initiatives did not later have a positive outcome.

Works unfulfilled in Levico and in Roncegno

Levico is a beautiful small town at 307 meters above sea level, placed almost at the western beginning of the wide and fertile Valsugana. Lying on the southern slopes of the Canzana and of Mount Fronte, dense with pines that mirror themselves in the lake of the same name, which the hilly bastion of Tenna separates from the lake of Caldonazzo, five times greater. Precisely in those years — in 1860 — they were beginning to exploit industrially the sources of mineral and arsenical waters that gush near Vetriolo, and which made of Levico a sought-after station for the cure of anemia and skin diseases.

In Levico there was then a small hospital of fifteen or twenty beds, administered by the commune.

On July 16, 1869 *don* Deoprani, pro-dean and director of the congregation of charity, wrote to *don* Sartori praying him to mediate so that the Sisters of Providence would assume its management. And *don* Sartori wrote in his turn to Father Luigi with his usual quick summary manner:

« *You therefore make in such way that the business goes to port; there would be also there the possibility of doing good, so as not to have later to render account of the good that could be done and has not been done.* »

The dean of Primiero did not fail to send many greetings to *don* Fantoni on behalf of the nightingale, which in those days — he said — had remained in silence due to the molting.

The founder replied to him that the Sisters of Providence would not be contrary to accepting the direction and assistance of the hospital of Levico, provided that the political situation improved, and set forth in seven points the minimum conditions necessary to open the new house. But the matter had no sequel, precisely because the political events grew worse.

« *Here one sighs* — he concluded — *so as not to weep, waiting from day to day, after a storm, for the beautiful serene.* »

Instead of the good weather came the occupation of Rome, while over the *House of the derelitte* and over the congregation of the sisters the shadow of oppressive laws gathered ever more menacingly.

In the heart of Valsugana, in the small village of Roncegno, there was a hospital even smaller than the one in Levico. It housed four to eight patients during the summer season and eight to fifteen in the winter. On December 28, 1870, *don* Alessio Pretis, the local

parish priest, asked Father Luigi, on behalf of the municipality, to send two of his nuns there. But Father Luigi replied on January 12, 1871, that he could not accept:

« *Since* — he said — *it is established by rule that these sisters cannot establish themselves in any place in a number fewer than five.* »

Obviously Roncegno had no need for so many persons, since the sisters risked being more numerous than the sick.

For then, therefore, the sisters did not go to Roncegno. They will settle there a few months after the death of the founder. And that was the last work accepted by him: the last of those twelve which, as he had predicted, would be opened before his death. Twelve! The presage was inspired by his vivid devotion toward the twelve apostles of the Lord.

The sisters sent to Gorizia

In the autumn of 1868 another invitation arrived for Father Luigi, from another area and for a different work.

There was in Gorizia a flourishing institute for the deaf, directed then by *don* Andrea Pauletig, where four Ursuline sisters provided assistance, who in the city managed also a large boarding school. The superior general of those sisters had decided to withdraw them in mid-November:

« *Because* — she said — *all those conditions requested by the rules of their congregation were not granted.* »

This time it was the Jesuit Father Antonio Banchich, a devout friend of Father Luigi, who wrote to him on October 31:

« *Here four of your sisters would be needed, who know the Italian language and some the Slovenian, and already know, or at least are in a position to learn, the method for the education of the deaf. For the beginning, if all could not be had, even only two would be accepted. I know that you have two nuns there who are well-educated in this matter, and you also have some who speak Slovenian. I send you with this letter the statute and the regulations of the institute, so that you may evaluate the business. I hope that you will feel pushed to accept this work of the Lord; the Sisters of Providence will provide for the good of the deaf and for the growth of their congregation.* »

The decision had to be taken in very short times, since on Friday, November 6, the board of the institute would meet to take the necessary decisions.

The reply of Father Luigi has not remained, but it was evidently negative. Perhaps he still hoped to keep alive the house for deaf girls that he had opened in Udine, although he found no support from the civil authorities. One could not explain, otherwise, how he did not send to Gorizia Sister Saveria Pascolatti or Sister Costanza Murero, whom he had had specially instructed for that apostolate at the Canossian sisters.

The Sisters of Providence will begin their service in that institute half a century later, on November 13, 1920.

The Sisters of Providence in Tesero

Things went well, instead, for Tesero, of whose hospital the Sisters of Providence assumed the direction at the beginning of June 1869.

Tesero is one of the oldest villages in Val di Fiemme, in northern Trentino, renowned for its old houses embellished with characteristic bifora windows and wooden balconies. The village lies on a plateau at the outlet of the Stava torrent and the valley of the same name, on the right bank of the Avisio river, which then descends through deep gorges into Val di Cembra, foaming against the porphyry rocks.

Tesero (TN). At the Giovanelli hospital the sisters arrived in 1869.

In Tesero there was a hospital that served the whole valley: a well-organized institution for those times, capable of sixty beds and if necessary even more, with its own chaplain and its own physician.

The Sisters of Saint Vincent of Innsbruck (known as the "*cappellone*") had held its management for about twenty years; and since 1861 the Sisters of Maria Bambina.

At the beginning of 1868, a hospital orderly, instigated by the physician of the time, had accused the superior of disorder and abuses in the administration of the institute. A trial had followed, at the close of which the slanderer had recanted the accusations and asked for pardon. The instigating physician had been removed and in his place had been called Dr. Crescini, formerly a physician in Primiero, where he had been able to know and admire the Sisters of Providence.

But the matter did not end there, because the Sisters of Maria Bambina decided to withdraw from the hospital. Neither the mediation of the Bishop of Trento nor the offer made by the administration of the hospital to accept any condition or proposal was of use. They declared that they would leave irrevocably on June 1, 1869.

The dean of Cavalese, *don* Corrado Mersa, and Dr. Crescini then had recourse to the intercession of *don* Sartori to have the Sisters of Providence. Dr. Crescini wrote:

« *All our hope is placed in you, and we live trusting that through your work our hospital will not be deprived of a help so humanitarian and just, so that a party which would like to banish every religious order may not triumph. We are sure that you will lend yourself with all your authority for a purpose so holy.* »

The dean of Primiero sent the two letters to Father Luigi on May 1, adding one of his own, in which he told him with his usual tone:

« *Propose the matter to the superior, overcome the difficulties that will arise, sketch the conditions and send them to me, so that I can have them delivered; organize a visit to the place, but make it so that their desire is fulfilled for June 1.* »

The founder replied on May 4, accepting the proposal in principle. Shortly after, to comfort him in the decision, a letter from the Bishop of Trento dated May 19 arrived for the Archbishop of Udine:

« *Most satisfied as I am with the excellent work that these venerable religious women have been providing for some years now in the hospital of Primiero, I cannot help but earnestly recommend myself to Your Excellency, so that the offer of this new field which opens to their charity may be accepted.* »

However, Father Luigi wished to inform himself about the reasons that rendered the hospital of Tesero a difficult seat for religious women, since two congregations had already abandoned it. He wrote himself to the Jesuit Father Ferdinando Moser, who had been his guest in Udine, asking why the sisters of Innsbruck had left it; Father Moser replied to him on May 21 that the cause had been economic straits and some heavy and inopportune local pretensions. *Don* Fantoni asked for analogous information regarding the Sisters of Maria Bambina from his friend *don* Emanuele Bazzanella, professor in the seminary of Trento and director of the newspaper *La Voce Cattolica*. *Don* Bazzanella replied that in the final analysis the true cause for which the Sisters of Charity decided to abandon the hospice of Tesero lay in the fact that they had opened better centers in the Kingdom of Italy, where the requests were so many as to be unable to satisfy them all.

He did not fail, however, to add some advice:

« *With how much pleasure would I now see the Sisters of Providence settle up there, because of the great good I wish to the congregation. Supposing that a conclusion is reached to send the good sisters of Udine to Tesero, let them follow this rule: as few male and female servants as possible! Rather let them make the sacrifice of adding a few more sisters. In the diet of the sick let the superior be generous with food rather than the contrary. The city regimen is unendurable for those robust natures of the mountain, who*

retain even in illness their stomach of iron: from this derived a large part of the ill feelings with the past superior. »

The road therefore did not present grave obstacles. But the prudent founder — writes Tinti — wished to ascertain with his own eyes both the conditions and the place where his beloved spiritual daughters were requested. Behold therefore Father Luigi promptly undertaking the long and fatiguing journey from Udine to Cavalese.

He departed probably on May 24, since the letter of presentation from the curia to be able to celebrate mass outside the diocese is of the 23rd.

We do not know, instead, which way he traveled. The most convenient — *don* Sartori had written — was that which led by railway from Udine to Egna — some thirty kilometers north of Trento — and from Egna to Tesero by the daily mail coach of four hours of travel. But *don* Sartori awaited him with open arms in Primiero, passing through Conegliano and Feltre:

« *From Primiero to Tesero* — he had added — *I will act as guide, and then I will embark you for the railway.* » Certainly, in the going or in the return, the founder did not omit a visit to the small community of Primiero.

In Tesero he found everything in perfect order, both regarding the hospital and for the lodging of the sisters to which was annexed a church with the Most Holy Sacrament. He returned to Udine satisfied and made five sisters depart immediately under the guidance of the Vicar General Mother Strazzolini. The first superior of Tesero was Sister Angela Rodaro, who had acquired experience in the hospital of Portogruaro at the school of Mother Cristina. Things went wonderfully from the very beginning, so much so that *don* Mersa could write to the Father on July 22:

« *In our villages, and especially in Tesero, up to now everything goes very well, thanks to God, from whom comes every good, cui omnis honor et gloria et gratiarum actio; thanks also to Your Most Reverend Lordship thousands and thousands of times.* »

To prevent future problems, Father Luigi drew up a « *Disciplinary Regulation and Code of Conduct of the Nursing Home in Tesero* », of which there remains to us his autograph draft with corrections and additions by his brother Giovanni Battista. He sent it on July 6 to *don* Mersa, who found it very appropriate and fully in conformity with the necessities of the hospital of Tesero. He thanked the Father again for the happy outcome of the undertaking, inspired and guided by God with a palpable evidence, and foresaw a prosperous future for it, because the sisters had established the true basis for the best hopes.

It is worth explaining in what, for the zealous dean, that « *true basis* » consisted.

He observed that such basis, of excellent omen, consisted in their keeping themselves rigorously reserved and severely apart from correspondences and relations with outside persons, who, carrying and bringing back gossip, had ended up putting the institute into complete turmoil. The current sisters, keeping themselves far from such troublesome persons and occupying themselves exclusively with their duties, had truly hit the mark, eliminating every possibility of intrigue. *Don* Mersa continued:

« *Believe me, in Val di Fiemme the only sovereign remedy to triumph over evil tongues is an iron reserve, or rather, the reserve of the saints, which confides nothing to outsiders without a precise motive of office, of charity, or of spiritual utility. A systematic silence in the face of outsiders imposes respect and confounds whoever would speak ill.* »

Probably *don* Mersa did not yet know Father Luigi's motto « *To work, to suffer, to keep silent* », in the spirit of which he had solidly formed the Sisters of Providence: and Sister Angela Rodaro was a figure as indicated as ever to put into practice that prudent « *keeping silent* ».

« Oh, the Saints! »

The founder remained in Tesero only a few days, but they sufficed for him to leave a profound impression there. People pressed around him as if to a saint and there ran together not only the inhabitants of Tesero, but those of the whole valley. Of this climate there remains a testimony in the history of two vocations, the seed of which was cast precisely at the end of May 1869.

From Castello di Fiemme there arrived in Tesero the twenty-two-year-old Maria Corradini; for years she had desired to become a religious woman, but she was tormented by fears and anxieties over certain obstacles that seemed to hold her back. The Father quieted her, assuring her that everything would be resolved in a short time and that with certainty she would enter his institute. Rather, as she herself recounted half a century later: « *he intuited also the hidden motive for which I wished to enter the convent, of which I had spoken with no one* ». She entered in fact the congregation three years later, on October 3, 1872, assuming the name of Sister Vincenza of Jesus; she died on March 3, 1929.

The other case concerns Teresa Zeni from Tesero, who became a Sister of Providence in 1882 with the name of Sister Eufemia and died in Cormons on November 7, 1936. In this circumstance there was repeated the prophecy that Father Luigi had made in Portogruaro in 1838 to the future Sister Ottilia Liva.

Behold how it is spoken of in a report collected for the diocesan process:

« *Father Luigi, going to the rectory, meets on the street a young girl of about eight years together with her mother, who says to her: Teresina, kiss the priest's hand. Teresina promptly renders the homage. Father Luigi, while according to custom he holds out his thumb for her to kiss* [1], *places his left hand upon her head and, pressing it gently, says to her: You are mine. Thirteen years later the provision came true: called by God to the religious state, the young woman requested and obtained from Father Luigi to be admitted among his daughters.* »

First among all to feel the fascination of Scrosoppi's spirituality was the dean himself, *don* Mersa.

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[1] Witnesses at the informative process deposed that Father Luigi, to whoever wished to kiss his hand, gave his thumb to kiss, on the inner part, because he said that the thumb and the index finger are always in contact with Jesus (Summarium, p. 156, par. 535; etc., in Positio...).

In the biography of Mother Cecilia Piacentini one reads this amiable page:

« *A radiant day of May 1871, Mother Angela Rodaro and Sister Cecilia leave the main road that leads to Cavalese to enter a narrow path among the woods scented with resin and the meadows dotted with flowers.*

They must go there to transact business with the president of the hospital, don Corrado Mersa, a priest entirely dedicated to God and to his poor. The reception is as cordial as the farewell. The priest recommends to the superior to greet the founder on his behalf when she writes to him, since he said: I consider him one of the holiest souls of this world.

The maid decides to accompany them to unburden herself a little with the Sisters of Providence, hoping that they can understand her.

She begins to recount how burdensome, and at times impossible, it is to serve the saints; how her master is excessively generous with charity, so much so that often the meat disappears from the pot; on Saturday she no longer finds the clean linen because it has been donated to the poor and she is forced to hide things. Furthermore she adds: After he formed a friendship with Father Luigi Scrosoppi, when he came here for the hospital and slept in the rectory, my lord dean no longer wishes me to remake his bed nor even to clean his room; he wishes to do everything by himself, like a Carthusian. This habit he learned from your Father... One day, almost without noticing it, he confided it to me. Oh, the saints!

The woman continued her complaints until they arrived in front of the Church of the Addolorata. The two religious women hastened to express the desire to enter the church to venerate the prodigious statue of the Virgin and thus they took their leave [(2)]. »

In his letter of July 22, 1869, *don* Merza — enthusiastic over the peace that the Sisters of Providence had brought to Tesero and over the spiritual rebirth promoted by their example — had turned to Father Luigi so that he might send him the Jesuit Father Banchich to hold a course of preaching in Cavalese:

« *in the form of spiritual exercises* — he wrote — *both for the jubilee, and for another solemnity which I intend to celebrate on such occasion: the centenary of the Blessed Virgin Addolorata, much venerated in this valley. I should desire such preaching for the first days of November. I pray therefore Your Most Reverend Lordship to deign to act as mediator to obtain for me this grace, without omitting any useful means for the purpose and insisting with prayers and supplications until we are answered.* »

It had been without doubt Father Scrosoppi who put forward the name of his very dear Father Banchich; in the discourses had with the dean they will have spoken of the local religious situation and the Father will have suggested a course of exercises preached by his friend as the most effective means to arouse a generous reaction to the spreading of religious indifference and of hostility against the Church. One sees once more with what zeal Father Luigi preoccupied himself with the glory of God and the good of souls, even outside his charitable works.

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[2] M. MAKAROVICHI, La solerte giardiniera di Rosa Mistica - madre Cecilia Piacentini, Albano 1955, pp. 67-68.

The sisters found therefore in Val di Fiemme that devotion to the *Addolorata* of which the founder had made himself the promoter for over thirty years. That remaking one's bed by oneself and cleaning one's own room recalls to mind the purposes of Father Luigi of November 1856, when he had assumed those humble services not only for himself but also for his confreres. He had practiced them for eleven years in the house next to Santa Maria Maddalena and had remained faithful to that rigorous method in the small house where he had taken refuge, after the removal, together with his archpriest brother.

Troubles for the school of Orzano

While Divine Providence opened wide horizons of hope for Father Luigi in Trentino, troubles upon troubles rained down on him in the works of Orzano and Cormons, especially in the scholastic field.

Governing is certainly not easy. But it is not a truism to say that the worst way to make laws is the theoretical one, without taking concrete reality into account, only to apply them with a bureaucratic precision glued to the letter of the law, at the cost of harming real life. When, moreover, the law is dictated and applied with partisan rancor, the situation becomes disastrous.

The Italian government and local authorities had utilized such a method toward the charitable institutions promoted and directed by ecclesiastics or religious, demanding invasive controls, at the cost of drying up the sources of private charity and putting the poor who benefited from it on the street.

The same system was adopted in scholastic matters as well. That there was a need to organize teaching, both to make it universal and to establish uniform programs and qualify teaching personnel, could reasonably be conceded. Naturally, while respecting the freedom of teaching that the Church and Catholic thought have always claimed as a condition of personal freedom itself; indeed, there is no worse dictatorship than that which pretends to frame brains. But the spirit of faction easily transcends reasonable instances into absurd requirements.

In Friuli, after 1866, the control of schools had fallen into the hands of Gabriele Pecile, a relative of the Father; he had brought there an anticlerical animosity deplored by many among the liberals themselves and even by some renegade priests. In such a toxic climate, even the small school of the Sisters of Providence of Orzano had its unpleasant trouble.

On April 27, 1869, the mayor of Remanzacco wrote to Anna Molinis — Sister Matilde — then director of the Orzano school (of the village of Orzano), communicating that the school council had resolved to tolerate the existence of private schools only until the end of the month of July. Sister Matilde, certainly on the indication of the Father, replied on April 29 that she had already ended the free lessons she offered to the poor young girls of Orzano and had decided not to resume them again later.

What would the administrators of the municipality of Remanzacco have thought? The solution, in theory, was easy: it would have sufficed for the commune to have built a school of its own in Orzano and entrusted it to a certified and salaried schoolmistress.

But where to find the means? Was it not wiser to let the sisters maintain for free, and in free premises, the school they had been managing for fifteen years?

Things came to a head in the autumn, when the new school year should have begun and the sisters' school was not reopened. It is easy to imagine the turmoil raised by the inhabitants of Orzano!

On November 2, the mayor of Remanzacco, Mr. A. Giupponi [3], was forced to write this eloquent letter to Father Luigi:

« *It was a providence, a true blessing from heaven for the inhabitants of Orzano to see founded in this hamlet a branch of that meritorious House of the derelitte of Udine, of which you, most distinguished sir, are the patron, the director, and the successor of that pious man who was Father Carlo Filaferro; from that moment, in that branch, the young girls of the village could receive the beneficial bread of moral and familiar instruction.*

You cannot imagine my sorrow and the common regret at hearing that this instruction, for so many years so profitable, had ended suddenly last summer. And the loss of this benefit is felt all the more now, because who knows when a female school can be obtained, Orzano currently lacking premises and a schoolmistress.

You alone could remedy such great harm and restore calm to me and to the inhabitants on this subject.

May your excellent heart, with a new trait of that evangelical charity which distinguishes it, please to annul the suspension of instruction which has so saddened those good villagers, who with so much satisfaction saw their daughters so well set on the way toward a domestic education.

In addition to the general good, please grant also to me the comfort of seeing that, following my interest, you have deigned to permit the good sisters of the institute to lend themselves again to the teaching of those poor young girls, at least until better circumstances permit to relieve them from such fatigue. »

Father Scrosoppi could well have replicated: And who wanted it? He limited himself instead to replying on November 6 that he had acceded so that in Orzano the schoolmistress sisters of the *House of the derelitte* would guarantee instruction for that year as well, as customary, for the poor young girls of the village.

Probably Giupponi had signed the intimation of April 27 bending to a higher order, since from this letter transpires his great esteem for the work of the sisters, with some hints at his personal relations of friendship with the Father, trusting that the latter would accede precisely following his interest. Perhaps he was a descendant of that Angelo Giupponi who had been so closely linked to the Scrosoppi family and godfather at the baptism of Giovanni Battista.

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[3] Born in Udine in 1799 and died in Remanzacco in 1873, probably belonging to the same family to which belonged the homonymous Giupponi, godfather at the baptism of Father Scrosoppi's brother, Giovanni Battista (see Part I, Chapter 1, note 8).

Peaceful schools in the *House of the derelitte*

On the contrary, no document lets one glimpse problems for the schools of the house of Udine. A little, perhaps, because regularly certified sisters taught there; a little because the adversaries themselves — including his cousin — could not deny respect and reverence toward Father Luigi. There was, indeed, some personality who expressed his applause.

Very courteous, for example, proved to be the knight Federico Bellazzi, deputy to the parliament, who in the autumn of 1866 visited the *House of the derelitte* on behalf of the inspection of prisons and houses of correction in the Venetian provinces, remaining very satisfied with it. From a letter addressed to him by the founder on November 29, we know that Father Luigi had sent him, upon his request, a brief historical reconstruction of the origins of the house and of the development of the annexed works. He added to it:

« *To the question whether the house could assume the direction, the surveillance, and the assistance of some poor young women in difficulty, as well as of some female inmates for rehabilitation, the undersigned replies that very willingly he would lend himself to this holy work, provided that a separate premises were prepared.* »

Bellazzi thanked him on December 12, reserving to himself to return to the project of the institute of correction. Of such initiative a hint is perhaps found in some procedures to open a center of reception in *via di Mezzo*, procedures which however did not come to fulfillment.

However, in the "*House of the derelitte"* there was later welcomed occasionally some young woman entrusted by the "*pretura"* (a lower local court of first instance with single-judge jurisdiction) or by the court of Udine.

Decidedly favorable to Father Scrosoppi and to his works was the provincial deputy Putelli [4], who upon mandate of the prefecture inspected the house on May 25, 1871. In the report of the visit, Putelli recalls first of all the two founders « *who gave* — he says — *all their own patrimony for the purpose of giving life to such a pious foundation.* »

Shortly after he adds:

« *The pious work subsists by means of public and private charity, with work, as well as by virtue of the great sacrifices of whoever directs it, of the female teachers and of the auxiliary personnel, who offer what they possess for the benefit of the house. No compensations or salaries are paid to anyone. Every performance is made out of pure spirit of charity...* »

And he concludes:

« *The undersigned has believed it his duty to express to the director Father Luigi Scrosoppi his full satisfaction for the regular course, the growth, and the prosperity of an institute founded by him, of so much decorum and public utility; there deserve at the same time a word of praise the direction and the protectors, who exert themselves to maintain alive, active, and prosperous a foundation so providential.* »

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[4] Lawyer (1816-1885) from Palmanova (Udine), he participated actively in the political events of 1848; he held public offices. He had the cult of the motherland and promoted every liberal institution and every progress of the Country. (Cf. La Patria del Friuli, 18-5-1885).

The declaration of Putelli is all the more notable in that it was issued in the most acute period of the struggle to transform the house into a legal entity. Putelli himself had later a way to express concretely his admiration toward the Father, influencing the provincial deputation so that this one should be more benevolent to him than any other authority.

About two months after the visit of Putelli, the prefecture of Udine announced, on July 15, 1871, the visit of a commission appointed by the school council, for the purpose of studying the present conditions of the female educational institutes, both as regards the administrative part and the didactic one, or proposing the reforms considered necessary. It was composed of Lanfranco Morgante, Dr. Carlo Luigi Schiavi, and the nobleman Dr. Niccolò de Brandis. To this visit must perhaps be referred the episode narrated by Tinti:

« *Count Federico Trento, an udinese patrician, who to nobility of blood united a profound religious sentiment and a true love of country, for over twenty years was a valid protector of the charitable institutions and a close friend of Father Luigi. The nobleman, because of his loyal frankness and noble wit, had easy access before the authorities and availed himself of it to be useful to the pious works.*

He related himself that one day, presiding with a representative of the government at the examinations of the orphan girls in the institute of Scrosoppi, while the young girls gave proof of the instruction received from the good sisters, that gentleman praised both the pupils and the schoolmistresses. But no sooner did he hear the examination of religion, having become serious in face he said:

Mr. Count, — he said to him — *this does not please me; know that I am a free thinker.*

To which the witty count replied: I am a free thinker too. How? — resumed the gentleman marveled — *You, a supporter of the nuns, are a free thinker?*

Yes, — affirmed the count — *indeed I add to you that the sisters also are free thinkers; and therefore, if you consider yourself free not to profess religion, leave me and these sisters just as free to believe and to teach Christian doctrine. Such a conclusion admitted no replica, and therefore schoolmistresses and schoolgirls were left in peace.* »

Rough seas in the school of Cormons

In Cormons there existed two female schools: the public one of the municipality and the one managed by the sisters in their own house. Such duality could not but generate tensions, all the more so since, after the death in 1867 of Sister Eletta Cucito, esteemed by all, some disagreement occurred among the certified sisters themselves.

Partly for these reasons and partly because of the political climate of the era, between 1868 and 1872 some intricate events troubled the house of Cormons and risked making it lose its zealous spiritual director, the Jesuit Father Giuseppe Rossi.

He himself recounts the details of it [(5)], although his narrative seems influenced by his passionate participation in the events. It must not be forgotten that in those times,

[5] Chronicle regarding the popular school of the Sisters of Providence in Cormons from 1866 to 1872, fasc. 24, ms. 9, cc. 14, A.L.S.

between Catholics and liberals, there reigned everywhere a most acute antithesis, which Father Rossi lived with particular intensity.

The problems were principally two.

At the beginning of the school year 1867-68, the renewed municipal council of Cormons resolved unanimously to entrust the municipal female schools, divided into four classes, to the Sisters of Providence. The municipality would have guaranteed a contribution of four hundred florins a year and the wood for winter heating.

At the end of the school year Father Luigi requested that the compensation be brought, for the following year, to eight hundred florins. Father Rossi considered the request reasonable, « *but perhaps* — he writes — *it was better to feel out the ground before risking failure, as then happened.* » Furthermore, for unknown motives, the note of the founder was not presented in July, as soon as it was drawn up, but toward the end of October, close upon the reopening of the schools.

« *The municipality had the impression of being taken by the throat* — observes Father Rossi —. *The adversaries took advantage of it immediately; outrageous things were said... Let the school be taken from the sisters, they shouted, and let it open elsewhere, even should it cost a thousand florins, if only to save the honor of the commune.* »

In the end, if only not to pay the eight hundred florins requested by Father Luigi, the municipality preferred to spend much more. Two certified schoolmistresses from Gorizia, devoid of a diploma, were engaged immediately for two hundred and fifty florins each, and a fortune was spent to equip the former convent of the Dominicans; the result was that only two classes could be set up instead of the four managed previously by the sisters.

Father Rossi mentions three principal persons responsible for the tumult, among whom the district inspector Pietro Pajakovic, who declared toward the Easter of 1869 that, if it had depended on him, he would have had the sisters' school closed because it did not respond to the requirements of the times and because in it — hear, hear! — Italian books contrary to the government were utilized. The same inspector, continues Father Rossi, was the author of manifest injustices toward the candidates of the sisters who presented themselves in Gorizia for the examinations of certification for teaching.

With the Austrian law on public instruction of May 14, 1869, the internal school of the sisters was declared a private popular school, despite the district school council, on December 28, 1871, having granted it a certain recognition by dictating some norms. « *Thanks to that official decision* — continues Father Rossi — *it was known therefore that this school was recognized; private, certain, but recognized.* »

Three years later, at the end of 1871, the municipality of Cormons announced the competition for two posts of schoolmistress and assistant schoolmistress in the municipal school. Father Luigi took advantage of it and, hoping to do the good of the small town, made two certified sisters participate. In this way the duality between the two-class municipal school and that of the sisters, by then arrived at five, would be eliminated; the Father offered again the premises of the convent for the single school, accepting that only two schoolmistresses be paid according to the norm of law. He sent *don* Fantoni to Cormons, who returned with his usual optimism, but his hopes were disappointed.

Toward the middle of January 1872, the municipal council proceeded to the appointment of two secular schoolmistresses, without even replying to a letter from the Superior Mother Teresa Fabris which presented the candidacy of the two religious women.

« *They did not directly attack the sisters* — writes Father Rossi —; *rather, they spoke of them with praise. They changed tactic, however... sustaining that for the decorum of the village it was better to maintain both schools.* »

Perhaps precisely because the ardent Jesuit had remained embittered by these events, the superior of the Society of Jesus in Gorizia, Father Giovanni Battista Dionisi, communicated on January 20 to the founder that Father Rossi would leave Cormons by February 4 to become rector of the seminary of Cremona. But Father Luigi used all his influence with the Jesuits to avoid it. Fortunately, both for the population of Cormons and for the congregation, Father Rossi was left by his superiors in the city for another seven years.

That dear « character » of *don* Sartori

In Primiero no problems of any kind occurred as long as the good dean *don* Sartori lived. It was necessary to remedy, however, the facility with which *don* Fantoni, accomplice to the celebrated nightingale, had accepted that charge for the Sisters of Providence.

Toward the end of August 1868, replying to *don* Sartori who was warmly supporting the assumption of the hospital of Levico, Father Luigi addressed to him this firm reproach:

« *If the Lord should arrange that the project take place, before the sisters repair thither, I should wish to go first to the spot for a preliminary inspection, to see whether everything were well prepared and disposed; and I should well wish first to agree with that administration of the hospital and with that honorable municipality of Levico, so that the sisters, once arrived, might not have to suffer displeasures or be deceived, as were — forgive me, most reverend dean — those of Primiero.*

Oh, how many times do I feel echoing in my ears from these mothers: Poor Father Luigi, oh! with how much good faith has he been with the inhabitants of Primiero... Ah, they say to me, where is the chapel that had been promised and where is the second room for the sisters? Where are the 100 lire a year promised by Teloni for the journey of visit of the reverend superior and for the transfers of the sisters to be made? Ah, they say to me, what pay do the schoolmistress sisters of Primiero have? Poor sisters, what heart do the inhabitants of Primiero have to pretend that two sisters sacrifice themselves all the year to keep school and give them for pay 55 florins each and some small addition of taxes? And this after they say they are most satisfied with their teaching and with the more than maternal performances of the sisters?

The sisters — he continued — *do not have as the purpose of their performances certainly economic interest, but let the gentlemen of Primiero think also that the Sisters of Providence too, in order to live, must eat, drink, dress: therefore it is proper to give them what is enough for these needs of theirs. These and other similar reproaches I often*

feel echoing in my ears from these reverend mothers; to tell the truth, not one, but thousands and thousands of reasons they have to reproach me thus... »

The founder complained above all of three things: that the chapel promised for the use of the sisters had not been fitted up in the hospital; that *don* Sartori, as testamentary executor, had not given full effect to the wishes of the deceased *don* Bonetti, who had left to the hospital a legacy of over three thousand florins for the precise purpose of improving the conditions of the religious women. On this point he said:

« *The premises for the schools I consider is already found near the hospital for the convenience of the sisters, but if by chance it were not yet provided and it were wished that the sisters go to teach in the premises of the municipal schools, so distant from the hospital, I say for your guidance that the schoolmistress sisters will be recalled to Udine, being unable in conscience to expose to such grave danger their already precarious health.* »

The threat, however, was not carried out. Perhaps the requests of the Father were in large part satisfied, because things proceeded without hitches for a five-year period. Toward the end of July 1873 Father Luigi sent to *don* Sartori a rapid announcement in which he communicated that the schoolmistress sisters would be withdrawn. The dean sent in all haste to Udine, to investigate the matter, the curate of Mezzano di Primiero, *don* Ernesto Egger; the latter returned on August 9 with the impression that the withdrawal was due to the excessively scarce salary paid to the schoolmistresses.

don Sartori and the podestà of Primiero set to work immediately and the municipal council, on September 15, resolved to increase the pay to 150 florins for each schoolmistress. Communicating such decision, the *podestà* hoped that the sisters would continue their precious service and pointed out that the commune, small and poor, could not take upon itself a greater burden.

The salary was certainly modest, but even scarcer was the number of certified sisters available, since someone had recently abandoned the congregation. But Father Luigi had become very fond of Primiero and wished that the sisters' school continue there at the cost of any sacrifice.

Therefore on September 23 there departed from Cormons a letter from the Superior General [6] which accepted the proposal, considering the many expenses that weighed upon the commune.

Perhaps *don* Sartori did not make it in time to read the accession of the sisters, or perhaps it reached him precisely in his last moments to comfort him.

He had taken to bed a month before and died on September 25, after having governed the parish with extreme zeal for fourteen years. There passed away thus, at only fifty-two years of age, that dear figure of a priest whom the death certificate defines as « *pious, learned, hospitable* ». Father Scrosoppi preserved an affectionate memory of that devoted friend and of his work, making mention of him often in letters to the sisters of Primiero.

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[6] From this letter it results that Mother Teresa Fabris remained in Cormons until September 1873, then immediately after she was in Udine.

From a letter of *don* Ernesto Egger of September 10 a detail of interest surfaces:

« *I have written to have a copy of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church by the Abbot Rosmini, and I hope to be able shortly to satisfy the desire demonstrated by you to reread such booklet.* »

Father Luigi, who had the faculty to read forbidden books, desired therefore to reread once more that work — placed on the Index in 1849 — by the celebrated abbot of Rovereto, dead already for eighteen years, with whom he had had personal and epistolary relations in 1845-46.

Three years after the death of *don* Sartori there was a small polemic in Primiero as well, but this time regarding the hospital, aroused — as one reads in a letter — by persons contrary to the Church. These took as a pretext the fact that the Father had sent one extra sister for service in the hospital and that work was being done to improve the habitation of the religious women. He wrote to the Superior Sister Visentini on December 19, 1876:

« *When three sisters were requested by that administration, there were to be assisted but from eighteen to twenty-three sick and sheltered people, whereas now how many more are there? Was there not therefore reason to add a sister? Regarding then the habitation of the sisters in the hospital, it can be made to reflect that the expansion of the hospital was almost entirely built with offerings made for the sisters, as for example the offering of the Empress Maria Anna and my offering of a thousand florins. I have hinted this to you not so that you may claim rights, but only so that you can, always with great calm, make it known that the poor sisters are not therefore that weight and burden which by some it would be wished to make believe.* »

In this juncture the generosity, the humility, and the patience of Father Luigi shine with vivid light in the face of the maneuvers of faction. But when does the spirit of party ever bow before virtue? « *To remove that sister immediately* — said the Father — *after the storm broke out, would mean to give reason to the supporters of the tumult.* » He will have her depart for the sake of peace a few months later, committing the remaining sisters to an even greater dedication.

The Sisters of Providence in the hospital of Trento

In the hospital of Trento the Sisters of Maria Bambina provided service; there a situation occurred analogous to that which took place in Tesero. Partly because of the contrasting alignments within the congregation of charity, upon which the hospital depended, and partly because those sisters did not wish to submit to certain prescriptions contrary to their rules, in the first months of 1876 they declared that they wished to withdraw as soon as their contractual engagement expired, that is to say in June. The congregation of charity replied that they might as well leave, even earlier if they preferred. The sisters did not have it repeated to them: the departure was fixed by May 1.

It was necessary to replace them. Someone put forward the name of the Sisters of Providence, of whom people spoke very well in Primiero and in Tesero.

The founder charged *don* Giovanni Battista Depeder to inform him on the real state of the question, who must have known well the works of Father Luigi, since in a letter of his of April 21 he writes:

« *I have by now all the hope that your meritorious daughters of Providence can come, destined, as it appears, to cover the places left empty by others.* »

The German party warmly supported the German sisters of Innsbruck, while the liberal group was contrary to any religious presence. « *The nuns of Udine* — added *don* Depeder — *of whose coming much is now spoken in the city, would be very well accepted by all, now that the others depart, and especially by the clergy, who have their sick at the hospital and would not wish them deprived of a word of comfort by the fact of not understanding German. The German ones would be looked upon badly for more than one good reason.* »

The congregation of charity entrusted the task of contacting Father Scrosoppi to *don* Giuseppe Palla, chaplain of the hospital ever since 1859, who, although of German orientation — as *don* Depeder said — rendered instead the negotiations easy and smooth.

« *But Father Luigi* — writes Tinti — *in the delicacy of his mind, wished first to assure himself of not causing the least displeasure to the Sisters of Saint Vincent; once certain that they on the contrary were favorable to the substitution, and that the directors renounced the inopportune pretensions, he concluded immediately the procedures with solicitude, since it was urgent that his daughters assume the management of that hospice for May 1.* »

The Father announced the opening of the new religious community to the superiors of the already existing houses; on April 27 he wrote to Sister Angela Rodaro, superior at Tesero, communicating to her that she would have to transfer to Trento. Imagining how much she would remain disconcerted by it, he began the letter with a very effective opening:

« *Now it is the case for you to have to execute what the Vicar of Jesus Christ was saying to you some time ago, to whom you, sisters of Providence, sent the offering of Saint Peter. Daughters — said the Holy Father — I bless you and remember to follow your Spouse where He calls you...*

You must know that on May 1 the Sisters of Providence will have to be in Trento; therefore we must organize ourselves for the best, and there and elsewhere it is proper to make some changes. For now you will have to go to Trento, and to Tesero will come for now Mother Teresa Serafina Gaspardis. Behold the changes to be made in a few days. I communicate everything to you in haste so that you can arrange things with calm and leave everything there in good order.

Please communicate your transfer to those gentlemen, so that no displeasures arise. Already you know the virtue of prudence, and see therefore to use a good dose of it.

Patience, dearest sister and daughter; if this change should be burdensome to you, think of what you would say to a sister if she found herself in your current position. I will tell you that before deciding on this change I have prayed and I have had people pray, and

with the most reverend superior general we have taken the decision after very many reflections. Believe me that our single purpose has been the glory of God and your good. »

Thus Sister Angela had to abandon her small nest of Tesero, where she had earned the esteem and affection of all. If the detachment made her suffer, the thought of the weight that was being entrusted to her must have frightened her.

The hospital of Trento, situated in the suburb of Santa Croce, counted then from one hundred to one hundred and twenty sick people, to whom it was necessary to add from seventy to eighty guests of the annexed nursing home and, as if it were not enough, from sixty to seventy inmates in the connected asylum.

In total about two hundred and fifty presences, moreover of a nature so different. To serve all those poor people, she had at her disposal only another seven sisters whom Mother Strazzolini brought her from Udine. There was nothing to be cheerful about!

Furthermore, it was necessary to replace most expert sisters and to please the directors of the congregation of charity, belonging to various alignments and all very demanding.

Fortunately with the sisters there went up from Udine also *don* Luigi Costantini [7], then a young priest: a combatant of the faith with a powerful voice, a courageous bearing, and a mind full of zeal; he was the support that was needed for the small group of religious women who were preparing themselves to face so many difficulties.

Santa Chiara hospital of Trento

[7] Canon of the collegiate church of Cividale del Friuli (1846-1918), he was a zealous priest. He is remembered especially for the preaching of missions, for which he had suitable talents: intelligence, a tenacious memory, and an ardent imagination. He was secretary of the Circolo San Donato, formed on the example of the Associazione Cattolica Friulana established in Udine in 1871. He founded the hospice of San Giuseppe for the children of the people; to him Father Scrosoppi addressed the letter of June 9, 1878, published anonymously by Tinti, supporting him in the difficulties he encountered in this work of charity. (Cf. Summarium, pp. 469-470 in Positio...).

The sisters arrived in Trento at ten in the evening of May 1. « *The reception received from that administration* — wrote the Father to a superior a few days later — *has been very satisfactory and it is hoped that Providence has opened this new field for the good of our congregation.* »

Already on May 8 he could add:

« *I cannot tell you how well looked upon our sisters are in Trento and how much good they already do there. I blush to see how they are respected, esteemed, loved and the extreme interest that everyone has for them, beginning with the bishop...* »

don Depeder on May 19 reassured him:

« *So far things proceed very well. The congregation of charity is content, and so are the sick of the hospital; rather, perhaps they are treated with too much sweetness, while a little firmness with certain ones would be more appropriate, from what is said... Meanwhile they have begun well, and it is already much, because in these first moments of contrasts, contests, and jealousies it is not easy not to be criticized. I place my trust especially in the humility of the sisters, which will be a great mediator so that God may help them.* »

A trust well placed.

Father Luigi had accepted the service in the hospital of Trento almost blindly, since the contract of assumption was signed only on July 4 by Mother Strazzolini and by the vice-president Baron Taxis. But on March 24, 1881, the new vice-president Bortolotti could release a wide declaration « *that the same sisters gave the most scrupulous execution to the contract of July 4, 1876* »; and, while he praised « *their beneficial and charitable work for the benefit of the poor suffering people* », he underscored particularly « *their faithful activity also in the material interest of the institutes themselves, to which the reverend sisters contributed at the same time with their shrewdness and an excellent internal management.* »

Barely a year and a half later, the sisters gave proof also in Trento of the charitable heroism to which the Father had educated them. Four were struck by smallpox in assisting the sick and one — Sister Maria Elena Oman [8] — remained a victim of it. On October 5, 1877, Father Luigi communicated the death to the various houses:

« *The congregation has suffered a great loss, because she was exemplary in everything and in a special way in holy humility, simplicity, obedience, and laboriousness. The good God has arranged thus: enough, Your will be done.* »

The Father's journeys in Trentino

In addition to the journey of 1868, undertaken to personally inspect the hospital of Tesero, the founder made several other visits to the houses of Trentino.

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[8] Oman Dorotea (Sister Maria Elena of the Passion) born in Uccovigh near Malborghetto (Udine) on March 24, 1842, entered the congregation on August 3, 1865, clothed the habit on February 26, 1867, professed on March 19, 1869.

He certainly repaired thither at the end of the summer of 1876. In a letter to the superior of Primiero of September 11 he writes:

« *Next Wednesday — that is, the 13th — the Lord willing, I shall depart for Trento, where I shall remain for eight days; on Monday I shall pass to Tesero to stay there until Thursday morning; and there I hope to find myself that same Thursday evening, that is, the 21st of the month. The desire was great to come sooner, and yet I have been unable to indulge it because of my great occupations.* »

In the spring of 1879 he would have desired to return there, but it was not possible for him.

« *We have had* — he writes to a superior on June 5 — *such unusual weather of winds, cold, and rains, which have never permitted me a concrete project of travel to those parts, as would have been my desire.* »

He did so a couple of months later, because Father Rossi wrote to him in September from Cormons:

« *I rejoice so much with Your Paternity that you have happily returned from your apostolic journey. Every day several times, in my misery, I have recommended you to the Lord, so that He might deign to sustain you in your so fatiguing journey.* »

On August 4, 1880, he writes:

« *My journey to Trentino will probably take place in October* »; and on October 12 of that year he says to the superior of Primiero: « *I shall do the possible to repair this year to Trento and Tesero, and how willingly would I come there too, if the road were passable.* »

On June 20, 1881, he writes to the same:

« *I pass to your second question and that of your beloved ones, and my daughters too, whether that is Father Luigi must come this year to find you. He has a very great will to come, and will do everything possible to do so. Behold how much I can tell you and nothing else. Is the road of the Schener not yet finished? Oh, sorrowful question!* »

Finally, on December 20, 1881, he insists on saying that he would have gone very willingly to visit those religious women, « *but I cannot* — he concludes — *because the season is dangerous for a poor old man such as I am, of 77 and more years.* »

Tinti also reports that the founder « *undertook frequent journeys toward the Veneto, Illyria, and Trentino, to visit in person the various hospitals, asylums, and schools, and at the same time comfort with his desired presence the sisters his beloved daughters. But his journeys* — he continues — *were true pilgrimages of penance, both because of the inadequate means and the too slow horses he made use of, and because of the little comfortable lodgings and the weariness of the long distances traveled, all things which he not only bore patiently, but generously desired to suffer. During the journey Father Luigi was in constant prayer, which he did not interrupt except to entertain from time to time with spiritual discourses the sisters he led with him for the various charges. Having initially recited with them the prayers of travel, you, good sisters — he would say — fulfill now your duties of piety, while I recite the divine office.* »

If we regret not possessing news of those journeys in Trentino — then, especially because of his age, truly most fatiguing — there remains to us testimony in some accounts of mystical facts that are said to have occurred there.

« *An old man sheltered in Primiero* — narrates Sister Eufrasia — *often recounted that once they had seen our venerable Father, during a visit of his to that house, kneeling in the parlor, immersed in deep prayer, when he appeared raised from the ground and as if illuminated by a clarity entirely special; they saw him from the window and marveled said to one another: Father Luigi is in ecstasy.* »

Other testimonies hint at an analogous episode that is said to have occurred before the effigy of the Madonna, called of the bell tower, in the church of the hospital of Trento.

Moreover, clergy and people in Trentino considered him a saint. « *When he came to the hospital of Tesero* — recounted Sister Placida Faés — *everyone on the street crowded together to see him, such was the devotion and the veneration he inspired. When he celebrated holy mass in the small church of the hospital, this filled with people, because they said: It is a saint who celebrates. And during the mass too he appeared to someone surrounded by light.* »

Death of Sister Giovanna Colloredo

There has been talk of setbacks, more or less relevant, in the various houses, but Portogruaro has not yet been mentioned. In reality, there is no news of particular difficulties for that seat.

Mother Cristina Borghese continued to govern that handful of sisters with her old affability and imposed herself, with her at times pungent realism, upon the administrators of the hospital and all those who met her. It was not easy to start disputes with a superior of that character; and if anyone had the intention, Mother Cristina made it pass for them, dismantling any trap with her wisdom and her virtue.

During the war of 1866 the sisters of Portogruaro dedicated themselves with self-denial to the assistance of the wounded of the advancing Italian army. Among them Sister Scolastica d'Orlando [(9)] distinguished herself particularly, so much so that at her funeral, on June 14, 1911, the city band rendered her honors as to a patriot.

In 1871 an epidemic of smallpox broke out in the city and several sisters were struck by it, having thrown themselves headlong into the assistance of the infected. On July 25, the chancellor of the curia *don* Ernesto Degani — destined to become the celebrated historian of the diocese of Concordia — wrote to Father Luigi that the archpriest of the Church of *Sant'Andrea*, « *in case of death of a sister* », ceded every parochial right to *don* Giuseppe Scarpa, chaplain of the hospital. The only victim among the religious women was Mother Giovanna Colloredo, who died on October 4 of that year, concluding as a martyr of charity a thirty-year span of religious life among the Sisters of Providence.

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[9] Margherita D'Orlando (Sister Maria Elena of the Passion or Sister Maria Scolastica of Saint Joseph), born in Rivignano (Udine) on June 18, 1839, entered the congregation on August 3, 1865, clothed the habit on February 26, 1867, and professed on March 19, 1869. For further insights on her, see the Biographical notes..., ms. vol. 11, pp. 202-217.

Chapter 8

FLOURISHING OF VOCATIONS AND GUSTS OF CRISIS

At the guidance of generous souls

The narrative, at times purely historical but necessary, of the works promoted or assumed by the founder, has sufficiently let transpire his personality and his interiority, just as fruits testify to the tree from which they come. In every instant there have emerged his single search for the glory of God, a holy passion in doing good, the unceasing drive of the religious women to sacrifice and to the offering of self, together with prudence, sensitivity, and a fortitude tested against all trials in initiating the works or in pursuing them.

Yet the spirit of any minister of God reveals itself more clearly in the pastoral guidance of the souls that are entrusted to him.

Father Luigi was not a parish priest and dedicated himself relatively little to the ministry of preaching and of the confessional. A clear design of Providence entrusted him with another mission: that of discerning, sustaining, and encouraging souls called to a complete dedication to God.

What did he think, in theory, of vocation? How did he behave, concretely, before its manifesting itself in this or in that soul? How did he mold and temper the religious women to render them living monuments of the calling received? Let us not forget that the problem of vocation presented itself to him with two particular demands: as a vocation to an active life in charitable service and as a female vocation, with the aspects now more simple and now more complex that are proper to it.

The thought of Father Scrosoppi on vocation

There remain to us four outlines of his conferences on vocation. The first, of only four lines, contains the list of the points treated:

« *Duty to correspond to vocation — excellence of vocation — advantages for correspondence — punishments for not corresponding.* »

Equally brief, but very significant, is the second. The Father indicates therein first the signs to understand if one is truly called, and then prospects the difficulties that can arise in the depth of the soul:

«

1. *Does this desire come to you from the bottom of your heart?*
2. *Is it constant?*
3. *Does your salvation appear easier to you?*
4. *At the moment of death would you wish to have made this choice?*

Difficulties. I shall have to suffer. Perhaps I shall repent. But even if I should repent, I wish to follow the calling; even if I should suffer for all my life, I wish to follow it, since I do not belong to myself, but to God. »

The last passage is decidedly typical of his spirit, even in the apparent radicalness of the formulation.

The Father did not conceive vocation as a state of certainty and a source of perennial spiritual joy. On the contrary, he lets one glimpse almost crudely the doubts, the repentances, the sadness's, the discouragements, and the desolate interior nights that can supervene even after many years of faithful service to the Lord. It appears that he says:

« *Vocation is not an invitation to a wedding, but to suffering; and to a suffering that at times appears to strike the very roots of the calling. What to do, then? To renounce vocation in the illusion of escaping pain? Absolutely not. It is necessary instead to cling to the choice already made and repeat: "I do not belong to myself, but to God."*

I have given myself to God and I do not withdraw my gift, although currently I feel vacillating and it appears to me that God has abandoned me. Better to remain in the vocation temporarily tormented than to go out of it. The torment that now anguishes me is also from God, because it is a trial of His; the peace that I seek would be instead my own thing. But I do not belong to myself; I am of God. »

He saw in this concept a psychological source of courage and of strength which in the end, with the help of grace, would make one overcome the momentary bewilderment.

Without doubt, the founder did not refer here to mistaken vocations, but solely to those sincere, though travailed. And the reply is truly entirely his own. One feels therein that willed, fighting, almost obstinate dedication; that donation of steel which was his.

It is almost impossible that a master of spirit does not let transpire his personality in the counsels and in the guidance he offers to others. For this reason masters of spirit become in some way « *fathers* »: precisely because they form souls similar to their own. Father Luigi wished, in the Sisters of Providence, daughters for whom the concept « *I do not belong to myself, but to God* » should represent the firm rock in the midst of the waves of the storm.

There is a third slip of paper of his in which probably he treats of the adhesion to Christ of every baptized person. He says there, in fact:

« *Baptism has made us heirs of God; and to attain this inheritance much is not needed. Saint Augustine says: See if it is labor, where it suffices to wish. A disciple of Jesus Christ asked his divine Master: What must I do of good to have eternal life?; and his divine Master replied: If you wish.* » Here Father Luigi places heavily the accent upon the will.

But what he adds can refer well to the religious vocation and to the detachment that it requires. « *Behold* — he says — *the first condition. A true, effective, resolute will is needed, and not simple desires. Hell is full of good will. Saint Augustine compares the lack of will of Christians to a sleepyhead who would wish to get up, but does not get up. Whoever truly wishes to get up, leaps from the bed and pushes away the blankets.* » And he continues putting on guard against certain deceits of Satan. There is whoever would wish, but on condition of touching immediately with hand the advantages of his choice,

of gathering immediately from it satisfaction and pleasure, of harvesting in July without waiting for autumn. Not so, he admonishes:

« *Wait and then you will enjoy with most full satisfaction.* »

These outlines are not dated. There bears instead a very precise date — November 8, 1868 — a sheet with notes for a conference to his religious women. We shall see shortly that that date had its importance.

We shall give some passages of it. Nothing unusual will be found there, since it did not even pass through Father Luigi's mind to lose himself in search of strange concepts and much less of sought-after expressions. Few truths, drawn from faith and sealed by experience, clear and strong like well-pointed nails: behold what sufficed for him.

In this conference he pivots upon two thoughts: vocation is always a combat; vocation fulfills itself in the vigilant and full union with the Lord.

« *Whom the Lord wishes* — he writes — *that he serve Him in one state, whom in another; and everyone must combat in the state in which the Lord calls him to serve Him. You are called to serve Him in the religious state... Oh, noble state! Oh, state the most sublime... And you in this state must combat against the devil, the world, and the flesh, our three principal enemies... As spouses of Jesus you must serve the Lord not in the way in which the persons of the world would serve Him... But you must serve Him in fulfilling the duties of spouses toward your divine Spouse... All the three enemies make war upon you so that you may fail in these sacred duties toward your divine Spouse. And you all three have to combat them... Remember holy perseverance. Remember that you by yourselves cannot obtain the victory. Means for holy perseverance: the thought that that which is not eternal is nothing — the thought of the reward. Means to have the strength to combat: intercession of the Mother of your divine Spouse. Confidence in the Spouse. The thought to God, the heart to God, the hand for God...* »

And he insists continually, Father Luigi, upon that combating and upon that sacred union: behind these words one senses the presence of a will and of a fervor extraordinarily tense. One would search in vain for the least concession to a languid sentimentalism. A combative union, whose nuptial bond was to be made of « *operating, suffering, and keeping silent* »: this was the ideal that he proposed incessantly to his sisters.

Prudence in admitting to the congregation

Tinti writes that the Father was very cautious in accepting postulants:

« *Both Father Luigi* — he says — *and the sisters in charge, far from being inclined to welcome young postulants merely to increase the number, proceeded very slowly in the acceptance of candidates, wishing that the foundations of the religious institute be consolidated and that the saying could not be applied to it: you have multiplied the people, but you have not increased the joy.* »

We have a twofold confirmation of this.

If we scroll through the list of orphans welcomed from 1837 to 1884 in the *House of the derelitte* — which obviously represented a breeding ground for vocations — we notice that out of six hundred and sixteen inmates only forty-eight entered the novitiate, that is, little more than seven percent. Yet those girls, for the most part orphans, must have seen in the house their own family and in Scrosoppi a father. It is an evident sign of the fact that he did not allow the slightest psychological pressure upon the minds of the young women.

If we then analyze his autograph lists, it is easy to note how he was in no hurry to increase the number of religious women, but operated a severe selection among the aspirants.

From 1854 — when he assumed the leadership after Father Carlo — through the whole of 1866, the postulants were one hundred and five, of whom only eighty-six were admitted to the novitiate, and of these barely half arrived at religious profession.

Subsequently, the political events of 1866-70 negatively influenced the influx of vocations.

In the nine years from 1866 to 1875 the postulants were forty-nine, less than half compared to the thirteen preceding years. Evidently there knocked at the door of the convent only those young women whose desire for dedication was so strong as to overcome the hostile climate of the era. Yet, partly for this reason, partly because the formation became gradually more rigorous and profound, what we might call « *the quotient of perseverance* » went on improving. In fact, from 1854 to 1866 forty-eight were those admitted to the clothing and forty-one those to the profession, while from 1867 to 1875, in a shorter span of time, they were respectively forty and thirty-one.

Some simple observations allow us to catch a glimpse of the causes of certain declines.

In 1867 there were solely two aspirants and none in 1868. The Father lived then in the fear of closure because of the suppression laws of the Kingdom of Italy.

In 1872 no admission to the novitiate is registered and ceremonies were held neither of clothing nor of profession; of professions none had been made in 1871 either. Obviously a wind of crisis was blowing.

And neither clothing nor profession was celebrated in 1876, precisely because in 1875 there had been a new violent attempt to subordinate the *House of the derelitte* to civil control, and the Father — as we have said — even thought of withdrawing with the sisters to Orzano rather than yield to such pressures. On December 19 of that year he wrote to a superior:

« *I must warn you that here we have a very great struggle with our municipality and with the prefecture, since it is wished at all costs to subject to the authority of vigilance the House of the derelitte as well, with the infant schools and the Tomadini Institute. For the derelitte the question has already been brought to the ministry in Rome and who knows what will be decided. Meanwhile prudence requires that for now the congregation of the sisters be not burdened with other aspirants, if they do not bring their dowry or if at least they do not have the diploma of schoolmistresses. It is true that we have many reasons in our favor, but we are unfortunately in times in which reasons are of no value.* »

The little flock grows

If the external difficulties and the extreme prudence of Father Luigi slowed down the development of the congregation until 1875, after that period Divine Providence wished to comfort the mature years of the founder, since the ranks increased sensibly. The Father saw fulfilled from day to day the wish and the blessing of the Holy Father Pius IX, whom he so much loved:

« *May the little flock grow!* »

Already on August 4, 1875, he wrote to the superior of Primiero:

« *We come to our novices. You must know that the day before yesterday the vote was taken for the four postulants for profession, and that all four obtained the favorable votes; so also the ten aspirants for clothing all obtained approval. See therefore what a consolation to see grow the number of the spouses of our beloved Jesus. The ceremony will take place, God willing, on September 8, the day of the birth of our Mom.* »

The function was anticipated to September 5 and was presided over by the Vicar General Monsignor Someda.

« *I was writing to you in my last letter* — continues the Father — *that we cannot accept for now other aspirants, having many of them, and our house is poor; with difficulty can it maintain those that are there. You then replied to me that you had two reserved, desiring that acceptance be granted to them. Behold now the favorable moment to welcome them.* »

He had even more reason to rejoice toward the end of 1877, because that year, in three distinct functions, as many as eleven sisters made their profession and eight clothed the religious habit.

New postulants arrived in large numbers from Trentino. The Father certainly rejoiced in it, but he continued to place the accent upon quality rather than upon quantity.

« *Speak with the mother superior* — he wrote on June 9, 1876, to the person in charge at Primiero — *but do not propose the aspirants unless you are sure of their will to desire the practice of the virtues of humility, sacrifice, and poverty.* »

And later, on April 21, 1880, he will write:

« *The superior general charges me to tell you that she desires to have the names of those two postulants to whom you hinted, since if they do not have excellent qualities they cannot be received; there are needed a solid and mature spirit, excellent health, and ability in works.* »

Vocations examined by Father Luigi

Extremely prudent in accepting postulants, Father Luigi had an exceptional intuition in distinguishing whether they were moved by a true vocation.

Monsignor Domenico Feruglio, who frequented him since childhood because of the strong bonds between their families, on March 28, 1932, rendered this interesting

testimony at Staranzano. Questioned about the judgment capacity of Father Luigi as an educator, the witness replied with simplicity: « *Excellent intuition*. »

Some witnesses assure that the rector of the seminary of Udine himself, Monsignor Antivari [(1)], sent seminarians of uncertain vocation to ask counsel of the Father.

It is licit to affirm, therefore, that he was endowed with a felicitous natural intuition of hearts, certainly refined by long experience. But, since Providence chose him as the founder of a religious congregation, it is right to think that it granted him the grace of state: a gift which he made bear fruit with his virtue. The sisters of his time were firmly convinced that he possessed the supernatural gift of reading souls, especially regarding vocation; in several cases they even attributed prophetic intuitions to him.

There exist apparent and illusory vocations, superficially emotional vocations, or even motivated by vanity, when in religious life an elevated or distinct position is sought. The Father, who wished to form a humble group dedicated to heavy works, certainly did not let himself be enchanted by such attitudes. A significant episode happened to him in his penultimate year of life, and he narrates it himself in a letter of June 28, 1882, to the superior of Primiero:

« *Today happily at 10 in the morning arrived the aspirant C.A. with her father, in conformity with your esteemed letter of the 24th ultimo. A thing never seen before I happened today to observe. Attentive, reverend mother!*

The father, in taking leave, made a profound bow to his daughter and devoutly kissed her hand: and the daughter, without any resistance and as if she were accustomed to this homage and to the humiliation of the father, extended her hand to him to be kissed.

Reverend mother, this act which I have seen gives me much to think about. It appears that the father considers his daughter a saint because she prays much and frequently attends church, and it seems to me that the young woman makes holiness consist in praying alone. We shall see, and may the Lord grant that it be not so. »

From the registers of the founder it results that that young woman remained in the congregation only a few months.

There are then vocations not sustained by the physical qualities necessary for the required tasks. In the same registers is often found, next to the name of the aspirant, the annotation of his own hand: « *sent back for reasons of health*. »

For this reason he would have wished to dismiss also the tertiary Sister Filomena Angeli, who entered as an aspirant in 1867. She herself later recounted in detail the series of trials to which the Father had subjected her. « *Have you prepared the bundle to depart?* » he would say to her every time he met her. And she:

« *I have not prepared it and I shall never prepare it*. »

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[1] Born at Morsano di Castions di Strada (Udine) in 1830, he was general prefect, then rector for thirty-three years in the seminary of Udine, auxiliary bishop of Monsignor Berengo and titular of Eudoxias; to him the clergy had recourse as counselor and father. (Cf. P. DELL'OSTE, Ricordi preziosi della mia S. Messa d'oro, Udine 1931-32, pp. 114 s.).

« *But you see* — added the Father — *we cannot keep you in conscience. You are too small and you know how to do nothing. What must we do with you?* »

« *Put me to the test, Father* — replied the poor woman — *so far they have given me nothing to do. You will see how far I shall arrive, but do not say to send me away*. »

To such constancy Father Luigi yielded. And that woman, tiny but with a great heart, was most faithful and most useful to him, becoming one of the persons closest to him in her office of concierge and a fervent supporter of his holiness.

At times, on the contrary, it was he who encouraged some doubtful aspirant because of delicate health. Thus he did with Sister Tranquilla Mayerhoffer, to whom he promised healing in the first year of novitiate, as happened punctually. The future superior general Mother Cecilia Piacentini also loved to remember in the last years of life an analogous prophetic encouragement of the founder [2]. When she was on trial, she recounted to her nurse, she was always sickly and lived in the fear of being removed from the institute, but she did not dare manifest her pain to anyone. She met the Father one day, who said to her:

« *Ernestina, stay calm and quiet: you will live long and will work much for the congregation*. »

The prediction was fulfilled with precision.

A bed of thorns

Extremely cautious in giving access to aspirants, Father Scrosoppi immediately removed from the minds of the candidates the idea — should they have had it — that religious life was a sweet mystical rapture, inculcating instead that of sacrifice and of the cross. They had to understand thoroughly that to love Jesus and to live with Him meant to suffer and to die in Him and for Him.

The year of trial and the two of novitiate were a hard crucible, necessary to eliminate every impurity and make the gold of a total and perennial dedication shine. For this reason: a straw pallet, measured and poor food, humble and heavy works. For this reason an uninterrupted succession of exercises of virtue, above all of a humility practiced to the very end.

Such was, without doubt, the austere method in use in those times; but it was also the necessary method according to the spirit of Father Luigi, who would probably remain dumbfounded before the indulgent concessions introduced in our days.

The cited Mother Cecilia Piacentini had occasion to describe that method with a very incisive phrase.

She had been for some time a postulant in the nearby convent of the *Suore Dimesse*, where she had met a certain Teresa Ferro who had entered that order in 1860, assuming

[2] [M. MAKAROVICH], o.c., p. 47. At page 48 is narrated the deliverance of Sister Cecilia as a novice from an oppressive melancholy by the prayers of the founder.

the name of Maria Agnese. When Piacentini entered on June 6, 1863, among the Sisters of Providence, Ferro expressed the desire to follow her and asked her counsel. « *Come* — Piacentini replied to her — *come if you are disposed to pass from the bed of roses to that of thorns* [(3)]. » For this expression the future superior general had to suffer not a little, because it was thought that she herself — having barely clothed the habit on April 17, 1864 — bore with ill will the hard discipline of the community. She aimed instead to dissuade Ferro from the change of congregation, because she had intuited in her friend a little laudable spiritual restlessness and the impulsive desire to accomplish who knows what works of good. She had seen correctly: that sister succeeded in passing among the Sisters of Providence, but did not persevere. She would not have made that step, or would have made it with a better spirit, if she had reflected thoroughly upon the words of Piacentini.

At times Father Luigi put the postulants harshly to the test from the very first meeting. It suffices to cite two episodes that recall the life of Saint Philip Neri.

Whalebone stays snapping

In 1860 a lady of about forty years of age presented herself to Father Luigi, asking to be accepted because she was desirous to serve the Lord among the Sisters of Providence. Father Luigi, after having made her observe that in the convent one must suffer and submit to many humiliations and mortifications — a theme he loved to reiterate —, seeing her good intentions accepted her and fixed the day of her entrance.

With joy in her heart, on the appointed day the woman left the world and, with a black silk dress sustained by whalebone stays, presented herself to Father Luigi. He said to her:

« *My daughter, this very day you must begin; therefore, kneeling on the ground, you shall kiss the feet of all the mothers and sisters when they enter the refectory.* »

The good woman welcomed with a serene mind the order of the Father and was led to the door of the refectory, where she kissed the feet of everyone. But what happened? Every time she bent down, a cracking sound was heard due to the whalebone stays going into pieces. The young woman continued until the end, without showing any annoyance.

The following day the father founder called her to himself and told her that, when the sisters sat down at table, she on her knees would have to ask out of charity from each of them a spoonful of soup. Faithful to the order received, although dressed in silk, she humbly asked for the soup like a poor woman and ate it in peace while staying on her knees, in the middle of the refectory.

These acts, accomplished with generosity, placed solid foundations in that soul, who was later a religious woman of great virtue and humility.

It was Pasqua Trevisan, born at Pasiano di Pordenone in 1820, admitted as an aspirant on June 8, 1860; she professed in 1863 with the name of Sister Caterina della Croce and from 1866 to 1867 was superior of the infant school of Udine. That entrance of hers accompanied by the noise of the stays snapping placed in her heart a passionate cult for

[3] Ivi, p. 54.

the virtues preferred by the Father: poverty and humility. She gave an extreme proof of it twenty-three years later, when she fell gravely ill. She was then arranged in a comfortable small room all for herself, but she supplicated the Father to have her moved to the narrowest storage closet of the house. And there she died serenely on March 3, 1883.

A flying little hat

A reception equally abrupt, but in a spirit similar to that of Saint Philip Neri, Father Luigi reserved many years later for Vittoria Simoni.

Born in Bologna in 1837, she came to know the Sisters of Providence in Trento as soon as they began their service in that hospital. Although she had already passed forty years of age, she felt driven to enter the congregation. She was probably encouraged by Monsignor Luigi Tinti, who had repaired to Trento at the end of October 1879 for a course of spiritual exercises and who accompanied the new aspirant for a large part of the journey toward Udine, where she arrived on November 8.

An ancient testimony recounts that in 1879 there presented herself to Father Luigi a woman no longer very young, of small stature and delicate constitution; dressed with decorum and with a little hat on her head, she asked on her knees to be admitted among the aspirants of the institute. The Father, to put her to the test, gave a sharp blow to the hat, making it land in a corner of the room, then asked her to repeat the question. Sustained by the grace of vocation, the woman did not lose heart despite her natural timidity and repeated her prayer with calm. The founder replied:

« *What do you wish me to do with you? You see how small you are and by now advanced in years...* »

« *It is true, Father,* — added the young woman — *it is true, but I shall do as much as I can to be useful to the institute.* »

Seeing her well-disposed and in no way offended by the abrupt gesture, the Father accepted her and, in dismissing her, said:

« *Go, take your skillet hat and return the day after tomorrow, I await you.* »

The young woman entered the convent on November 10 — the Father delayed her entrance by two days precisely to verify whether the vocation would hold against that first trial — and took the name of Sister Maria Imelda, persevering with fervor until death. She must have understood from the beginning that into the convent one entered through a narrow gate, not to walk in a rose garden but to follow the path of the cross. Sister Imelda understood it and became an exemplary religious woman. She was also superior of the *Casa del Provvedimento* from 1890 until almost her death, which occurred in Cormons on July 23, 1909.

These two episodes, occurring nineteen years apart, demonstrate how the founder wished to clarify from the very start the sense of sacrifice of vocation to whoever asked to become a religious woman.

Shadows upon the divine calling

Not always does the divine calling, once welcomed, continue to resound clear and serene. At times, even in generous souls, it undergoes clouding's. Perhaps through the intervention of the tempter, or through human frailty which makes arise, like great waves in the sea, doubts, bewilderments, and melancholies; sometimes there insinuates itself into the heart a mysterious bitterness, similar to that which new converts at times experience. A mere nothing suffices to fall into a dangerous state of crisis.

The religious women reacted in a different way to these interior storms.

Some, by temperament or through profound trust in the founder, ran immediately to him; he possessed the extraordinary gift of restoring peace to troubled souls.

It was experienced, for example, by Sister Annunziata Felcher, who entered the congregation in 1857 at twenty-eight years of age, with the desire for a life of prayer and recollection. The Father assigned her instead immediately as assistant cook in the house of Udine. This was a task then most fatiguing, rendered still more burdensome by the obligation to go to draw water at the fountain of the Ronchi borough.

The *Cenni biografici* recount that, feeling herself oppressed by the fatigue, she began to lose heart and to complain within herself:

« *You have left the world to occupy yourself more seriously with your soul, to pray with more devotion and recollection, to make yourself a saint. But here, among the pots of the kitchen, and perhaps for all your life, you will never attain your purpose. Go out, go out...* »

One day she went resolutely to the Father and asked him to return home: let him write to her parents to come and collect her, or let him have her civil clothes returned to her because she would go away by herself. Father Luigi let her vent herself, then spoke to her with sweetness, encouraging her to resist and assuring her of his prayer. The temptation vanished and Orsolina — her name in the world — resumed her occupations with serenity, finding in them comfort instead of torment. She drew strength by thinking that fatigue, offered for the love of God, is a perfect prayer and devoid of distractions.

She clothed the habit in 1860, professed in 1862, and was for thirty years a cook at Cormons, where she died on May 3, 1899. Three months before her death she dreamed that she found herself in a very crowded railway station; not knowing how to get out, she was seized with anguish until she suddenly saw Father Luigi. She ran to him and, heartened, said to him:

« *Oh, Father, I believed I was losing myself.* »

To which the Father replied:

« *No, no, my daughter, stay serene because I have come to collect you.* »

Only a dream, certainly; but it demonstrates how the sister, at the beginning and at the end of her life, saw in the founder the secure guide toward peace.

Sister Tranquilla Mayerhoffer also lived a similar experience:

« *When I was a novice* — she testified in 1894 — *I found myself often in great desolations, and he always knew what afflicted me without my saying anything. I had*

also strong temptations upon vocation. I had no peace; I went three or four times to ask him to let me go. He calmed me for a while, but then the doubts returned. Always good and patient, he encouraged me and prayed with me, until God delivered me, granting me a profound peace that made me most happy. »

Sister Vincenza Corradini too, met by the Father at Tesero in 1869 and entered in 1872, suffered much.

« *During the novitiate I was very restless. In moments of pain I went to him to be comforted. He was accustomed to place a hand upon my head and say to me: Go in peace, I know you. I felt immediately reassured. One day, after the profession, I was assailed by a strong temptation against vocation and I was about to yield. That same evening I spoke of it to the Father and he said to me: The Lord was He who called you, and the devil, envious of your lot, wishes now to tempt you. Stay calm, therefore, my daughter! From that moment I experienced an indescribable joy. Another time I went to him for a comfort and he asked me: Have you perhaps not promised to the Lord this and this other thing? Yes — I replied. Well then, stay quiet.*

I remained marveled — concludes Sister Vincenza — *because I had revealed to no one my pain and my promise.* »

The two Sisters Osanna

Already from these episodes transpires the conviction of the sisters that their venerated founder possessed the gift of reading in hearts and of knowing spiritual secrets jealously guarded.

They were so much convinced of it that not a few — less open or more shy in revealing their own interior travail — did everything possible not to meet him when they found themselves in crisis, or avoided crossing him as soon as they saw him, certain that he would read in them as in an open book.

A singular case regarded Sister Osanna Tisot, who entered as an aspirant in 1869. She herself recounted it during the diocesan process.

Still a novice, she had been placed under the direction of Sister Giacinta De Monte, an exemplary religious woman but of a character often rough and abrupt. One day, for an unspecified shortcoming, Mother Giacinta addressed a severe reproach to the novice, who had in her turn a rather lively character. Tisot, wounded in her pride and still little solid in virtue, did not accept with good grace the scolding: it appeared to her that she had not deserved it. After a long crying, she said to herself: I do not feel like bearing from that sister who knows how many other scoldings. Tomorrow, when I open the doors of the church — since she was assigned to that task — and no one sees me, I shall run away.

And so she did. The following morning, having risen at four o'clock for her turn of adoration, she opened the large door which from the stairs of the small church of San Gaetano leads onto the street, left the keys upon the steps and fled, taking refuge in the nearby church of the Capuchins. It was her fortune, because there the crisis vanished.

The friars were reciting the psalms and among them there were — as Sister Osanna remembered — imposing men with long white beards and young men at their first weapons. The young ones — she thought — will have after all to adapt themselves to the old ones, bear them and live in peace, without thinking of absurd flights. It is better that I return to the convent, where no one has noticed my absence, and try to be more humble. On the other hand — she added with a mountaineer's practical sense, being native of Primiero — without money and without acquaintances, where could I go?

She returned therefore to the *House of the derelitte* and ran to light the lamps in the corridors, including that of the Father's room [(4)]. He, after having replied to the customary greeting « *Praised be Jesus Christ* », said to her:

« *Stop in the corridor and do not move, because I must speak to you.* »

The poor woman, with that heavy weight upon her conscience, was much troubled by it. Shortly after Father Luigi made her enter into the study and made her recite on her knees the litanies before a statue of the Madonna, keeping his hands placed upon her head. Having finished the prayers, he said to her:

« *Look straight! Do not look askance! The devil stays closer than ever to you, especially in moments of weakness, to make you fall. See how quickly you would have destroyed all that you have built! For a momentary caprice you risked losing your vocation. You had only a small humiliation to bear: if you had conquered yourself in so little, another time it would have cost you less. Prepare yourself, because sacrifice is the daily bread for the soul that loves the Lord; it is the necessary coin to purchase perfection. Face these small trials with prayer and merciful God will not deny you His help. There must have been some saint to take you by a hair and lead you back here. Let us go into the church before Jesus sacrament: if He welcomes you still, I shall welcome you too.* »

Sixty-two years later Sister Osanna still wondered how Father Luigi had known of her flight.

Reconfirmed in her vocation by that intervention, Tisot obtained to assume, during the clothing of March 25, 1873, the name of a novice who died with a reputation for holiness.

It was Teresa Dush [(5)], born in Porzus, above Attimis, in 1845.

When she was about eleven years old, one Sunday her mother ordered her to go to gather grass for the goats. In vain the girl made it noted that on feast days one ought not

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4 The bed of Father Luigi was surrounded by curtains.

5 The event of the animation of the statue of the Madonna by which Dush is said to have been favored at the age of ten years, is recalled in a canvas by a local painter of January 1886, which is found inside the small chapel built on the place of the occurrence. In the canvas, below the young woman depicted on her knees before the Virgin there is the inscription: « Dush Teresa 8-9-1855 apparition ». On Dush see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. I, pp. 124-137. The event took place at Porzus a decade after the apparition of the Madonna at La Salette in the diocese of Grenoble (19-9-1846), recognized authentic by the diocesan authority in 1851. The apparition of La Salette had wide resonance in Friuli: at Cividale a small church took the name of Our Lady of La Salette. There are no data to affirm how much Father Luigi followed that occurrence. It is remembered because, three years after his death, there will enter into the congregation a young woman, Melania Zuppichin (1854-1890) of Latisana, who assumed the name in memory of that apparition (Melania Calvat was one of the visionaries); she died assisting the sick of smallpox in the hospital of Portogruaro.

to attend to such labors. « *We eat* — her mother replied to her roughly —, *the beasts too have a right to eat.* » She went away therefore anguished before a statue of the Madonna and confided to her pain. The Virgin would then have spoken to her:

« *Obey and go to the meadow, but gather only a handful of forage, which will suffice for the whole day.* »

And since the child feared that her mother would be angry, the Madonna made her approach and impressed a small cross upon the wrist of her left hand:

« *Show this sign to your mother and she will believe you.* »

The episode shook those mountaineers, who subsequently built a chapel on the place of the event; the chapel stands even today at the entrance of the village.

To remove the little one from the dangers of an indiscreet devotion, the canon of Cividale Monsignor Tiossi had her welcomed in 1856 in the *House of the derelitte* , where she remained four years. She went out of it for a period, but in 1864 she returned thither to become a sister. Once more the Madonna would have encouraged her, since she knew neither how to read nor how to write:

« *Go indeed to the convent and, when you have to recite the prayers, you will know how to do it like the others.* »

In fact, while she was in the choir, she read and recited very well the office of the Virgin; as soon as she went out, she became illiterate as before. She clothed the habit on September 14, 1868, and the Father gave her the name of Osanna Maria, so that she might be protected from all spiritual vanity and render praise to God and to the Virgin, with whom the young woman continued to dialogue with secure faith and simplicity.

Shortly afterward, however, she fell ill. One day Tisot found herself next to her bed together with the founder. He felt the pulse of the sick woman to sense her fever and Tisot could see the small cross — three centimeters long and similar to shining gold — which the Madonna would have left her as a sign. Shortly after she said to the venerated founder:

« *Father, when I clothe the habit, will you give me the name of Sister Maria Osanna? Certainly, if you become good as she has been.* »

Dush died piously on August 17, 1870. In that moment all the sisters could see the cross, which from golden had become white with death. In life, by the will of Father Luigi, she had taken the utmost care to keep it hidden.

The Indies of Sister Placida

Another episode occurred some years later. A sister had for some time the idea of becoming a missionary, but she had made no mention of it to anyone; within herself she went on thinking how she could realize such a desire. One day she ran into the venerable Father Luigi, who without hesitation said to her:

« *Far from the Indies! Far from the Indies! Your Indies are here, among us.* »

How that sister remained anyone can imagine, secure as she was of not having spoken with anyone.

The case regarded Irene Faés from Tavon, in Trentino, who had assumed the name of Sister Placida in the clothing of May 3, 1878. In her fifty-two years of religion — she died in fact in Cormons on June 16, 1930 — she herself recounted several times the surprising intuition of the founder regarding that secret craving of hers, which from then on vanished completely.

Vocation crises and abandonments

Analogous accounts are very numerous in the tradition of the religious women who lived at the time of Father Luigi. From all of them transpires the firm conviction that their founder possessed a singular intuition, not without flashes of divine light, in guiding the religious women. But above all, Sister Eufemia Zeni used to say:

« *He had a special gift of consoling afflicted hearts. The sisters always went to him in their disturbances, anguishes, displeasures, and they departed totally consoled and reassured.* »

It is obvious however that not even the most holy and enlightened guidance can prevent entirely crises and abandonments, especially when external circumstances exasperate the situation of a soul and the latter lacks the confidence and docility then more than ever necessary.

Sister Gioacchina Gremese, praising the customary fortitude and serenity of the founder, happened to say:

« *The good Father showed himself desolate only when in the political upheavals, in the wars of 1859-66, there occurred several abandonments of the professed sisters and schoolmistresses whom he himself had made study. Oh, the immense pain of the good Father in seeing his daughters, by him tenderly loved, leave the institute! It appeared that he was to go mad with pain, which he manifested with groans, tears, and fervent and sorrowful prayers to the Lord.* »

The testimony of Sister Gioacchina, born in Udine in 1866 and entered in November 1881, could certainly not be exact in the temporal reference, since she spoke of things that occurred before her birth. In reality, from the registers of the Father it does not result that there was any defection in those distant years. They occurred later, precisely among the schoolmistress sisters, as we shall say shortly.

However, Gremese undoubtedly grasped the root of the crises by attributing them to the political upheavals of the time.

It is necessary to think back to the wave of contempt and hostility against the Church, the papacy, the clergy, and the religious congregations, which accompanied and followed the events of 1866 and 1870. The believers were put in the pillory. Among the few Catholics who continued to profess themselves practicing and faithful to the Pope there reigned truly bewilderment and dismay. A cassock could not show itself through the streets without provoking more or less open, and at times clamorous, demonstrations of derision and mockery. Father Scrosoppi himself experienced it.

The acrimonious external climate did not fail to have negative repercussions upon the minds of the faithful. While part of the aristocracy and of the bourgeoisie abandoned the

Christian feeling of the fathers and the populace itself, especially in the cities, yielded to the anticlerical and anti-religious ferments, among the clergy of Udine — though so whole in its entirety — there were some cases of open denial and even an attempt at schism. Nor did the fervent prayers and the wise and strong direction of Father Luigi succeed in blocking some infiltration of the polluted air of the time among his spiritual daughters. Thanks to God, not collapses of faith or of morals, but a subtle restlessness, a dangerous dejection, a melancholy mist of weariness.

The three deaths of 1871

To this situation must probably be linked the decidedly pathetic episode of three sisters who died in 1871, which remained like a nightmare in the memory of the sisters.

All three were very good and all three had long been harboring death due to incurable illnesses. The latent disease certainly opened the doors to some bitterness. To leave the congregation, no, never: not even to think about it. But to ask to die, indeed to die together, that, yes, immediately.

It was in 1868, the year in which — on November 8 — Father Luigi gave the conference on vocation and perseverance of which we have spoken. He gave it because it seemed necessary to him. For a year and a half the superior general had moved to Cormons and upon the house of Udine weighed the fear of suppression. It is within this framework that must be placed the singular event, narrated by an old testimony:

« *About the year 1868 three sisters: Sister Saveria Pascolatti, Sister Felicita Pigani, and Sister Rosalia Simeoni made a pact together, without the knowledge of the superiors: the first to die would return to collect the others.*

They were three most fervent sisters. Sister Saveria they called "colombina" for her simplicity and innocence. Sister Rosalia was a seraph, remembered even today by the elderly: it was a joy to see her in prayer and even more to hear her speak of God and of Paradise; it seemed that she saw it open over her head. »

The narrative continues rich in singular details. The fact is that Sister Saveria died on April 14, 1871, and Sister Felicita on the following May 30, both from tuberculosis; Sister Rosalia, struck by erysipelas, followed them on June 10.

Since the community had come to know of that pact, Father Luigi had to toil quite a bit to restore tranquility. While he deplored that sad agreement, because it was made against the virtue of obedience and abandonment to God, he admonished the other religious women thus:

« *When one has inspirations, one must ask counsel from the one who directs our soul so as not to err, and then we are certain that they come from God and that His will is done; but one must not act on one's own head, because we are not in a position to discern whether it be or not the will of God.* »

A sign, therefore, that the three sisters had believed they were following a celestial inspiration, behind which, however, it is not difficult to discern a sorrowful craving for escape.

But those three daughters, at least, had left the cloister for heaven. Shortly afterward some religious women would leave it to return to the world. And to these apply well the words of Sister Gioacchina on the pain of the founder upon seeing some professed schoolmistresses desert the ranks of the congregation.

We wish to remember them briefly and with moved respect, following the example of the Holy Church, which, if it honored the martyrs, had maternal pity for those who had yielded. So much the more since their abandonments were not without extenuating circumstances, beginning with the fact that the very diploma of schoolmistress — permitting them to sustain themselves in civil life — rendered the temptation stronger. Nor is there a case that does not enclose a seed of admonition and of salutary teaching.

The drama of Sister Gertrude Corradini

She had entered the congregation in 1854 and had professed in 1860. When Father Luigi decided to have some religious women obtain a diploma, he included her too in the first group that took the examinations in Udine in the spring of 1866.

The following year she was sent to the house of Cormons, where one of the elementary classes was entrusted to her. But, either because of excessive trust in her own capacities which drove her to wish to teach in the higher classes, or under the influence of the school controversies that troubled the life of the house, or because the illness that would reveal itself later had already manifested itself, she became a cause of discord in the small community, governed then by the excellent but perhaps somewhat weak Mother Luigia Dario [(6)]. She was therefore re-entrusted to the house of Udine in March 1872 and on the 18th of the same month she returned to her family.

The poor sister could not give herself peace; personally or through others she sent numerous requests to Archbishop Monsignor Casasola so that he might have her readmitted into the convent.

Father Luigi, though respectful of the decisions taken by the superior general and by her female counselors, supported the hopes of Corradini, whose suffering he shared. He had promised in fact that he would welcome her back if he succeeded in realizing a project of his: perhaps that reception center for young people in difficulty which he dreamed of erecting in Udine, in *via di Mezzo*.

Then nothing came of it and we do not know the subsequent history of Corradini. But the obituary of the *House of the derelitte* offers us a moving image of her tormented sunset: one reads there that she died in the psychiatric hospital of Ribis in 1919 and by her will expressed the vivid desire to be buried in the tomb of the Sisters of Providence, to whom she belonged and whom she loved with vivid affection, especially the superior Sister Lucia De Giorgio.

Thus, at least after death, she could return among her dear sisters.

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[6] Dario Marianna (Sister Maria Luigia dei Cuori di Gesù), born in Villasantina (Udine) on September 30, 1824, entered the congregation on August 6, 1846, clothed the habit on August 7, 1847, professed on August 6, 1851, died in Cormons on March 5, 1890. For notes on her see Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. 11, pp. 185-190.

Restless souls

That environmental conditions had a remarkable influence upon the abandonments of some religious women seems clearly demonstrated by the fact that they occurred almost all in the period 1872-1875, in which Father Scrosoppi himself, not wishing to accept the transformation of the *House of the derelitte* into a moral entity, even thought of dissolving it. It is very probable that the state of uncertainty contributed to triggering some interior crises.

On July 10, Sister Eustella Oliva, not yet professed, left the congregation. She was from Cremona, and perhaps the difference in origin and mentality made her feel uneasy among the poor sisters of Udine. On that very day Father Luigi notes in his expense book:

« *for a schoolmistress returning to Cremona L. 36.25*. »

In close agreement with Oliva, Sister Giuliana Ferro left the congregation on October 14 of that same year 1872; she had entered among the *derelitte* on January 4, 1865, coming from the *Dimesse*, with whom she bore the name of Sister Agnese. She is the one to whom Sister Cecilia Piacentini had said:

« *Come, if you are disposed to pass from the bed of roses to that of thorns*. »

The biographer of Piacentini writes that Ferro made a novitiate that seemed fervent. But Ferro herself, in a letter to Monsignor Casasola, declares:

« *The first year of novitiate I passed among the most acute sufferings of the spirit, never being able to feel myself content however much I sought to be so: the remaining two years were even worse*. »

For fear of the judgment of others she had not dared expose her distress at the time of her profession, celebrated on October 27, 1868. But in 1872 she felt secure:

« *I am decided, resolute* — she wrote to the Archbishop — *not to stay in a place, certainly holy, but which does not adapt itself at all to my spirit*. »

She had already initiated negotiations with another convent:

« *Their spirit* — she added — *is sweeter and milder: I feel that only there shall I find the desired calm and quiet*. »

At the end of October she was in fact in the institute of Santa Dorotea in Cremona, where Oliva had probably preceded her. But not even there did she find peace, since she subsequently passed among the *Dame Inglesi* of Rovereto. Finally she returned definitively to civil life; after a period of teaching in Naples, she married and emigrated to America.

Both were therefore victims of that error of perspective against which Father Luigi did not cease to warn: to seek in convents an illusory quiet instead of union with the sacrifice of Christ.

Perhaps the founder suffered more for two other abandonments due to the internal situation of the house of Primiero. There Sister Cecilia Piacentini had wept for two years and only a special grace of God had given her the strength to overcome the trials to which

the good but rigid superior Sister Visentini subjected her. The same strength was not possessed by Sister Margherita Bellini, who left the congregation on November 13, 1875, and Sister Veronica Tessitori, who returned to civil life on October 15, 1877. The latter had to return again to ask help from Father Luigi, since on February 8, 1878, he notes the moving sum of 7.70 lire given as « *charity to Maria Tessitori retired to Palmanova* ».

Testimony of Angela Martinis

Another case of abandonment occurred toward the end of the tormented period 1871-1875. We believe it is opportune to narrate it with care because it appears to us suffused with a singular emotion.

On May 15, 1865, two little orphans from Udine, Angela and Italia Martinis, had been welcomed into the *House of the derelitte* . The first under the immediate protection of Father Luigi, the second of Monsignor Someda.

Protector was called, in this case, whoever assumed the burden of the fee.

While Italia left the institute for reasons of health in 1871, Angela on October 25 of that year entered the congregation as an aspirant and immediately began to prepare herself for the teaching qualification under the guidance of Sister Costanza Murero. She clothed the religious habit on December 7, 1873, but did not make her profession, since she left on November 22, 1875. Her two companions of clothing also did not profess until January 23, 1877: an indubitable sign of a certain crisis then looming.

Subsequently, Martinis dedicated herself in civil life to the profession of teacher and married. She lived so long as to be able to render a testimony upon the holiness of Father Scrosoppi: a declaration not contained in the diocesan process, but worthy of being reproduced integrally from the letter which Martinis wrote on April 12, 1932, from Sagrado to Sister Valburga Zuccolli.

« *I keep the word given last Thursday to write to you some fact regarding the life of the most beloved Father Luigi Scrosoppi, a model of goodness and of charity toward the poor and the needy. You will excuse the delay, caused by some sad circumstances.*

I was about eleven years in that sacred enclosure and I had occasion to hear from the very lips of this venerable priest many things which remained sculpted in my soul.

How many sacrifices he made for his poor little orphans! Of everything he deprived himself to come to their rescue. With affection he would say: My beloved daughters, be obedient and devout; study with diligence, love work and be respectful toward those who instruct you. That then which he frequently recommended to us was devotion to the holy protector of the institute: Pray, daughters, to Saint Cajetan that he may succor you in your needs and each day keep present the brief prayer: Obtain for us, O Saint Cajetan, with your opportune assistance from God, Providence.

The institute lived on the alms which many benefactors sent for the poor little orphans. One day, among others, noon strikes and we all hasten to the refectory for dinner; but the tables were empty because food was lacking. What does our good Father do then?

He calls us together and with such words exhorts us to be patient and trust in divine Providence that we all were moved. We prayed together with him. He went then into his small study of prayer and, having come out, gave us a small piece of chocolate saying: Take this meanwhile, and shortly you shall have dinner.

Within a few minutes behold arriving a cart laden with foodstuffs. Immediately the food was prepared, which was abundant and good. After having dined merrily, we thanked Saint Cajetan and went into the courtyard for recreation.

One day in which I was of help to Sister Maria Lucia — in the world Caterina Merlo — to bake bread, the fire could not be lighted because of the wood still green. Then the good sister has recourse to the Father and explains the case to him. Having returned, she ordered me to take the wood and carry it to the feet of the altar of the small church annexed to the convent.

Having deposited the bundle, she said these precise words, advised, I believe, by the venerable Father: Lord, bless this wood, so that we may bake the bread for noon.

This said, she imposed on me to take up the bundle again and put it to the oven. To our great marvel we saw that those woods burned as if they were so many candles. This fact made a great impression on me and I said within myself: Our blessed Father is a saint.

On the eve of holy Christmas, each year we would place ourselves in line around the corridor in which was found the study of our most beloved director, and a pastoral song was sung in the Friulian language which pleased him so much. I do not know if they sing it still. It began thus: "Vés di savé ch'al è nassut il Salvator in forme d'un frut" (You must know that the Savior is born in the form of a child). The song finished, he thanked us and recounted to us so many beautiful things regarding the birth of the Child Jesus, who was born poor in a stable to teach us poverty.

He exhorted us to be good and wise, to love one another mutually.

When he prayed, he did so with such devotion as to seem an angel, and I know not how he could remain so long kneeling, having for many years a diseased leg. One saw that he suffered, but he never complained. How patient he was!

Often I heard him say: No, I shall not die content until I have founded twelve institutes.

This blessed priest was the visible example of every virtue. Let us seek at least a little to imitate him.

Excellent mother, accept this writing of mine and, if you wish also the Friulian pastoral song, write to me and I shall transcribe it for you.

Remember me to the most reverend mother superior and pray an Ave for the poor old woman.

Angela Martinis widow Stacul. »

Thus, in a light of holiness surrounded by prodigies and prophecies, the old schoolmistress remembered with emotion Father Luigi, over fifty years after having left

the ranks of his spiritual daughters. Between the lines of her letter, besides the sweet return of memory to those distant times, a sorrowful regret seems to transpire.

Caresses of Providence

In the testimony of Martinis are remembered two providential cases of which she herself was a witness. This induces us to recall here some other similar episodes, which occurred at various epochs, also to close in serenity a chapter somewhat marked by shadows and sadness.

We do not wish to attribute to them the qualification of prodigies, although the Lord said that he who has faith as a grain of mustard seed can make even mountains move. And Father Luigi possessed a faith great and firm as a boulder. For the rest, in the life of the saints — especially of those dedicated to charity — facts of the kind are frequent. God never abandons to confusion those who trust in Him.

One day, therefore, the sister purveyor went to the Father to tell him that in the granary there was by then wheat only for a few days and therefore it was necessary to provide more. He replied to her to take for then as much as sufficed, because afterward divine Providence would think of it. Then the Father repaired to pray in the small church; from there he went into the granary with a small image of Saint Cajetan, which he placed under the little wheat. Two months were still lacking until the new harvest. But the sister was able to continue to draw from it, although the community was very numerous, and the small heap never diminished. The phenomenon ceased when the new reaping was ready.

In another case of the kind, to faith in Providence the Father united a lesson of poverty. A sister was sweeping the floor of the granary, by then devoid of wheat. And behold from the crevices issued a few grains. The religious woman paid no heed to it. But the Father, arrived there by chance, ordered her to clean the crevices well, because otherwise one would sin against the spirit of poverty and against Providence from which came even those stray grains. The sister, provided with a wire, set herself to dig. And dig and dig, she raised her gaze astonished toward the Father, because that appeared a hidden mine. He encouraged her to continue and remained there smiling, until he saw a nice small heap formed.

Another time the purveyor ran exasperated to the Father to complain that the wheat in the granary was so infested by the granary weevil (a parasite) that it would no longer serve for anything. The Father listened to her with calm and then smiling replied to her:

« *But no, daughter, you have not looked well, it is not possible that it is spoiled.* »

« *Oh, yes, Father. I have turned it and turned it again and there issued a swarm of butterflies. Other sisters saw it with me.* »

« *My daughter* — replicated the Father — *it is necessary to have faith in God. Faith, faith! Return to check and you will convince yourself that the grain is still good.* » And he gave her his blessing.

The sister returned to the granary and with great marvel found the wheat in perfect state. This account was frequently repeated by Mother Cecilia Piacentini and by Sister Elena Zuccolli.

Toward 1873 a novice [7], assigned to the kitchen, while she was preparing to make the polenta, noticed that the kneading trough was entirely empty. And there were so many mouths to feed! She ran immediately to the Father so that he might send in all haste to buy some flour. But Father Luigi had not a cent. What to do? He ordered the sister to put the water in the pot and to light the fire. He, meanwhile, immersed himself in prayer. One and two times the novice returned to tell him that the water was boiling, but of flour not even the shadow.

« *Trust, my daughter* — repeated the Father — *and the flour will arrive for certain.* »

The sister was descending for the third time when she heard the bell of the main door ring. She ran to open and behold a stranger with a little donkey laden with a sack of yellow flour. He unloaded it into her arms and went away without saying a word.

These sudden arrivals of flour or of other necessary things happened several times. Sister Giacinta De Monte, responsible for the kitchen, turned to the Father who often sent her to the nearby convent of the Capuchins, the customary refuge in desperate cases; but shortly afterward arrived carts with flour, wood, potatoes, beans, and whatever else was needed.

To another sister assigned to the kitchen happened once this trouble. One morning, very early, she went down to the kitchen to prepare the bread soup for the breakfast of the little orphans. She put therefore the bread to boil and, when it was at half cooking, she prepared to season it. Still entirely drowsy, she mistook the bottle of kerosene for that of oil, and poured kerosene in abundance. She noticed the mishap immediately from the stench that rose from the pot. She ran immediately to the Father. And he, after having recollected himself in fervent prayer, blessed that foul-smelling meal, saying to the sister who was trembling at his side:

« *Now ladle it out as usual.* »

The sister, with little faith, replied: « *But, Father, it tastes of kerosene!* »

« *Come now* — he replicates — *put it on the table and you will see that all will eat willingly.* »

When the girls sat down for breakfast, the stench was still in the air; but the soup had become exquisite.

Sister Filomena Angeli who, besides acting as concierge, kept the cupboard of the shoes for the little orphans and engaged herself in repairing them, recounted that she found herself several times in difficulty. The Father desired that all the girls, indistinctly and at least for the feasts, should wear shoes. But often there were not enough. She knew not how to remedy it. The Father then comforted her saying:

« *Trust in Providence and meanwhile distribute the shoes you have.* »

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[7] It was Sister Maria Francesca Serafina (cf. part II, ch. 7, note 2). Sister Maria Antonia della Sacra Famiglia, in the world Caterina Gadenz (born at Transacqua di Trento in 1854, entered the congregation in 1876, clothed in 1877, professed in 1880, died at Cormons in 1889), was also a spectator of the arrival of the flour for the polenta: after Father Luigi had exhorted the sister to trust in God because there was no money to buy it, he went to pray before Jesus sacrament and « not a quarter of an hour had passed when the door bell rang. Having opened, they found a stocky, robust man, with a load of flour on his back. Without saying a word, he deposits the sack and leaves ». (A.L.S., fasc. 29, doc. 9, c.r. 99).

And with her great marvel there came into her hands always all the pairs that were needed.

There did not rain, so to speak, from heaven only sacks of flour, grain, and wood or shoes; money also arrived, and in the exact measure required.

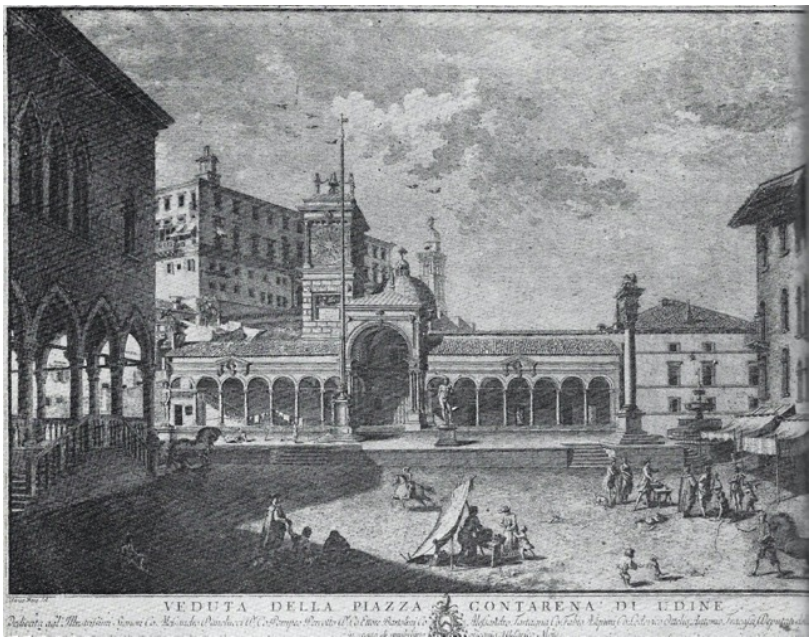
The same Sister Filomena recounted that it fell to her to pay the workmen who labored for the house. She went to ask the pay from the Father, but he, very many times, found himself without a centime. Then he would place himself on his knees before Jesus sacrament, then opened the alms box and drew out of it just what was needed to settle the debt. Sometimes he made the workmen themselves pray with him. And the box, previously empty, offered in the end the necessary money.

Tinti recounts a similar case, in which however Providence made use of an intermediary.

« *The venerated founder* — he writes — *had to pay a large sum of money for a purchase made by him to the advantage of a charitable institution. The day fixed for the payment came, without Father Luigi having succeeded in finding the necessary sum, nor was there hope of obtaining a postponement. The Father goes to prostrate himself before the sacred tabernacle, his usual refuge, and there abandons himself to prayers and tears, confiding to Jesus sacrament the urgent need. Then he rises reassured of receiving the grace, climbs into the carriage to gain time, and orders his faithful servant to conduct him to the house of a certain gentleman.*

At half journey, and precisely in piazza della Libertà (or piazza Contarena) in the center of Udine, that gentleman, who was arriving in haste, made a sign to the coachman to stop the horse. He approached the door and asked Father Luigi permission to accompany him in the carriage.

Felicitous meeting, said Father Luigi, I was coming precisely to you for an urgent business. To which immediately the gentleman replied: And I, fearing that you today might find yourself in some economic difficulty, was repairing just now to your institute to deliver to you this sum which I entrust to your charitable hands. »



Udine. – Piazza Contarena. 19th-century engraving

« *It was exactly the sum which on that day served the good Father Luigi! Of similar adventures* — continues Tinti — *one reads many in the lives of the Blessed Cottolengo and of Don Bosco, which prove clearly that he who is generous with his neighbor for the love of God is then by the Lord abundantly rewarded. And so it was for Father Luigi, who never knew how to deny succor to the needy.* »

One of the most powerful magnets of divine Providence is that of forgetting one's own needs to succor those of one's neighbor. Father Luigi knew it; and often there slipped from his hand a help barely received to pass into that of others. One day there arrived at the *House of the derelitte* a person to return to him a *marengo* (or a gold coin) and Sister Strazzolini awaited him at the passage, because she had urgency of it for the house. But when she went to the Father, he in the meantime had given the coin to a poor man who had preceded her. « *Calm yourself, my mother* — he said to her —, *God will provide.* » And in fact, shortly afterward, arrived an unexpected subsidy for the little orphans and for the axes. Blessed charity and blessed abandonment to God: keys of gold and of silver that open the heavens. The Heavenly Father abounds with blessings upon him who is generous with his neighbor and trusting in Him.

Chapter 9:

GLEAM OF THE ANTEVIGIL (1876-1880)

Five years of relative peace

Every day brings with it its own labors and its own anxieties. One notices it in the evening, if the dawn had seemed splendid.

The word « peace » here below represents but a sigh and a desire: only for those who believe is it a celestial promise, of whose joys one foretastes in interior quiet. However, it exists in the vocabulary. And « time of peace » is defined as that in which war and tension cross a moment of stasis, and breathing seems to become lighter, as for a wayfarer who, having attained a summit with effort, sees open before him a stretch in a slight slope.

From 1876 to 1880 Father Luigi knew such a period of distension. He certainly did not lack labors and preoccupations, but they were like light waves upon the surface of a river in the plain.

The political-religious climate had somewhat attenuated. The long and exhausting contrast with the civil authorities for the transformation of the *House of the derelitte* into a moral entity had by then concluded in 1875, to the disadvantage of the Father: to him nothing remained but to continually postpone the execution, before accepting that bitter morsel. Furthermore, the restlessness by which for a brief period the congregation of the sisters too had been shaken was almost entirely placated.

Father Luigi, then, enjoyed a renewed vigor in these years: he hints at it himself in one of his letters.

It was the well-known phenomenon, physiological and psychological, of the so-called last youth, which precedes and announces the sunset, precisely as a flame burns more intensely before extinguishing.

Weak spirits, prone to illusions, draw from it a reason to cling to earthly life. Strong and believing souls discern in it instead a divine gift to prepare themselves for the great return.

A tomb in the silence

If, having passed seventy years of age, Father Luigi did not yet feel death knocking at the door, nevertheless upon death he thought. And he thought of it with sweetness.

In reality, there is not a line in his writings, nor a hint in his discourses, of that vision of death tinged with anguish or terror, which yet is not rare in the preachers' sermons and in the admonitions of ascetics. He was a Franciscan and could not call it anything but « sister death ».

How, therefore, did he imagine it?

He, who had had no regard for himself during all his life, he who loved to ask in charity for his own use the rags of the poor, one single thing wished and cared for: a tomb in the silence for his own body.

Not in the monumental cemetery of Udine, but in the distant and loved village of Orzano. A decision that attracted affectionate reproaches from those who were close to him. Why go away, once dead, far from his spiritual daughters, far from the orphans and the beneficiaries, far from the fellow citizens who yet venerated him? And he replied:

« *Let this good-for-nothing rest in peace far from all confusion; let him be forgotten.* »

Nor did he content himself with choosing the place of burial, but studied with love the setting he preferred. He ordered therefore that next to the house of Orzano a small church should be built in everything identical to the Holy House venerated at Loreto and entrusted its care to Don Luigi Costantini. The chapel was already under construction in 1877, when on February 25 he wrote to Costantini:

« *I recommend to you the small church of Orzano.* »

Orzano (UD). Small church of the Madonna di Loreto built by order of Fr. Luigi.

Whether Father Luigi had taken in person the exact measurements of the Holy House during one of his pilgrimages — as a witness affirms — or whether he had drawn them from a small church in the Veronese territory built as a copy of the original — as others say — is a detail of no importance. What counts is his desire for a chapel entirely identical to the house of Nazareth. Later that desire of his will not be respected, under the pretext that the bare and dark walls did not favor devotion.

The Father, however, would have loved it thus and in this way amused himself in describing it — before it was finished — during his brief visits to Orzano. To await the final resurrection in a nest that recalled Jesus, the mother Mary, and the most beloved Saint Joseph: this was the dream of his soul, enamored of the mystery of the incarnation and of the humility of the Word made man.

In building that church he did not lack some annoyance. Orzano belonged to the territory dependent on the chapter of Cividale, which claimed almost episcopal rights, with pretensions of autonomy from the government of the Archbishop of Udine. Father Luigi, instead, after having asked and obtained the consent of the chapter, as priest responsible for the area, had made the works proceed with the sole approval of the archiepiscopal curia. There followed a protest from the chapter, placated later thanks to the manifest honesty of the Father in respecting the supreme religious authority. However, the small church will not be consecrated until thirteen years after his death. His love for hiddenness and his disciplined obedience will merit him, thus, a doubly humble tomb: truly similar to the house of Nazareth where, according to scholars of the Scriptures, the Holy Family lived almost ignored by the surrounding environment.

The fiftieth anniversary of priesthood

« *The first of April of 1877* — writes Tinti — *represented for the father founder a most sweet memory: his priestly jubilee. The humble Father Luigi had kept the joyful recurrence hidden with care and, as far as he was concerned, that feast day would not have been distinguished from the others by the entire religious community. However, his beloved brother Don Giovanni Battista had already warned the Sisters of Providence, to permit them to manifest to the father founder their own filial affection and, at the same time, to rejoice spiritually for the solemn and rare festivity.*

The sisters had to act with great prudence in preparing everything without Father Luigi noticing it, out of the well-founded fear that, if he had foreseen some celebration in his honor, he would have sought to prevent it with his authority. Only on the eve of the feast the good Father, noticing an unusual movement among the people of the institute and meeting suddenly some sisters who hastened to hide the objects they held in their hands, noticed the pleasant conspiracy to celebrate him and passed next to them saying smilingly: Ah, rogues, rogues!

In the small church of the institute, adorned for the feast like a bride awaiting the bridegroom, the venerated father founder celebrated on that day the holy sacrifice, assisted at the altar by Monsignor Antonio Feruglio and by the priest Luigi Costantini, two valid collaborators of Father Luigi in his works of charity. During the holy jubilee

mass, the clear voices of the pupils, accompanied by the organ, sang those sublime Latin compositions set to music by the celebrated Don Jacopo Tomadini, who with his celestial notes touches the deepest chords of hearts.

The tears of emotion, the vibrant tone of the voice, and the bearing of the person were evident signs of the interior consolation that the Lord granted to his faithful minister; he, for fifty years, had celebrated daily upon the altar with the same fervor of his first mass.

Many priests hastened on that day to celebrate in that devout church; subsequently, in the large hall of the institute, the Father, surrounded by many friends and acquaintances, was celebrated by the sisters and by the pupils with joyful songs and appropriate discourses.

To the sisters of Udine were united on that day some superiors of other houses, spokeswomen of the joy of all the sisters who, with one heart and one soul, felt themselves spiritually united to their loved father founder. There was among them a noble contest in presenting to him, as a dear memory of that feast, some skillful manual work accompanied by poems and inscriptions, as a sincere testimony of their most devoted affection.

Among the various compositions were distinguished: a most affectionate ode by the girls of the institute; a poem in quatrains by the same young women; an ode by the Sisters of Providence of Trento; an inscription and a sonnet by the sisters of Primiero; a sonnet by the sisters of Tesero; a song by the sisters of Udine; a sonnet by the sisters of Cormons and an inscription from the superior general to her beloved daughters in Jesus.

Notwithstanding these and very many other manifestations of affection and of esteem addressed to him on such an occasion, the modesty of the Father suffered much from it, since he desired rather humiliations and indifference toward his person. However, in his goodness, he left free course to these signs of joy and of gratitude so as not to sadden his dear orphans and loved sisters; he accepted to suffer provided he permitted them to rejoice, since charity is kind. »

Thus far Tinti.

He does not remember, perhaps out of humility, a sonnet which he himself composed for the occasion and which was recited in the name of some priests of the diocese of Concordia; nor does he remember an ode, sung by the children of the *Asilo dell'Immacolata*, written by Don Sebastiano Comuzzi [(1)], born in Lestizza in 1816. He had been a witness to the heroic dedication of the sisters in his native village during the cholera of 1855 and was then assigned to the church of San Pietro at Cividale. In this latter work Father Luigi is compared to Pope Pius IX:

« *Oh, thou art similar to the great Pius, who is a true image of the heart of God!* »; to the Father it is wished: « *Eternal reward of his prodigies, of an untiring divine love*. » In the sonnet of the house of Cormons it is said of the Father that: « *Like an angel still of the dearest virtues, precisely as on the first day, thou shinest*. »

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[1] Born in Lestizza (Udine) in 1816 and died in 1880, he was a municipal teacher and collaborator in various parishes; he also lent service at Cividale del Friuli.

These are phrases that state clearly by what reputation for holiness the figure of Father Scrosoppi was surrounded.

He had to balance those praises with profound gestures of humility, if Mother Angelica Gervasoni, almost twenty years later, could affirm:

« *His humility stood out especially in 1877, the year in which his priestly jubilee occurred.* »

We believe however that the jubilee celebration was not held precisely on the first of April, which in that year coincided with Easter Day; it is not easy to imagine in such a solemnity the hastening of many priests to celebrate mass in the small church of San Gaetan. Perhaps one must think of some day during the week following Easter, as seems to be suggested by a letter of the Father of April 7 to the sisters of a community in the Trentino territory, probably of Trento:

« *The coming of that reverend local mother superior to find me was for me a most welcome surprise... I thank you for your letters for the congratulations made on the occasion of my jubilee. I know not what else to tell you, save that you ask of the Lord to forgive me the many offenses committed in these fifty years in which I celebrate holy mass.* »

A cassock and a pair of overshoes

What sweet sentiments filled the soul of the Father on his jubilee feast? Without doubt he relived, upon the wings of memories, the emotion of the ceremony in the Cathedral of Udine and the ineffable joys of the first holy sacrifice in the church of Santa Maria Maddalena; he felt tenderly close his mother, his father, and his most beloved Father Carlo. Yet he must have experienced an unspeakable pain in not being able to celebrate mass where he had officiated the first time, in that church so much loved, an innocent victim of profaning offenses.

Of one thing he was glad: that his priestly anniversary almost coincided with the episcopal jubilee of Pope Pius IX, who had been consecrated Bishop of Spoleto on June 3, 1827.

Precisely on the day of that recurrence, Father Luigi admitted three candidates to the novitiate. Next to their names he wrote in his own hand:

« *In memory of the episcopal anniversary of Pius IX, they shall bear the name of Pia di San Giuseppe, of Pia del Cuore di Gesù, and of Pia dell'Immacolata.* »

He loved Pius IX very much, Father Luigi, and was devoutly close to him in his sufferings and humiliations.

Shortly afterward came the feast of San Luigi. Perhaps there occurred on that day what Sister Pia Bortolotti recounts, who at that time was a simple novice.

« *He having need of an ecclesiastical habit and being a great lover of poverty, the mother superior, who well knew how he did not wish new garments, thought to go one*

evening to beg him to permit her to take the old one to repair it, as she effectively did. At the same time, however, she had a new one cut and had it sewn.

Now the problem was to find the way to deliver it to him. Fortune willed that precisely in that period occurred his name day feast. On that day all the sisters and the girls gathered in the hall, where wishes were made to him and several poems were recited.

One of these poems had been entitled purposely: Divine Providence. The girl who was to recite it, having arrived at the point where she prayed the good Father to accept the gifts which his daughters made him, came forward presenting the habit to him. Then he took it smilingly and, turning to the mother, thanked courteously saying: The poor never refuse anything, and indeed show themselves grateful; thus I thank you for the charity you do me. »

Whether it was June 21 or some months later — on August 29, 1877, was held the clothing of eight sisters — it is certain that in the meticulous registers of Father Luigi one finds but a single note of expenses for new habits, and it is that of September 23, 1877, in which the Father marks thirteen lire « *paid on account of Signora Elisabetta Feruglio to the tailor for an ecclesiastical habit and a pair of overshoes* ».

This Signora Feruglio belonged to a numerous peasant family of Paderno, on the periphery of Udine. Frequenting the *House of the derelitte* , as a penitent of the Father or as a benefactress of his works, she noticed that the holy man needed a new habit. But even overshoes! It is true that then they were commonly used also by priests. Who knows then if Father Luigi wore them? Certainly he would have done well, if for nothing else than to hide « *his slippers, repaired a hundred times* », as Sister Filomena Angeli used to say.

Some unreleased works

In the relatively tranquil years from 1876 to 1880, the founder did not give life to any new institution nor opened any house of the congregation of the sisters. He had several projects and various works were proposed to him, but due to multiple causes they never reached an effective realization.

In Udine the *Istituto per le Sordomute* was closing and it was not possible to concretize the reception center for girls in difficulty or in danger which he would have wished to build in *via di Mezzo*.

In August 1876 Father Attilio Adolfo Venturini of the Oratory, a fellow priest of his from the Philippini congregation, visited the *House of the derelitte* . On November 29 he wrote to him from Chioggia, begging him to grant some Sisters of Providence to relaunch an orphanage in that city, founded by the Philippini Father Giuseppe Renier and directed then by two elderly nuns. Probably it is the same orphanage of Chioggia whose management was offered to Father Luigi in the course of 1877. It was managed by the *Figlie del Purissimo Addolorato Cuore di Maria*, founded by the canon Doctor Antonio Besolo, who died four years prior. Indeed, Sister Ernesta Amoroso had become its absolute owner, who for fourteen years had collaborated with Monsignor Besolo. It

seems that the Bishop of Chioggia, Monsignor Agostini, named at that time Patriarch of Venice, desired to reinvigorate that congregation by now in decline.

The reply of the Father has not remained, but obviously he did not accept. Perhaps because he was asked to cede some of his religious women to the dying community instead of opening a new house of the Sisters of Providence.

Much longer, but with an equally negative outcome, the negotiations took place to entrust to the congregation of Udine a work at Pellestrina, an island of the Venetian lagoon connected with the famous dikes (or *murazzi*) to Chioggia itself. The Father hints at it in a letter of his of May 21, 1877:

« *A foreign priest came to see me, about two weeks ago, to interest me in wishing to send some sisters to his small town for the installation of a hospital with a rest home and a small infant school for girls. The position would be beautiful and very great the good that could be done. But the business requires much prayer to know the will of the Lord and, once known that it is His will that you set yourselves to the work, may He grant you the grace to succeed well. I recommend to you therefore* — he concludes, turning to the recipient superior — *that there too special prayers be made for this important business.* »

The priest was Don Giuseppe Maria Marella, president of the congregation of charity of Pellestrina, who fought five years to attain his intent, supported with fervor by the mayor Prospero Bianchini, by the archpriest of Ognissanti Don Angelo Viannello, and by all the inhabitants of Pellestrina, and backed by the Patriarch Monsignor Agostini, who wrote of it to the Father on March 10, 1882, and wrote to him again, as Cardinal, on August 20, 1883. Father Luigi had visited Pellestrina around July 20, 1877, and had adhered with enthusiasm to the initiative, attracted especially by the fact that to the future foundation was annexed a church in which on August 4 was celebrated with great solemnity the memory of an apparition of the Madonna.

He always maintained that adhesion, since on August 21, 1883 — a few months before his death — he replied to Cardinal Agostini that he was always ready to assume the work « *when the conditions should be verified which, by means of the very reverend Father Luigi Costantini apostolic missionary, I made known as necessary... When Your Eminence shall deem for the glory of God that the project of Pellestrina be realized, sign indeed the contract with Cavalier Fisola, because divine Providence will think of the restorations of the premises.* »

« *But as happens always for great and holy things* — the mayor had written to him on August 27, 1877 — *the work initiated by you too had to meet its obstacles, and anguish and trepidation put to the test the enlightened trust which, after Providence, we from the first instant have placed in your great and most generous heart.* » Obstacles which derived in part from the fact that the former convent of San Vito — where the work was to rise — was subject to ecclesiastical sanctions, because purchased from the State following the repressive laws of 1866, and in part from the conditions placed by the owner, Cavalier Giovanni Busetto, called Fisola; obstacles which, as it appeared, could not be overcome. From the negotiations emerge nevertheless clearly the great and open generosity of Father Luigi, his secure abandonment to divine Providence, and the search for the glory of God as the sole motive of his every action.

In the years 1878-79 Predazzo, in Val di Fiemme, also desired to have the Sisters of Providence. A pious woman, Giuliana Morandini, had left a capital so that to the *Dame Inglesi* of Rovereto or to another religious institute the schools of the village and the infant school should be entrusted. On September 17, 1878, the parish priest Don Giovanni Failoni had begged the superior general Mother Serafina Strazzolini, visiting Primiero, to destine to Predazzo, to assume such charges, two sisters regularly certificated according to the current school regulations. Father Luigi, with his customary prudence, wished first to inform himself accurately and almost a year passed from the request of Don Failoni to his reply, dated August 27, 1879:

« *Willingly these sisters would have opened a branch house there, managing private schools for the benefit of the girls of the village, but never would they wish to accept the charge of the state schools of the village and less than ever the infant schools and the mixed schools, with all the requirements for the certificated schoolmistresses. Turn indeed to some other congregation, Your Most Reverend Lordship, to obtain your intent, a thing of which I am most content and I shall not fail to pray to the Lord that you may succeed in it.* »

It has already been seen that at Cormons there had been a strong opposition against the schools of the Sisters of Providence. This did not prevent nevertheless that one should think of the same sisters for the internal administration of the rest home and of the annexed hospital. Since 1875 a commission had been formed for that purpose and on February 23, 1876, a manifesto was diffused to the citizens « *so that with a noble contest they may contribute to furnish the means, because finally there may rise an institute that brings decoro to the town* ».

Probably the fundraising did not have the hoped-for outcome. But Father Luigi must have taken the matter into serious consideration, because a memorandum in his own hand is preserved on the fees for the inmates and the sick, on their treatment, and on the salary for the doctor, the sisters, and the auxiliary personnel (that is, the servant nurses); and it is in the hand of his brother, Don Giovanni Battista, an « *Organic Regulation for the Institute of Public Beneficence of Cormons* ».

The initiative was resumed in 1883. The new chaplain of the sisters, Don Giovanni Blasutich, wrote on June 8 of that year to Father Luigi saying that Signor Pietro Tomadoni was disposed to cede under advantageous conditions a large house of his for a more worthy arrangement of the hospital and of the rest home. The municipality, of which Baron Locatelli was mayor, had declared that it could not face the huge expense of the purchase. But Don Blasutich was convinced that the Father, with his personal intervention, would succeed in resolving the situation on both fronts: that is, to convince Tomadoni to the lowest price possible and the baron to proceed to the purchase, since the latter — he said — « *has much esteem for your person* ». But nothing came of it even then.

The Sisters of Providence will assume the management of the rest home and of the hospital of Cormons only in 1895.

Zeal of Father Luigi for his diocese

Father Luigi lived always, so to speak, on the margins of diocesan life. This however did not prevent him from feeling himself a devout son of the Archdiocese of Udine, to which he belonged by baptism and ordination, and in which he poured out the best of his apostolate. One would seek in vain in him the least hint of disagreement with the diocesan authority, as at times happens to whoever is part of a specific religious community. On the contrary: he always considered the Archbishop of Udine as the natural president of his works of charity and as the father of the congregation of the sisters founded by him, so much so that he never opened houses outside the diocese without first asking his consent.

He did not manifest only a perfect obedience and reverence toward the episcopal dignity, but demonstrated a filial and most faithful attachment to the persons of the bishops who succeeded each other in his time on the Udine chair. There are those who insist on the obvious distinction between the headquarters and the person who occupies it, exploiting it to attack the owner in various way, perhaps under the pretext of honoring the see itself, conceived in an abstract and empty mode. Father Luigi never lost himself in similar subtleties. Although because of his many occupations and by temperament he did not frequent the episcopal court, of which then some trace still survived, nor went about without necessity in the offices of the curia, he was considered an intimate of Monsignor Trevisanato, held to be a conservative and pro-Austrian, becoming with him a target for the venomous criticisms of the liberals, both religious and secular. He demonstrated equal respect and fidelity toward his friend Monsignor Casasola, younger than he by two years of age and by four of ordination, when the latter moved from Portogruaro to govern the Archdiocese of Udine. When the passions unleashed by the Roman question and the libertarian restlessness of the era — diffused also in a part of the clergy — together with the rigidity of thought and of attitude of Monsignor Casasola aroused against him imposing party tensions and scandalous internal rebellions, Father Luigi stood inflexibly with the bishop and shared his humiliations and sufferings.

Such conduct was easily predictable, since dictated by his faith and by his virtue. Nevertheless he did not limit himself to this: he gave more than one proof, also on the practical level, of his great love for the diocesan church.

The « *paradise* » for old priests

« *In the last years of his life* — writes Tinti — *while others, weakened by advanced age and by labors, must resign themselves to a forced rest, Father Luigi seemed instead to increase his activity in maintaining his charitable institutions vigorous and in collaborating in other pious enterprises. Among many, he studied the way to erect at Cividale del Friuli a house imagined by him as Paradise, where so many priests, after having consumed their life in the missions, in the care of souls, or in the education of youth, could find refuge and enjoy in the last period of their existence a well-merited rest in the peace and in the advantages of common life.* »

A project of the kind had been several times wished and attempted, but without success, within the scope of the diocese of Udine. Father Luigi hoped to resolve the problem with a broader vision, that is, to the benefit also of the clergy coming from outside the diocese.

There was at Cividale a large building, formerly the seat of a suppressed religious institute, which had been confiscated by the State and subsequently purchased in part by Count Federico Trento and in part by Signor Sandrini. Father Luigi, certainly out of regard for his friend Count Trento — although by then the family affairs were managed by his son Antonio —, did not wish to enter directly into the negotiations. They were conducted by Don Tommaso Turchetti, administrator of the diocese, assisted by Don Luigi Costantini.

Proposals and counterproposals were advanced on several occasions in the years 1876 and 1877, in the hope of finding an agreement on the price. However, the gap was too wide: the Father estimated the sum of ten thousand lire as just, while the Trentos had not gone below sixteen thousand. On April 12, 1877, Count Federico wrote to the engineer Giovanni Guerra that he had no unprovident haste to sell. Don Costantini, however, pressed Father Luigi still on May 11, inviting him or his brother Don Giovanni Battista to visit the building, whose size led the experts to say that it was a very demanding business to purchase it for eighteen thousand lire; he insisted furthermore for a personal intervention of his which would certainly have unlocked the situation, sustaining that there could no longer subsist the fear or the regard of treating the matter from the very beginning directly with Signor Trento.

The affair ended there, perhaps also because the initiative of a rest home for priests was premature and found no adhesion in the diocesan environment. However, the denomination « Paradise » which Father Luigi dreamed of giving it reveals clearly with what spirit he desired it.

Since that work did not go through, the two venerable brothers dedicated themselves to supporting at least the *Pia Unione* for needy priests, devised already in 1816, proposed again in 1856, and finally realized on June 27, 1872, by initiative of the congregation of the priests of San Pietro Apostolo.

« *On the evening of the Epiphany of 1879* — writes Tinti — *Don Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi, after having had the secretary and cashier of the pious work for needy priests called (who was then Don Ferdinando Blasich) and delivering to him a considerable sum, addressed to him these exemplary words:*

I have brought you trouble by having you come all the way here for a most simple business. The work of poor priests is very close to my heart and to that of my brother Father Luigi: we, thanks to God, are provided for the needs of old age or for an eventual illness, but so many poor priests move our heart; well then, by common agreement we have established to deliver into your hands this sum, so that it may be the first seed of the social fund.

We are sorrowed not to be able to give more, as our heart would wish; but you know that here in the house we have that army of orphans whom it is necessary to maintain and educate with most limited means and with forces that are failing, because few remember us, continually solicited by pressing requests to welcome girls. To our offering

we shall add prayer, so that others, if there be among the clergy any wealthy one, may imitate our poor example. »

In these words transpires once more the respect of Father Luigi toward his elder brother, whom he loved to consider as the head of the family.

The support of Father Luigi for the diocesan Catholic press

Father Luigi gave furthermore a contribution as powerful as it was reserved to the recovery of the Friulian Catholics after the bewilderment of the years 1866-1870. A discrete contribution, since the historian of the Catholic movement in Friuli, Tiziano Tessitori [(2)], does not even cite the name of Father Luigi in his voluminous book, which is otherwise significant and documented.

However, all the representatives of the "*Associazione Cattolica Friulana"*, born in Udine in May 1871, belonged to the circle of the devout friends of the founder and of the supporters of his works. Among them was his namesake and distant relative, Luigi Scrosoppi, a haberdasher in *via Poscolle* [(3)].

As soon as the Friulian Catholics matured, they thought of facing the serious problem of the press.

Immediately after the annexation of Friuli to Italy in 1866, two daily newspapers began to be published in Udine, "*La Voce del Popolo"* and "*Il Giornale di Udine*", to which were added later "*Il Friuli"* and "*La Patria del Friul"i*, besides some periodicals: these organs of the press differed among themselves in their different political or party inspiration, but agreed — the one as tenor, the other as baritone — in combating everything that regarded religion and the Church. To this multitude of adversaries the Catholics of Udine opposed only a small-format weekly, *La Madonna delle Grazie*, whose first number appeared on Saturday, December 5, 1868 [(4)]. Only on January 1, 1878, would they succeed in having a Catholic daily newspaper under the title "*Il Cittadino Italiano*".

In reality we know nothing of the birth of that newspaper. On January 1, 1884, Don Giovanni Dal Negro, who was its director, wrote:

« *A few willing people furnished us the first means, but almost without having hope of good success.* »

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[2] T. Tessitori, Storia del movimento cattolico in Friuli, 1858-1917, Udine 1964, pp. 413.

[3] Among them we remember the lawyer V. Casasola (see part III, chapter 10, note 13) one of the first supporters of the holiness of Father Scrosoppi (cf. Summarium, p. 15, par. 46 in Positio); Count Federico Trento (see part II, chapter 2, note 12); the lawyer Antonio Zamparo (1823-1891), of vast culture and president of the congregation of charity, who together with Eugenio Ferrari (1841-1914), a volunteer from the campaign of 1860 and a participant since the beginnings in the Friulian Catholic movement, and Pasquale Fior (1827-1909), a spinner and merchant, were supporters of the House of the *derelitte* ; the engineer Lodovico Zoratti (1841-1917), technical assistance officer in the House of the *derelitte* ; Doctor Gabriele Mander (see part III, chapter 12, note 2); the homonymous relative of Father Scrosoppi born in 1858 and died in 1935 (cf. T. Tessitori, o.c., analytical index).

[4] Founder of the first Catholic periodical was, as already stated in a preceding note, Don L. Fabris. Purpose of the small paper: to make the voice of Catholic truth heard; to be alien to every polemic. It expressed the necessity for a Catholic newspaper that should embrace a wider sphere of action and be in a position to face adversary attacks. (Cf. O. Comelli, Stampa cattolica in Friuli, Udine 1957, pp. 7-10).

Among those few willing people there must have been without doubt Father Luigi, since in the register of entries and exits of 1878 of the *House of the derelitte* appears a note in his own hand in which he analyzes accurately the estimate of the newspaper, up to calculating its typographical characters and the expected monthly expense. It appears that the calculations refer only to the first page, of which we believe that the Father initially assumed the financial burden.

The social works of Don Dal Negro

The political-religious events unleashed, from 1859 onward and especially after 1866, an alienation from the Church and often an open hostility, of which today it is impossible to imagine the real scope. The necessity was felt, therefore, in the Catholic field, to begin everything over again from the beginning. To that purpose nothing remained but to promote works for the Christian education of youth.

Archbishop Monsignor Casasola intuited this clearly, succeeding in calling to Udine the already mentioned Don Dal Negro [5], formerly a faithful collaborator in Venice of the illustrious liturgist and pedagogue priest Alberto Cucito [6] in the school patronages for the children of the people.

Dal Negro opened in 1875 such a patronage in the premises of a former convent next to the church of *Santo Spirito*: a convent and church which were repurchased from the State thanks to the generosity of Monsignor Someda and of Monsignor Cernazai. Three years later, in those same premises, Dal Negro gave life to a printing press, called also « *del Patronato* », which became the publisher of the Catholic newspaper *Il Cittadino Italiano* and distinguished itself by the quality of its editorial production. In the autumn of 1881, to the Patronage for the children of the people, Dal Negro added a boarding college for the young men of the aristocracy or of the bourgeoisie, to which he gave the prestigious name of « *Giovanni da Udine* ». These works collapsed ruinously in 1887, three years after the death of Father Luigi. « *Everything was destroyed* — writes with bitterness Monsignor Pietro Dell'Oste, who had dedicated his first priestly energies to those institutions — *everything was destroyed and Don Dal Negro was obliged to abandon Santo Spirito* », where there succeeded the *Ancelle della Carità* who reside there still.

The complex affair of the pedagogical and social initiatives of Don Dal Negro constitutes for the historian Tessitori « *an obscure page of the history of the Friulian Catholics, obscure for the lack of news and sad because there is glimpsed in it a painful*

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[5] Born in Venice in 1840, died in Udine in 1900, secret chamberlain of His Holiness Leo XIII. Having come to Udine he implemented the works spoken of in the text. After 1888 he continued to direct, almost alone, Il Cittadino Italiano and preserved also the much praised printing press. With the foundation of the Catholic daily newspaper he demonstrated that the banner of Christ also had a right to that liberty whose cry had traversed Italy. His work as an educator was appreciated and if he did not reach the purpose fixed for him by men, he attained that established for him by God, for whom alone he had labored. (Cf. La morte di Mons. Giovanni Dal Negro - I funerali, in Il Cittadino Italiano July 30-31, 1900).

[6] A Venetian (1844-1912), he collaborated in the work of patronages for the children of the people and to diffuse such activity published in Venice in 1874 a booklet I Patronati per i filhos do povo; he gave himself to journalism and was director of La Difesa; he was a member of the permanent committee of the Opera dei Congressi; he contributed to found the Venetian Circle of the society of Catholic Youth (1868); he was a reporter at national congresses of Catholics and passed his last years as canon of St. Mark.

internal struggle ». We can clarify in part that page; the explanation would be complete if our intense researches of the registers of the « *Pia Opera segreta l'Innominato* », constituted precisely to support such works, had given a positive result.

It is certain that the three greatest supporters of the works of Dal Negro were Monsignor Giovan Battista Moro, parish priest of Martignacco, Monsignor Pietro Bernardis, from 1883 canon of Cividale, and Father Scrosoppi, who had the principal role in sustaining their costs. To them were flanked, among the principal benefactors, Monsignor Domenico Someda, Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, and Monsignor Feliciano Agricola.

It is impossible to specify the exact entity of the economic aids furnished by Father Luigi, but they must have amounted to several hundreds of thousands of lire: a decidedly imposing sum for those times.

The correspondence of Don Dal Negro with him is a clear and moving testimony of how much Dal Negro leaned upon the Father. « *I trust in the Most Holy Heart of Jesus* — he wrote to him — *that you will never have to repent of the charity used toward me... For the love of God accomplish the new sacrifice so that tomorrow I do not see myself lost... You, Most Reverend Father, will have the sweet consolation of having sustained a work which God wills, because the Pope his vicar and the Archbishop, angel of this diocese, blessed it...* » Monsignor Moro and Monsignor Bernardis had in the end grown tired of signing or guaranteeing promissory notes. Father Luigi never grew tired of it.

The sisters of the *House of the derelitte* intuited, with feminine sensitivity, that all that continuous exchange of letters aimed at asking for financing or signatures from their venerated founder, and they were not at all content with it. Who knows how many times the concierge, Sister Filomena Angeli, will have murmured against the invading messengers:

« *The Father is not here! The Father is sick!* »

But the founder continued to sign. Only after the Christmas of 1883, when by then he was confined to bed, he put at least eleven signatures on notes falling due for a value of 93,000 lire. And he did not content himself with exhausting the resources coming from the family patrimony, but promised fifty thousand lire drawn from the inheritance left by Monsignor Cernazai to the Sisters of Providence; a promise reconfirmed after his death by Monsignor Feruglio. At the collapse of 1887, Monsignor Elti, secretary of the "*pia opera segreta l'Innominato*", wrote:

« *The heir of Father Luigi Scrosoppi had at the moment to take upon himself to assume toward the creditors the debt of 50,000 lire promised by the Father.* »

In such a figure are not calculated the approximately 22,000 lire delivered by the Father to Monsignor Feruglio in March 1884, nor another 20,000 paid in 1885 by Feruglio to free the chapter of the cathedral, Don Ferdinando Blasich, and others from promissory commitments contracted, of which the Father had assumed the guarantee. Still in 1896, on March 4, Mother Elena Zuccolli spoke in a letter of hers « *of the Dal Negro catastrophe, so ruinous for our congregation* ».

One experiences a certain stupor before so much generosity from Father Luigi. He, usually so prudent and meticulous in the management of his goods and of his works, appears to us here extremely open toward initiatives not initiated nor directed by him and

perhaps not devoid of a certain administrative superficiality. However, he deemed them necessary for the glory of God and for the good of souls. And on the other hand, how could he say no to whoever implored him with a sorrowful voice in the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Pope, and of the Archbishop? If then those works failed, one cause will have been the internal discord among Friulian Catholics, lamented by Dell'Oste and by Tessitori; but one is led to think that the disaster would not have occurred if the unexampled generosity of Father Scrosoppi had been imitated, who feared not to throw into the furnace huge interests of his beloved congregation provided he benefited the hoped-for spiritual rebirth of the diocesan Church.

Yet another illuminating detail. When in the autumn of 1881 the college « *Giovanni da Udine* » was opened, the didactic and moral direction was entrusted to the Jesuit Father Ronchi. There presented itself thus a favorable occasion to introduce to Udine a community of the Society of Jesus, as Father Luigi had attempted in 1865. In a short time, however, dissensions arose between Father Ronchi and Dal Negro, who attributed to the presence of a Jesuit a large part of the hostilities that the college encountered. Father Luigi, strong in his financial support, did not yield: indeed, he nourished the hope that to substitute Ronchi his dearest Father Rossi would be sent, who had been rector of the sanctuary of *Rosa Mistica* at Cormons and spiritual guide of that community of the Sisters of Providence. The Provincial of the Jesuits, Father Valentino Steccanella, wrote to him from Mantua on September 6, 1882, that he could not accept because of the difficulties interposed by Don Dal Negro, while expressing « *lively thanks to Your Paternity and, by means of your goodness, to Monsignor Archbishop and to the other persons who, thanks to their affection, would have us there* ». Father Luigi remained much sorrowed by it; nevertheless he did not cease to sustain the institutions which he considered indispensable for the Christian formation of youth.

Death of Pius IX

In the meantime, on January 9, 1878, after a few days of a fulminant illness, Victor Emmanuel II, King of Italy, had passed away at only fifty-eight years of age. Not even a month later, on February 7, Pope Pius IX died at more than eighty-four years of age. There disappeared thus from the scene of the world the two personages who for about thirty years had represented the opposite poles of the tormented event of the Italian Risorgimento and of the dramatic clash between the new Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See. Not even the qualities of both — the political realism united to Catholic sentiment in the sovereign, the holy meekness in the pontiff — would have sufficed, even if they could have acted by their exclusive initiative, to resolve the fundamental question, embittered by the understandable passions and tensions of the time. It will take more than half a century for the question to be resolved officially with the Lateran Pacts of 1929: and it is not said that the wounds in the depths of souls are, today, entirely healed.

The mortal remains of Pius IX were deposited provisionally in the basilica of San Pietro; three years later they were transferred in the heart of the night to the basilica of San Lorenzo, which the pontiff himself had recently restored. On that circumstance there occurred deplorable episodes of fanaticism, reaching even to the attempt to throw the body of the Pope into the Tiber.

Father Scrosoppi shared as a most beloved son the joys and the sorrows of the great pontiff, toward whom he nourished an affectionate tenderness and a profound veneration.

By a singular coincidence, the biography of Father Scrosoppi written by Tinti was published in 1897, the year in which Leo XIII authorized the beginning of the cause of beatification of Pius IX. However, Father Luigi had from the death of that Pope the certainty that he had already ascended to the glory of the saints.

On June 2, 1878, writing of Sister Agnese Candetti, who was gravely ill at Portogruaro, he said:

« *Let us pray, let us pray that the Lord, through the intercession of Pius IX, may console us by restoring her to us cured, if this is the divine will.* »

On November 17 of the same year he wrote to a superior:

« *Here I am to reply to your letter just received. Pius IX loves us, and loves us very much, and doubt not that the grace so much desired by us he will obtain for us from our good Father God; but it is convenient to continue to pray to him and to increase trust in his intercession* »; and he concluded the same letter with the words: « *And then above all I trust in Pius IX.* »

From the expression « *Pius IX loves us, and loves us very much* » transpires the testimony of an experience already lived by Father Luigi regarding the celestial protection of the holy Pope. One seems to glimpse in it not only a generic, though vivid trust, but almost a hint at a sweet and constant spiritual relationship, perceived with strength, between the humble priest who still labored upon earth and the vicar of Christ by now in the glory of Heaven.

The voluntary despoliation of 1879

With good right — writes Tinti — the venerable father founder could transmit to his sisters the true spirit of interior and exterior poverty, since he first, following the example of the divine Master, began to act before teaching.

« *Everything that was in him or belonged to him bore the imprint of evangelical poverty. In truth, his study, poorly furnished, was encumbered with every kind of objects, so much so that it seemed the shop of a ragpicker; he preserved in fact every little thing that could serve the mason, the blacksmith, or the carpenter of the house. In that room he received also important persons, without being ashamed of appearing almost a miserable man. In like manner was the room where he slept: very cold, full of books, with a wretched small bed in a corner which he made up himself, not permitting anyone to enter it, save in case of illness.*

In like manner he was poor in dressing, so much so that the efforts of the sisters to make him put away a consumed and worn habit were of no avail; if he noticed a substitution occurred secretly, he returned immediately the new habit to have back the old and patched one, remembering always to his daughters the poverty that reigned in the grotto of Bethlehem and in the holy house of Nazareth...

In like manner he wished that a poor and scanty food should be prepared for him. Soup, a few vegetables seasoned only with oil, measured bread, and water. In his last years, weakened in health, out of obedience to the doctor he conceded to himself the luxury of a small portion of roast or of a small glass of wine of very bad quality. One never saw him taste fruit, sweets, or liqueurs. With such moderation he succeeded nevertheless in prolonging life up to eighty years.

If sometimes the good Father had need of using something, he turned to the superior of the house and, like a supplicant, asked her permission with a humility such as to move the heart of his loved daughters, assuring them of having made a vow of poverty and of wishing to remain faithful to it.

All his family patrimony, including the parts inherited from his two brothers Father Carlo and Don Giovanni Battista, had by now been entirely donated to his institutions. Yet, not yet satisfied, he wished to renounce the property of everything and, with the two following letters which merit to be reported integrally, made a donation of all his movable goods to the pious House of the derelitte and, through it, to the college of the schoolmistresses or ministers of Providence. »

Thus far Tinti.

Before nevertheless reporting the two letters, it is opportune to clarify what was the occasion and what the spirit that inspired them to him.

We are at the beginning of 1879. His brother Don Giovanni Battista is still alive, although at the end of life. One has however reached the last act of the long dispute on the necessity of having the *House of the derelitte* recognized or not as a moral entity. Father Luigi had resigned himself to accept this decision, even if it had been rendered less burdensome to him by special favorable conditions, as a sign of respect for his role as founder and benefactor. He had therefore drafted the required organic statute, which would be approved with slight modifications a year later.

Here is what he wrote on January 25, 1879 « *To the honorable superior of the pious House of the derelitte , and for her to all the college of schoolmistresses and ministers, denominated college of Providence* »:

« *To your tranquility, and to the tranquility of all this college, I communicate to you having presented on this day to the royal prefecture the organic statute of this pious house, as well as the inventory of its movable and immovable goods. And since they, who direct this college, possess as absolute property not only all their clothes and what is found in their rooms, but also many other movables which they leave to the common use of the pious house, I have held it my duty to declare in the inventory itself that all the movables not listed are of their absolute property.*

If therefore someone should wish to hold as property of the pious house some movables not inventoried, you, egregious lady, will have to do nothing else than present this declaration of mine in the name of truth and of justice.

I declare furthermore in the name of truth that all the movables found in the two rooms for my use belong they too to the property of this college of schoolmistresses or ministers. This for your tranquility. »

It is almost superfluous to notice how Father Luigi calls « *egregious lady* » the superior Mother Strazzolini and never uses the term « *sisters* », since the congregation was not recognized by the government of Italy, before whose authorities the letter was to have legal value. Father Luigi feared still the pressure of taxes. Well then, let the State take indeed what had been inserted in the inventory in the name of the *House of the derelitte* ; but let remain intact what came from the generous offering of his daughters and from his own. The extreme precision and the sensitivity of his conscience made him appose upon such goods, as a defense against possible seizures, the formula: « *In the name of justice and of truth* » this does not belong to you.

But the preoccupation with legal protection is united to the desire for a complete personal renunciation.

In another letter of the same January 25, addressed this time to the « *Most Reverend mother superior of the Sisters of Providence* », Father Luigi, after having summarized the official communication reported above, proceeds with these words:

« *In that letter I told you also that all the movables found in the two rooms for my use belong to them; and now I tell you that I intend that they be of their absolute property also the clothes and the books found in this pious house and which at one time were my property, and of which I made them verbally a definitive gift, leaving that divine Providence should occupy itself with me as it occupies itself with dressing the poorest.*

Behold, most reverend mother, how you must consider what at one time belonged to me: you must consider everything as their absolute property, so that you may dispose of everything at your pleasure and give the whole to whom you believe, since you are the absolute mistress of it.

With this declaration of mine wish out of charity to remove every mark found on the things that at one time were mine, and to place them among the common goods of their religious community. I hope you will wish to do me this grace, and I shall not fail, for all the good you will do me, to pray to the Lord that He help you to walk with most rapid steps upon the road of perfection. I leave you in the sacred Hearts of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. »

It seems that it is not he who voluntarily renounces the goods; he begs almost to be despoiled of everything. If he had been told that that was a gigantic step of his toward perfection, he would have remained astonished by it, so much did he consider it, for himself, simple and due.

Yet in this way he imitated the great saints. Indeed, in asking to eliminate every personal mark of property he placed a touch typical of his character, a final act of his complete abnegation.

There is no reason to marvel, therefore, if the sisters who lived in his time recount to us some behaviors of his which, otherwise, might appear excessive. For example, his asking repeatedly and on his knees from the superior of the house for a handkerchief or any other little thing of which he had need; his pretending that which was most consumed or ragged; his begging, when he visited the hospitals directed by his sisters, for the garments already used by the poorest sick. One understands perfectly his preoccupation so that there should not be made, I do not say waste, but not even the least spoiling of anything:

a preoccupation which otherwise would seem avarice. To the sister in charge of the wardrobe he recommended continually economy:

« *Remember always, my daughter* — he would say — *that the wardrobe is a silent file (that is, a constant wear that consumes resources): one can do much good to the advantage of the institute by observing exactly holy poverty, or much damage, by wasting goods against the precious virtue of holy poverty.* »

Poor dear Father, that love of his for poverty and the attention against every waste drove him at times to give singular examples of humility.

Here is one.

« *One day* — recounts a testimony — *he enters into the wardrobe where vicar mother was together with Mother Arcangela Bernardinis and a girl of fifteen years, Rosa Gremese, today Mother Gioacchina (the fact occurred therefore around 1880).*

As soon as she saw him, Mother Arcangela said immediately in a low voice: Now that good man will certainly combine one of his typical acts. In fact he places himself on his knees and, with joined hands and with extreme humility, says: I accuse myself of failing much against holy poverty, treating with negligence the things given to me for use; thus this morning I broke the chamber pot. »

Well then, he did it with profound seriousness. But try to imagine the scene! The vicar mother, Sister Serafina, who was distributing the linen, will have struck the others with a glance so that they should not burst out laughing. Then she could not avoid reproaching publicly that holy man:

« *Another time, Father, I pray you, tell it to me elsewhere and not here. Now rise and recite a De Profundis for the souls in Purgatory.* »

It was the customary penance for whoever caused some small material damage.

Father Luigi thanked humbly and went away.

« *Of these acts* — concludes the testimony — *the Father performed them every day.* »

Death of his brother Don Giovanni Battista

If you do not convert and do not become like children — Jesus said — you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

One of the consequences of this spiritual childhood is that which Christian doctrine calls detachment from earthly creatures. A detachment necessary during all life and complete when it moves to its term. According to the words of Job, naked we were born and naked death must find us, like Christ on the cross. A nakedness which is not contempt of the world, but freedom in the path toward the final flight.

Father Luigi employed the heroism of virtue to attain such a condition; and physical death helped him, taking away from him one by one his dearest friends.

On August 1 died Giovanni Puppati [7], a silk spinner, his most faithful counselor and support in administrative matters. The Father, with delicate gratitude, welcomed his by now elderly daughter first among the Sisters of Providence in Trento, then in the *Casa del Provvedimento* in Udine.

On March 1, 1879, little more than a month after the voluntary renunciation of his goods, died the dear Doctor Giacomo Zambelli, who for almost half a century had been close to him in his initiatives of charity.

Seven months later, on August 10 at 17:00, there left him for heaven his loved brother Don Giovanni Battista. The presence of about forty priests at his funeral — an exceptional number for the era — demonstrates the esteem enjoyed by the former archpriest of Sacile, upon whom was reflected the universal veneration toward Father Luigi. By now infirm for a year, everything presaged the end, which arrived slowly. His agony terminated precisely on the same day on which, fourteen years prior, his father Domenico had died, next to whom he was buried.

Already from July 24 Father Luigi wrote to a superior:

« *I cannot bring you good news of my brother, who on the contrary every day worsens, and perhaps from one moment to another I shall be able to telegraph to you his disappearance. Our good God disposes thus; let us resign ourselves therefore to the great sacrifice and let us pray Him to give to the sick man the strength to suffer so much evil, and to us the strength to accept this separation in a Christian wayration. He dies as a saint, as as a saint he has always lived, having had always as objective the sole glory of the Lord. Precisely now the doctor came and gave us no hope of improvement. Let us pray, let us pray, and I leave you all in the sacred Hearts.* »

In another letter of August 19 he wrote:

« *Forgive me if after the death of my loved brother I have not written to you. To your consolation and that of the sisters, I shall say that my brother died as a saint, and left written to me that, once arrived in Paradise through divine mercy, there he will sustain your cause and will pray the Lord to grant you holy perseverance in doing good, to find us all together before the throne of God and of Mary Most Holy. See the care which he has always had for all of you. Let response be made to so much charity of his!* »

Unfortunately the writing of Don Giovanni Battista to which the Father alludes has not remained. But from his letters transpires the deeply Christian bond that united those two priestly souls; it is difficult to say whether the praise of holiness addressed to his brother moves more or the admirable serenity of Father Luigi before such a loss. His heart was certainly broken, but to the pain of the parting faith substituted the hope of a meeting in Paradise.

Meanwhile at Cormons the Jesuit Father Rossi terminated his mission. On October 31 he announced his departure to the founder with a touching letter:

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[7] An Udiniese, born in 1805, died in 1876.

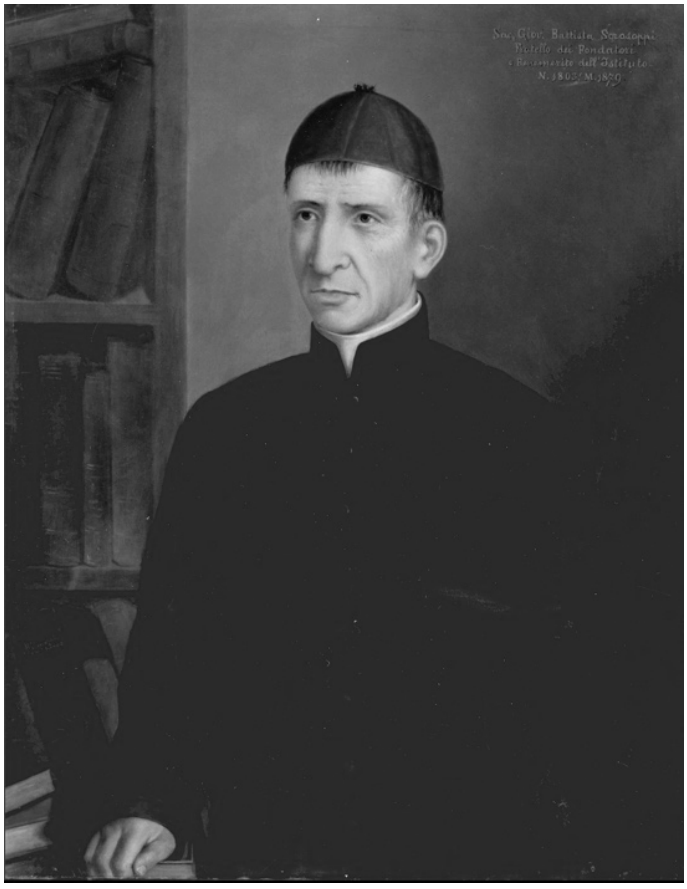
« *I come with this letter of mine to ask humbly pardon for how much evil I have done in these thirteen years... I implore you, bless me; and in your holy prayers pray always for me, so that I may for all eternity be in the company of Your Paternity.* »

He went away secretly, on the night of November 2, to avoid tumultuous farewells from the citizens who loved him. Father Luigi hoped to have that religious still close, but they saw each other no more on this earth: Father Rossi died in Padua on July 6, 1883, nine months before him.

Don Giovanni Battista and the will of 1873

In that climate of industrious expectation which marked the years of maturity, Don Giovanni Battista wished to seal the total communion of intents with his brother Luigi through an act of extreme Christian prudence. On August 14, 1873, he drafted in his own hand a holographic will which represents not only a patrimonial disposition, but an authentic manifesto of Scrosoppian charity.

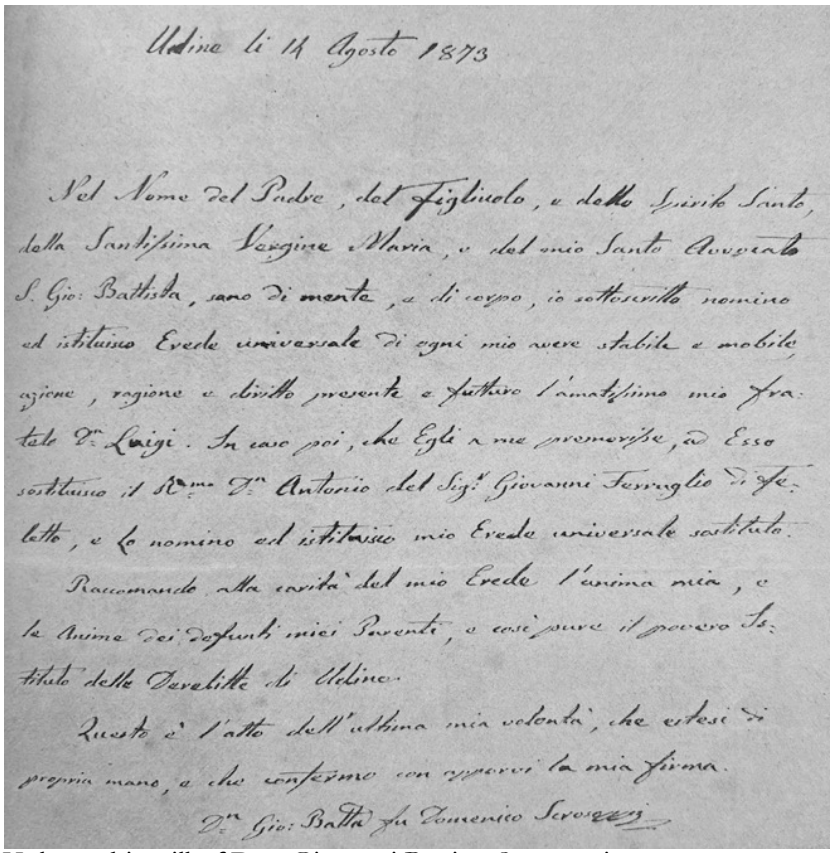
Declaring himself « *sound of mind and of body* », Don Battista chose to name Luigi universal heir of his every possession, movable and immovable. The profound intention of this writing was not the enrichment of his relative, but rather the creation of a legal shield in defense of the orphans. In an era marked by the laws of suppression and by the constant danger of state confiscations, leaving one's goods to a single physical person — and not directly to the Institute — was the only way to guarantee that the family patrimony continued to nourish and clothe the *derelitte* without secular interferences.



Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi, brother of Fr. Luigi,
in an oil portrait by an unknown author.

« *I recommend to the charity of my Heir my soul... and likewise the poor Istituto delle derelitte of Udine.* »

It is significant to observe how Don Battista, index-linking with realism the eventuality of his own death or that of his brother, indicated as substituted heir Don Antonio Feruglio of Feletto, witnessing his esteem toward that Friulian clergy who shared the same ideal of poverty and dedication. With this writing, he did nothing but despoil himself of every "*action, reason, and right*", confirming that in the Scrosoppi house nothing belonged to individuals, but everything was a sacred deposit for the poor of the Lord.



Udine li 14 Agosto 1873

Nel Nome del Padre, del Figliuolo, e dello Spirito Santo, della Santissima Vergine Maria, e del mio Santo Avvocato S. Gio: Battista, sano di mente, e di corpo, io sottoscritto nomino ed istituisco Erede universale di ogni mio avere stabile e mobile azione, ragione e diritto presente e futuro l'amatissimo mio fratello D.r Luigi. In caso poi, che Egli a me premorisse, a Esso sostituisco il R.mo D.r Antonio del Sig.r Giovanni Feruglio di Feletto, e lo nomino ed istituisco mio Erede universale sostituto.

Raccomando alla carità del mio Erede l'anima mia, e le Anime dei defunti miei Parenti, e così pure il povero Istituto delle Derelitte di Udine.

Questo è l'atto dell'ultima mia volontà, che estesi di propria mano, e che confermo con apporvi la mia firma.

D.n Gio: Batta fu Domenico Scrosoppi

Holographic will of Don Giovanni Battista Scrosoppi

Udine August 14, 1873

In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and of my Holy Advocate St. John Baptist, sound of mind, and of body, I the undersigned name and institute as universal Heir of my every possession real and personal, action, reason, and right present and future my most beloved brother Fr. Luigi. In case then, that He should predecease me, to Him I substitute the Rev. Don Antonio of Mr. Giovanni Feruglio of Feletto, and I name and institute him my substituted universal Heir. I recommend to the charity of my Heir my soul, and the Souls of my deceased Relatives, and likewise the poor Istituto delle derelitte of Udine.

This is the act of my last will, which I extended with my own hand, and which I confirm by placing my signature upon it.

Don Gio Batta fu Domenico Scrosoppi

Note APL: This sub-chapter integrates the original work of Mons. Biasutti because the will of Giovanni Battista merits a particular attention which cannot exhaust itself with only reproducing the image of the holographic document.

Monsignor Antonio Feruglio deputy director

His brother Don Giovanni Battista being dead, it was necessary to name a new deputy director of the *House of the derelitte* . The founder chose Don Antonio Feruglio [8], who

[8] Born at Feletto (Udine) in 1841, died at Staranzano (Gorizia) in 1911. Graduated in canon law and theology, having obtained a diploma in oriental languages, he taught classical languages and then theology in the Udiniese seminary. Canon, vicar general of Archbishop Berengo, Bishop of Vicenza from 1893 to 1910 when, for reasons of health, he was exempted from the episcopate. In the diocese he encouraged every religious activity, instructed with his homilies and pastorals revealing a living faith and profound culture. Most attached to the Church and to the Pope, strongly and proudly he defended the truth; not always well listened to, he did not take strong measures, silently he suffered and prayed. Bound by profound friendship to Father Scrosoppi, with him he collaborated in his institutions

already for a long time had collaborated with him. Therefore on October 28, 1879 — availing himself of the faculty to name a substitute recognized to him by the statute of the house — he wrote to the prefecture of Udine proposing him for such charge. The proposal was accepted. Father Luigi had thus the certainty of leaving his works and the congregation in capable hands.

Sister death could arrive when God willed it. It would find him poor and humble, devoid of every material good and glad to step aside, considering himself a "*good-for-nothing*". But it would not arrive so soon: there still remained to him an intense day of work.

and, after his death, became director of the House of the *derelitte* and of the religious congregation itself. He accepted these tasks as a mission. He cared for the formation of the sisters and the development of the congregation, was an intelligent guide to the superior general Sister Cecilia Piacentini in the revision of the constitutions; he remained director until 1891 when these were approved, but was « father » and benefactor of the sisters until his death. (Cf. L. VENTURINI, S.E. mons. Antonio Feruglio - secondo padre, in La Congregazione delle suore della Provvidenza nel suo primo centenario, pp. 29-31; Summarium, pp. 484-485, in Positio...).

Chapter 10

THE LAST DAY (1880-1883)

Saints are always young

From the year 1873, the number of sisters grew from year to year with such intensity as to be a source of great joy. If previously, during the annual ceremonies of clothing and profession, a single hand was sufficient, indeed amply enough, to count the candidates, now two were required and were no longer sufficient.

Father Luigi exulted in this and deeply thanked the Lord.

This rapid growth, however, posed new and numerous problems for him.

One of these regarded the necessity of an update. Certainly not in substance, which was to remain unchanged: to serve God through the orphans, the poor, and the sick with ardent generosity and respectful humility. However, until that moment the congregation had lived following a modest and almost familial model, however solid. One could say, metaphorically, that it was dressed in a village and workday habit, meaning a simple and modest style, typical of country life.

The variety of works — nurseries, boarding schools, schools, hospitals — together with the more specialized requests of some sectors of apostolate such as Trento, Portogruaro, and Cormons, demanded a change. To this were added the rapid civil and social evolution and the increasing requests of governmental authorities, both in the hospital and school spheres, as much in Italy as in Austria. The arrival of new generations of sisters, which could no longer be contained within the good-natured and patriarchal mold, meaning a simple and familial management model, of the first "*caterinette"*, meaning the first sisters of the congregation, pushed toward a more refined and functional organizational form.

The founder did not oppose this process; on the contrary, he became its promoter. On June 12, 1880, he wrote:

« *Our most reverend mother superior, Mother Strazzolini, together with Mother Angela Rodaro, has repaired to Venice and to Padua to instruct herself at those public beneficence institutions and in those religious houses, so as to adopt in our seats all that shall result applicable. Oh, how many beautiful things she will have to recount to them when she comes to visit you.* »

Within the congregation, moreover, diverse factors required a change with ever greater insistence.

First of all, the geographical origin of the religious women. At the death of the Father, in 1884, the sisters of origin of Udine would still have been numerically prevalent: almost half among the professed and two-fifths among the novices already admitted to clothing. However, according to the registers written by the Father's own hand, among the approximately seventy who received the habit from 1877 to 1883, forty-six came from

the region of Trento, seventeen from the region of Udine, and eight from other regions. Among the thirty-nine who emitted perpetual vows, those from the region of Trento were twenty-two, against thirteen from the region of Udine and four from other zones. In 1880, of the eight superiors, six were from the area of Udine, while Sister Rosalia Simeoni, who was from Bologna, guided the *Casa del Provvedimento* and Sister Cecilia Piacentini, who was from Trieste, the house of Cormons.

In this scenario, inevitably, the influence of politics made itself felt, or rather a certain reflection of national sentiment.

As the sisters of Austrian citizenship — coming from the region of Trento and from the Dalmatian and Istrian area — became the numerical majority, it appeared logical and right that a role of greater importance in the guidance of the congregation should fall to them. This was corroborated by the fact that in Italy the dominant anticlericalism rendered difficult the life of existing religious communities and still more complex to fund new ones, while in the regions under Austrian dominion the perspectives were decisively more encouraging.

There manifested itself, moreover, an ever more evident gap between the elderly religious women and the young ones, both in terms of culture and of mentality and orientation.

At the end of the summer of 1880 there survived fourteen professed sisters of the first generation, formed in the initial and pioneering period of the congregation, before the approval of the Holy See in 1862. These were followed by a group of about thirty sisters of the second generation, whose cycle had concluded with the sacerdotal jubilee of the Father; their vocation had flourished among thorns, meaning born in a period of harsh difficulties, of the restless period comprised between 1862 and 1875. Finally, there were some forty religious women who had arrived in more serene times.

The firm and paternal surveillance of Father Luigi knew how to preserve the bond of charity despite these divergent thrusts. He made sure that the inevitable differences — not entirely erased by the common love for Jesus and by the identical flash of dedication — did not trigger contrasts. However, his customary realism made him comprehend the necessity of passing the command to those who, until that moment, had not been at the summit.

The point is that saints never grow old in spirit. If they are not taken by the craving for novelty, since they do not experience superficial excitements, and if they do not act with imprudence because guided by the virtue of wisdom, they do not suffer either from the ankylosis of a stubborn conservatism, meaning the stiffening of an obstinate traditionalist vision. In fact, they enjoy the liberty of the saints and, having as their sole objective the glory of God and the best possible service in charity, they constantly seek the most suitable instrument to reach such ends.

Mother Strazzolini renounces the generalate

The constitutions of 1862 established that the « *office of superior general shall last three years, nor can she be confirmed in succession except for a second triennium*. »

However, since the constitutions had not yet obtained the definitive approval of the Holy See and also because of the tensions of the era, this norm was not observed.

In 1862 Mother Teresa Fabris had been elected superior general, who in 1866 — as has already been said — had sought refuge in Cormons. Political events must have forced — as has already been said — in February 1867 a strategic division of the guidance of the congregation; Strazzolini reassumed it for the houses in Italy, while Fabris maintained it for those under Austrian dominion until 1873, when she was able to return to Udine. In that same year, Strazzolini was able to exercise the office of superior general over the whole congregation [(1)].

Mother Serafina Strazzolini — according to what is reported by the *Cenni biografici* — « *was goodness and sweetness personified*. » It appears, indeed, that excessive goodness sensibly reduced her firmness in command. She loved, although being superior general, to spend much of her time among the orphans — with great advantage for the latter, since she possessed uncommon pedagogical gifts —, leaving to the sisters wide space for initiative, trusting in their upright spirit.

The founder often felt the need to support that good mother in her difficult office. On June 12, 1880, he wrote to the superior of Primiero:

« *This letter of mine will reach you probably on the same day in which you will have the joy of receiving the visit of the most reverend mother, who departed yesterday from Trento for Tesero and for those zones. She is sent by the Lord to know your needs and to help you as an affectionate mother both with counsels and with admonitions. Receive her therefore as an angel sent to you by your divine Spouse... She comes in His name and this must suffice for you to bend your head to her every order and submit yourselves to her judgment with the true spirit of humility, of docility and of obedience.*

Sisters, give this consolation to your dearest mother, since I can tell you that she loves you with true maternal love; do not be willing to embitter this maternal heart, because in such case you would embitter also my paternal one. Let all be done for the glory of the Lord and for your sanctification. »

It is not difficult to read between the lines the desire of the Father to strengthen the authority of Strazzolini.

On August 16, 1880, he wrote to another superior:

« *Today the most reverend superior general departed for Tyrol, and let them pray the Lord so that He may grant her the necessary lights to perform well the office which now falls to her to exercise. Here all the sisters are most occupied* — he continues — *in preparing the many dresses for the brides of our beloved Jesus. There are 14 for the clothing and 12 for the profession. What do you think of it? May the Lord grant that all correspond to their holy vocation, and open the places to station them, giving thus place to the acceptance of so many others who aspire to enter the congregation.* »

If Mother Serafina had not thought of renunciation before that journey in the region of Trento, upon her return she asked to be exonerated from the office of superior general. Certainly not for reasons of age, since she was then only fifty-seven years old. Wise and

[1] The chapter of 1873 has not remained.

humble as she was, she herself perceived the necessity of ceding the place to a younger person, especially in view of the new developments that were foreshadowed in the life of the congregation.

The religious profession was held on September 24, 1880. Among the twelve professed was Sister Giuseppina Doliac, who had to attend the ceremony seated in an armchair because exhausted and with fever; there was also Sister Elena Zuccolli, of whom the Father, the ceremony having concluded, happened to say:

« *This one you will see one day as superior* »[2].

The rite of clothing was instead postponed to Sunday, October 10, the day on which the general chapter for the election of the new superior would be held.

Mother Cecilia Piacentini new superior general

On Tuesday, October 12, Father Luigi wrote to the superior of Primiero, who obviously had not been able to repair to the general chapter:

« *At 9 in the morning today Mother Cecilia Piacentini was elected superior general. I consider that the election was made according to what was the will of their divine Spouse, therefore I do not doubt that the community is optimally provided... Dearest daughter, let us adore the dispositions of the Lord and we shall make ourselves great saints... The most reverend Mother Serafina, who has remained vicar general and vicar of the House of the derelitte , salutes them with all the profusion of affection of her heart...* »

Mother Cecilia Piacentini, superior general of the Sisters of Providence from 1880 to 1920, considered a co-founder.

[2] Zuccolli Orsola (Sister Maria Elena della Croce) born at Cembra (Trento) on 15-3-1857, entered the congregation on 16-4-1877, clothed on 3-5-1878, professed on 24-9-1880, died at Cormons on 21-1-1921. The prophecy of the founder was fulfilled: she was elected superior of the college of Providence (former House of the *derelitte*) in Udine in 1889, where she remained for almost 31 years, being contemporaneously, from 1910, vicar general of the congregation; on 23-4-1920 she was elected superior general.

Upon the majority of votes obtained by Piacentini must have weighed not a little the influence of the founder, both because he will have exercised the old right provided by the statute which attributed to the director the designation of some electors, and because he will not have failed to orient the others toward the most opportune choice.

The biographer of Mother Cecilia narrates that the new superior, barely elected, would have addressed immediately to the capitular sisters these energetic words:

« *If you have elected me general, let me act as general* »[3].

It regards words probably never pronounced, but imagined later by tradition to characterize the energetic guidance — lasted then forty years — of Piacentini, of whom it was custom to say that « *she made the handkerchief tremble in the pocket*, » meaning she incited such a reverential fear as to make vibrate even personal garments.

It is very likely, instead, that at least a part of the elderly sisters experienced a certain uneasiness toward the barely elected, not so much for her relatively young age — Piacentini counted then forty-four years —, as because many reasons made one think that her government would have led to a turning point in the life of the congregation.

« *Such a somewhat hostile attitude* — observes the biographer — *the mother had to endure, until, with the wisdom of her government and a charity without limits, she succeeded in imposing herself also upon these daughters who, not knowing her, had distrusted her.»*

There was, however, Father Luigi to infuse the oil of charity into the new gears. For this purpose he seized every occasion to support the prestige of Mother Cecilia. Two months later, on December 12, 1880, he wrote to Sister Visentini, vicar of Primiero:

« *The most reverend mother superior is of general satisfaction for all her beloved daughters, solicitous toward all and full of zeal to procure the sanctification of all.* »

And on June 18, 1881, he recommended to the new vicar of Primiero, Sister Luigia Dario, to take care of the superior, who was on a visit in Tyrol, with these delicate words:

« *When the poor thing arrives there, oblige her to have for herself that charity which she uses for her daughters. She, so weak and infirm in health, would wish to follow the common treatment so as not to give bad example, but I assure you that she cannot, and therefore it is convenient to oblige her to take frequently some small snack, to stay in bed in the morning beyond the established hour, to go to rest in the evening earlier and oblige her to lie down after dinner. I write to you these things because I know she would not wish distinctions of any kind, although she suffers much from it in health. In a word, there you act as a mother to her, since she is so good and deserves that one should have for her every solicitude.* »

« *The most reverend superior general* — he writes on March 13, 1882 — *finds herself since a few days among us in Udine, and is admirable for her great activity and for the great zeal for the greater glory of God. All admire her and love her, and she is truly a*

[3] [M. MAKAROVICH], o.c., p. 81.

favorite soul of the Lord. » And on June 2, 1883, he writes to Sister Matilde Osso at Rovigno d'Istria:

« *You will make for me a visit to the most reverend mother superior, and you will tell her that I respect her very much and that I wish her a happy journey in the return she will make to Cormons. Poor thing, she is so good; see to be of consolation to her and, as a good daughter toward a tender mother, listen to her and appreciate her every desire upon you.* »

We preserve a beautiful letter of the founder to Piacentini. Written on November 18, 1883, shortly before Father Luigi fell mortally ill, it has almost the savor of a spiritual testament:

« *Close to the name day of your maternity (Saint Cecilia), I am to make to her all those wishes of happiness that a heart can ever make to a person toward whom it professes that esteem which her grade and her distinct qualities exact. God bless her and grant her all those graces necessary to embellish each day more her soul, and render herself ever more dear to her divine Spouse and to all the holy Paradise.*

May the good God grant her, through the merits of her holy protectress, the grace to sanctify herself collaborating to the sanctification of so many little souls that to her He entrusted, so that as a loving mother she may guide them well along the road of evangelical perfection. May the good God hear me, and I shall have the consolation of seeing her a model of a true spouse of Jesus, adorned with the virtues most dear to Him: of humility, charity, obedience and perfect resignation in everything to the divine will. Pray for me to the Lord, and ask Him as much as I from my heart ask for your maternity. Leaving her in the sacred hearts of our divine Loves, I bless her. »

We would not know how to say whether in these tender lines transpires more the humble respect of the founder toward the daughter, heiress of his mission, or the exhortation of the saint toward holiness.

The novitiate at Cormons

In the general chapter of 1880 the venerable Mother Teresa Fabris had been reconfirmed mistress of novices, to whom — because of her advanced age — Sister Luigia Dario gave help, who had already covered that charge from 1862 to 1873. However, one of the first acts of government of the new superior general Mother Cecilia Piacentini was the transfer of the novitiate from the mother house of Udine to that seat of the superior (the generalate house) of Cormons. Such passage was implemented, in any case, in a gradual way.

At the beginning of March 1881, Sister Dario was sent to Primiero to substitute there the local superior Sister Gioseffa Visentini. Contemporaneously Mother Fabris, who by then was approaching the end of her life, was placed at rest.

Mother Fabris will pass to the other life on December 17, 1882, at sixty-nine years of age and after about fifty years of service in the *House of the derelitte* , since she had entered there as mistress since very young, even before 1837.

« *Just now* — wrote the Father on the day of her death — *our beloved sister in Jesus, the very reverend Mother Teresa, serenely expired toward her beloved Spouse. She lived as a saint, and as a saint she died. Our congregation has now in heaven one more advocate, before the throne of the Lord, to obtain for us help in our great necessities.* »

Father Luigi was so convinced of the holiness of this sister, a true supporting column of the religious community, that nine days later, on December 26, he wrote in this way to Sister Filomena Suoch:

« *Trust in our divine Mother, in our dear father Saint Joseph; with total abandonment entrust yourself to the divine will, and you will obtain the tranquility of the spirit and nothing will disturb you. Trust also in the help of your mistress, the sister Mother Teresa, who now will find herself forming a crown to her beloved spouse Jesus, and do not doubt that also from her you will receive comfort in your necessities.* »

To guide the novices in the house of Udine was then called Sister Agostina Pez, who for many years rendered service in the hospital of Portogruaro. She was, however, rather delicate in health and perhaps did not feel herself suited to that delicate charge. De facto, Father Luigi had in large part to assume its functions.

When Sister Pez made her return to Portogruaro, that pleasant Sister Cherubina Voncini was nominated mistress of novices, of whom it has been spoken when narrating the history of the "*Asilo dell'Immacolata"*. Voncini covered that office for a couple of years, until after the death of the Father; subsequently she went as superior to Primiero.

With her finished the novitiate in the house of Udine, where on the other hand it had by then reduced itself to the minimum terms. In the meantime the house of Cormons grew in importance.

Mother Piacentini had been its superior since 1873. Once become general, the new duties would have without doubt forced her to distance herself frequently from the house. She thought therefore to entrust to others the local direction and chose a young woman who had emitted her vows, then twenty-seven years old, Sister Giuseppina, daughter of a well-known lawyer of Gorizia, Carlo de Doliac Cipriani, a noble figure of a convinced and combative Christian, one of the founders of the catholic movement in the Isontine city. The biographer of Piacentini writes of Sister Giuseppina:

« *In a fragile body she enclosed a beautiful and generous soul. The love for Jesus was so strong as to make her win the opposition of her family, rich and noble, which did not wish to let her depart at any cost.* »

Her precarious health put several times in doubt her permanence among the sisters; however she resisted with determination, encouraged by Father Luigi who intuited how much advantage she would have brought to the congregation. Entered as an aspirant on May 30, 1877, on September 24, 1880, she emitted her profession, seated in an armchair during the ceremony. After a period of rest at Orzano, she recovered perfectly: and the grace was attributed to the Immaculate of Lourdes.

She, therefore, already in 1881 was nominated superior of the house of Cormons and to her was entrusted also the direction of a group of novices. These became ever more numerous at Cormons, while they diminished in Udine. This is confirmed to us by the founder himself in one of his letters of June 15, 1883:

« *Here, thanking the Lord, we are well, apart from some small difficulty; just as our most reverend mother superior general is well at Cormons with all her daughters, who are fully thirty-four, comprised twenty-two novices. What do you think of this number? And here there are another eleven. The Lord be blessed!* »

The house of Cormons in 1883 had become by then by far the most important of the congregation, both for the number of the religious women, and because it hosted the seat of the superior general and the novitiate. To guide it remained for about ten years an extraordinary couple of religious women, Mother Cecilia and Mother Giuseppina, until the latter died with fame of holiness on June 17, 1890.

The Sisters in Pergine of Valsugana

The Sisters of Providence, during their first four years of service at the hospital of Trento under the direction of the most capable Mother Angela Rodaro, had given such a positive proof of virtue and competence that, at the beginning of 1881, they were offered a new field of work.

Until then, the mentally ill were admitted to ordinary hospitals, albeit in special wards. However, the nature of the illness, the necessity of specific care, and the requirement for adequate supervision prompted the construction of specialized hospitals, which were once called asylums and today are known as psychiatric hospitals.

In the small town of Hall — on the banks of the Inn, about fifteen kilometers east of Innsbruck — a large psychiatric hospital had been built to serve the whole of Upper Tyrol and, on 6 August 1880, it had been entrusted to the German congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, also called of Saint Vincent. Another hospital, for the region of Trento — then called *« Lower Tyrol »* — had been planned in Pergine Valsugana.

Already on 14 January 1881, Sister Rodaro had written to the founder, communicating that the service in this latter facility was being offered to the Sisters of Providence. The explicit invitation was extended on 24 January by the provincial captain Bossi Fedrigotti; the Superior General Piacentini gave her acceptance in principle on the 30th and confirmed it on 18 February. Some difficulties arose, however, since the invitation obtained official superior approval only in June. Perhaps someone objected that the Sisters of Providence did not possess the required preparation for the new assignment.

Pergine (TN). Psychiatric hospital. The Sisters of Providence lived here a wonderful page of their life of dedication for over ninety years.

On 20 June Father Luigi, sending wishes for her name day to Sister Luigia Dario, who had become superior in Primiero a few months earlier, wrote to her:

« You, Reverend Mother, wish to know something about the hospital of Pergine, and whether this will be entrusted to the Sisters of Saint Vincent or to those of Saint Gaetano. On the 11th past, the provincial council of Innsbruck addressed itself, pay close attention, to the venerable congregation of the Sisters of Providence in the civil hospital of Trento, are you pleased, Reverend Mother?, to ask if it were disposed to assume the kitchen, the storehouse, the management of linen and laundry, the maintenance of clothes and finally the service of assistance in the female ward of the new psychiatric hospital of Pergine, and under what conditions it were disposed to accept such duties. Three weeks of time have been granted, so that at the latest by 10 July a definitive answer must be given.

The commitment is very serious, and I have deemed it appropriate to write to the Superior General, who is now in Trento, so that together with Mother Angela she may go to the hospital of Hall to inform herself well from the Sisters of Saint Vincent who manage the structure regarding every office and the conditions in which they find themselves. After this inspection on the spot, and once informed about everything, a reply will be given to the honorable provincial council which wished to give preference to our pious congregation ».

Mother Cecilia carried out the visit to Hall: she observed and accepted. *« The affair of Pergine went well* — Father Luigi wrote on 21 July to Dario — *and the Mother General, who will be there with you in Primiero on Monday, will provide you with a detailed explanation ».* Piacentini also organized a period of apprenticeship at Hall for some sisters. Indeed, Sister Giuditta Defrancesco was sent there with the two lay sisters Carolina Turra and Celestina Cinzol. A very brief apprenticeship, of only three weeks, in line with the limited requirements of those times.

Having obtained the approval of the Imperial Royal Diet of Vienna on 22 September 1881, Mother Cecilia was able to sign the contract of employment on 18 November. Two priests of Cormons signed as witnesses: Father Angelo Marega, chaplain of the sanctuary of Rosa Mistica, and Father Giovanni Blasutich. Father Luigi had not moved from Udine, partly because his advanced age did not allow him such a long and tiring journey, and partly because he was absorbed by the complex question of the Cernazai inheritance.

On 23 November the hospital of Trento formally delivered to Sister Giuditta Defrancesco [4] and to Sister Celestina the large quantity of linen prepared for the psychiatric hospital. They stayed in Pergine for part of three days and had to labour hard to arrange all that linen, although they were helped by the nurse Huez, who sought in every way to alleviate the work of the sisters.

Just after concluding that task — continues the Jesuit Father Grazioli, biographer of Defrancesco — Mother Giuditta had an idea which she herself jokingly defined as sublime. To guard so much linen, a watchman was needed; well, she said, let us place Saint Joseph. At the first opportunity, returning from Trento, Mother Giuditta brought four images of the holy guardian of Jesus and placed them in the various rooms of the wardrobe. After having done this, all the sisters felt safe and slept peacefully.

While she was shuttling between Trento and Pergine to set up the new structure, Sister Giuditta wrote to the Superior General:

« It would be necessary for the local superior to be present to acquire those competences which will certainly be useful to her ».

And Mother Cecilia, for all answer, sent as superior an image of the Madonna, venerated under the title of *Mater admirabilis*.

The image — relates Grazioli — depicted the Madonna seated with the spindle in her hands and a work basket at her feet; she had a reflective air and a solemn bearing. The sisters did not much like that so serious face and, while declaring that the first superior of the house would certainly be the Madonna, they desired one in flesh and blood who would speak and smile. It was a clear proof of how much those young sisters cared to serve in holy joy, as constantly taught by the Philippine Father Luigi.

Mother Cecilia replied with a very beautiful letter, of a tone between the maternal and the admonishing, in which she exhorted them to imitate the strong woman of the Scriptures and to be content for the moment with the superior sent, listening to her voice. *« This is very faint* — she said — *and one must lend the ear of the heart ».*

Sister Giuditta Defrancesco superior in Pergine

However, a superior in flesh and blood was necessary. Finally, on 14 March 1882, a letter arrived in Trento addressed to the « *Reverend Mother Giuditta* ». Grazioli writes

[4] Defrancesco Teresa (Sister Maria Giuditta of the Holy Family) born in Panchià (Trento) on 20-10-1857, entered the congregation on 8-1-1878, received the habit on 19-3-1879 with the name of Sister Eufemia, professed on 8-5-1881, died in Cormons on 24-12-1909. After her profession she was sent to the community that served in the hospital of Trento and here the superior changed her name. (L. Grazioli, Cenni biografici di madre Giuditta Defrancesco, Udine 1939, p. 202).

that, upon receiving it, she trembled from head to foot; she waited until the afternoon to open it, as she doubted it was reality. In fact, she had been appointed first superior of the new hospital of Pergine. She was just over twenty-four years old.

The following day, continues Grazioli, she departed from Trento with the small community, then of only four sisters, accompanied by Mother Angela. Traversing the valley of the Fersina, they arrived at the new destination and, as soon as they entered the new and vast house, they raised a song of thanksgiving to God. Mother Giuditta, however, was pensive and, without meaning to, showed a more serious and rigorous attitude than that which she herself attributed to the image of the *Mater admirabilis* sent as first superior [5].

Meanwhile, some organizational problems, such as the appointment of the director and the choice of personnel, delayed the actual opening of the hospital, initially planned for February. Father Luigi showed a certain anxiety in a letter of his of 8 May:

« I hoped that by this time the psychiatric hospital would have already been opened, but who knows when we shall see it; when you know something, communicate it to me for my information ».

Shortly after midnight on 18 August, the Superior General arrived at Pergine with twelve sisters. Festively welcomed by their fellow nuns — wrote Tinti — they all proceeded into the church to place themselves immediately under the protection of the glorious patriarch Saint Joseph. The journey by carriage from Trento was rather eventful, because that day marked the birthday of the Emperor Franz Joseph and the drivers had drunk a few glasses too many.

Subsequently, the poor mentally ill began to arrive, some from Hall, others from the hospital of Santa Chiara of Trento. Some of these latter « *did not want to allow themselves to be transported elsewhere, because of the affection they felt towards those Sisters of Providence, and they calmed down only when they were convinced that in Pergine also they would be assisted by the same religious* ». Here Tinti launches a criticism against the anticlericalism of the era, which did not want religious women in hospitals so that they would not influence, with their counsels, the so-called freedom of thought of the inmates. « *It is so true — he says — it is so true that the freemasons, brutally expelling the sisters from the hospitals, degrade themselves below the poor fools!* »

The early times were difficult, since the sisters were all young and without experience. They were particularly hard for the young superior. But the pious founder knew how to encourage the sisters to such a confidence in the protection of Saint Joseph that, finding themselves very often exposed to dangers, they always found safety in prompt recourse to the holy patron.

Indeed, on one occasion Sister Giuditta attributed a prodigious intervention to the holy patriarch and Father Luigi replied to her, on 18 August 1883, expressing his *« great comfort in seeing that, even with miracles, Saint Joseph helps you »*. Probably this refers to that singular event narrated by the "*Cenni biografici*" regarding Sister Francesca Novello. She was a cook at Pergine. One day a commission of inspectors arrived for

[5] Cfr. L. GRAZIOLI, o.c, pp. 68-69, 71-73.

whom lunch had to be prepared, as well as for the sisters. However, only a few fragments of meat floated in the pot. « *Blessed Saint Joseph, help me!* », exclaimed Sister Francesca. And behold, mixing again in the large cauldrons, large pieces of meat emerged. There was enough for everyone and it was exquisite.

Novello was one of those most humble sisters, yet endowed with an immense faith, who gave prestige to the nascent congregation: in her simplicity, she awaited the extraordinary helps of Providence as a completely normal fact. Sister Giuditta had learned from the Father such a deep devotion to the holy patriarch, and knew how to transmit it so well in the new house, that this was called par excellence *« the house of Saint Joseph ».* To encourage her, letters arrived frequently from Mother Cecilia, who very soon conceived such an admiration for Sister Giuditta as to write to another sister:

« How many times in a day do I feel shame in comparison with her ».

The founder also wrote to her often. Since she bore the religious name *« of the Holy Family »*, this letter of his of 14 November 1882 is certainly addressed to her:

« Do not believe, only because for a long time I have not written to you, that I have forgotten you; on the contrary, I hold you often present and recommend you to the Lord. From the Reverend Mother Superior I have learned that you have performed the spiritual exercises as far as has been permitted to you by your present position, but the Lord will certainly have appreciated what you have been able to do and will have been very generous with you, so that the crown of lights, of resolutions and of victories for which I have reason to congratulate myself might be complete. The Most Reverend Mother General has reported to me that good order reigns there, that all can dedicate themselves to religious practices, that the holy rules are well observed, that there is peace and contentment and that all perform their duties well with a true spirit of charity.

May the Lord grant that holy perseverance may not be lacking and that every day one may grow more and more in these virtues. Confide in the Holy Family and thus you will find in everything a special assistance and the necessary lights to guide yourself well. Great humility and charity, great sweetness in every circumstance, and everything will go well. Have always present your divine Spouse and imitate Him in these beautiful virtues, since the bride must be similar to the Spouse and will obtain the victory over her adversaries. I conclude by greeting all those sisters and imparting to them the holy benediction ».

At the end of 1882, there were twenty-one sisters in Pergine, of whom only three — besides Mother Giuditta — were choir sisters who had already emitted their vows: Sister Petronilla Sicheri (local vicar), Sister Battistina Dossi and Sister Salome Dai Prà. This last, who was the oldest, was thirty-one years old. However, virtue and concord amply compensated for their young age. After the first period, understandably complicated, everything proceeded very well: there was truly a secure guide at the helm. To the greater glory of God, sighed Father Luigi happily!

The Sisters in Rovigno - Istria

« *I write on the day of Saint Joseph for an affair that I have entrusted into the hands of Saint Joseph; and I write to you, dearest Father, who are so devoted to Saint Joseph, and I address the request to you for the love of Saint Joseph. All circumstances that make me hope for a most happy result.* » Thus wrote Monsignor Giovanni Maria Teloni from Rovigno to the founder on 19 March 1881.

The good Monsignor, who had repaired to Rovigno to preach the spiritual exercises, had already written to the Father on 5 February, presenting to him the possibility of sending some Sisters of Providence to open a reception center, a kindergarten and an oratory for the seven hundred female workers of the local tobacco factory. And he insisted repeatedly upon the figure of Saint Joseph because he knew that that was the right chord to touch in order to obtain consent.

The people of Rovigno were very devoted to the holy patriarch and for this reason they were dear to Father Luigi, who was in his turn most devoted to him. Could he perhaps deny anything to those who solicited him with that sweet name? Furthermore, he certainly did not wish his favorite patron to deny him help should he himself be miserly with confidence. He replied therefore positively. However, partly because the devil interfered and partly because the Father loved to proceed with extreme prudence, a year passed before the negotiations reached an operational conclusion.

On 23 January 1882 the provincial school council granted permission to open in Rovigno « *a kindergarten under the direction of the Sisters of Providence of Cormons* »; and on the 28th the bishop of Parenzo and Pola, Monsignor Giovanni Glavina, welcomed with joy the upcoming opening of the new institute.

On this occasion the Father wished to go in person to inspect the new field of work; perhaps he presaged how many excellent spiritual daughters the generous Istrian land would gift to him.

He departed from Udine on Wednesday 9 February and stayed that evening in Trieste, a guest of the Simonetti family in a house near the Jesuits. There Father Andrea Ghira from Rovigno had arrived to meet him. The following morning, at seven o'clock, they departed by steamboat toward the small Istrian town, situated upon a rock a little beyond the middle of the coast of the peninsula.

In Rovigno he remained only a couple of days, since on the 13th he had already returned to Udine. « *I have been to Rovigno* — wrote Father Luigi to sister Luigia Dario at Primiero on 20 February — *to find the dwelling for the sisters, called there by divine Providence, and I found a place that adapts itself very well; now however it is necessary to find eight thousand florins (namely, the local currency of the era) to pay for it. May Saint Gaetano see to it! The mission of the sisters will concern the infant schools and the oratory, and five of them will be needed. The Lord calls them into a vineyard which, if well cultivated, will give very much fruit, and from what I see they will be able to depart for the day of the Patronage of Saint Joseph.* »

Around the same date he wrote to Mr. Niccolò Prodomo of Rovigno:

« *I received your postcard and I said: oh, how powerful is Saint Joseph!; and shortly after, your dearest and esteemed letter having reached me with the three obligatory*

declarations of sale of the house in project, I had to say: ah, Saint Joseph, I see truly that you wish these sisters in Rovigno, and that there you have chosen the good Prodomo and the reverend Father Ghira as executors of your wishes. »

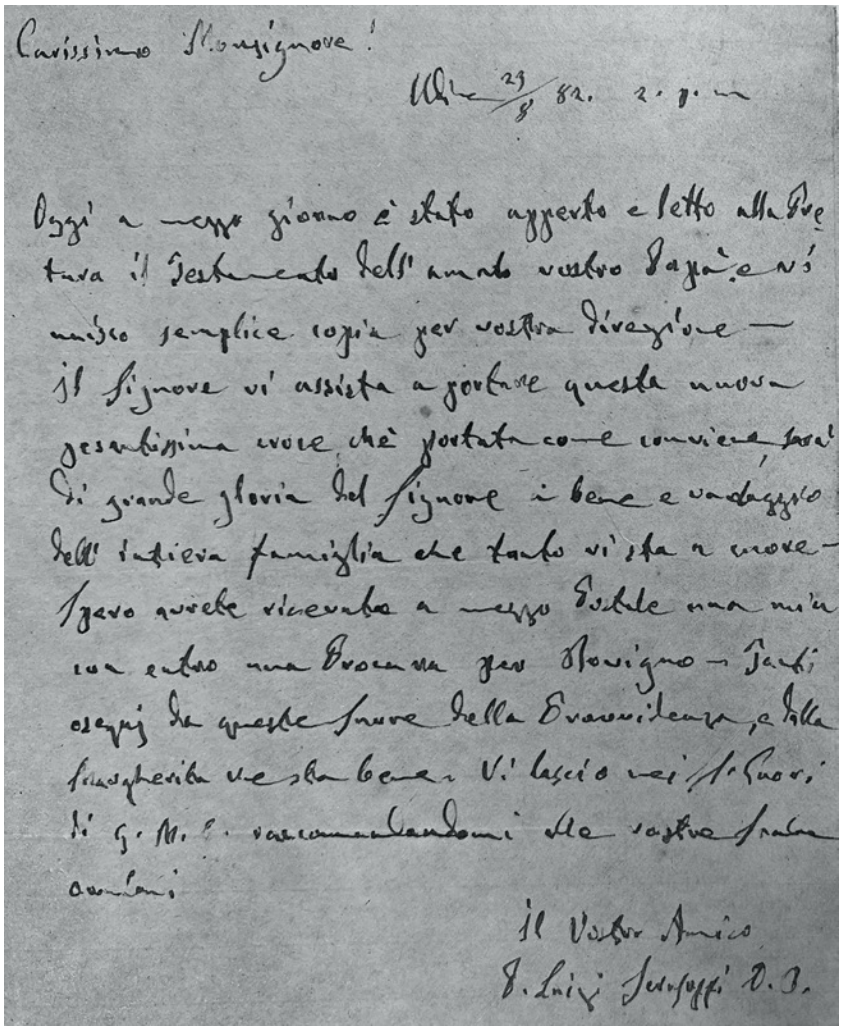
For the sake of chronicle and gratitude, the promoters of the work of Rovigno were precisely Prodomo, president of the local Catholic Reading Circle, together with the vice-president Pietro Menis and, for the ecclesiastical part, Father Ghira — in whose house Father Luigi had stayed — and the parish priest Monsignor Luigi Medelin.

Although he had remained for a very short time, the founder left a most powerful impression of himself among the people of Rovigno. In the diocesan process fifty years later, sister Vittoria Biasutti testified:

« *I remember that when I went to Rovigno, where I remained for twelve years, men, women, young people and the parish priest himself, who was a certain Father Medelin, a truly holy man, told me that the Father had given them the impression of being a saint. The parish priest often said: Let them thank the Lord that they have a saint as founder.* »

Sent by Father Luigi, Monsignor Antonio Feruglio repaired to Rovigno on 20 April and remained there a week to prepare in the smallest details the arrival of the sisters. These, guided by the superior general and by Mother Strazzolini, embarked at Trieste on 27 April and landed at half past two in the afternoon.

« *The devil* — writes Tinti — *envious of the good that this institution would produce, unleashed a storm at sea so furious that the sailors themselves declared they had never seen one like it. It is easier to imagine than to describe the sufferings of the sisters, unaccustomed to journeys by sea; however they were well recompensed by the festive welcome they received upon arrival in Rovigno, where the clergy, the civil representations and a crowd of people had come to meet them, despite the rainy weather.* »



Letter of Father Luigi to his fraternal friend Monsignor Antonio Feruglio.

Dearest Monsignor!

Udine li 23/8/1851. 2 p.m.

Today at noon the Will of your beloved Father was opened and read at the Prefecture, and I enclose a simple copy for your guidance — may the Lord assist you to bear this new, most heavy cross which, borne as is fitting, will be to the great glory of the Lord and the good and advantage of the entire family that is so close to your heart — I hope you will have received by post a letter of mine with a Power of Attorney for Rovigno enclosed — Many regards from these Sisters of Providence, and from Margherita who is well. I leave you in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, recommending myself to your prayers.

Your Friend
Father Luigi Scrosoppi
D.O.

Sunday 30, feast of the Patronage of Saint Joseph, the canon Onofrio imparted the benediction to the premises and Father Ghira hastened the same day to inform Monsignor Feruglio:

« *Just now the inauguration of the kindergarten has happily concluded. Magnificent weather, most beautiful feast, extraordinary participation on the part of the population. Praised be God and blessed be Saint Joseph! Infinite thanks to Father Scrosoppi!* »

A long report of it was given also by the Catholic newspaper "*L'eco del Litorale"* in the issue of 4 May 1882. There was no lack, however, of attacks full of rancor on the part of the so-called liberal press, attacks which had already unleashed themselves the preceding year, as soon as the project had become known, and which renewed themselves in the following years. A proof amply foreseen: the Evil One never fails to hinder every good work, and Father Luigi and the sisters accepted the challenge, as usual, with a humble and serene spirit.

On 3 May the presidency of the Catholic Readings addressed a truly solemn thanksgiving to the founder, who replied humbly three days later. He augured that the sisters « *may correspond well to the expectations of all those who have taken part in this holy work to cultivate with care the small plants of the new generation, and this full correspondence will suffice to recompense me for all that has been done for these good*

people of Rovigno, to whom I entrust these young religious women of Jesus, praying them to be willing to sustain them in their necessities. »

The correspondence of the sisters to the expectations and the education of youth return as constant thoughts in another letter of the Father to sister Dario of 14 May:

« *Yesterday evening there arrived from Rovigno the Reverend Mother Vicar* — Mother Strazzolini, who had remained there to insert the religious women into the environment — *after almost eighteen days of absence. Oh, how many facts she has related to us concerning those good gentlemen, ladies and all the inhabitants. News that leaves one astonished, since there the sisters are held, one is almost ashamed to say it, in veneration, and they consider them as a great treasure. Oh, what a responsibility we have before God. On Saturday there will have been four hundred and more girls to begin the festive oratory; imagine what an commitment. And let us pray to the Lord so that He may give lights and strengths to those sisters of ours, to perform well this angelic task of guiding youth upon the road of holy Paradise.* »

The kindergarten, named after Saint Joseph, was effectively inaugurated — with sixty children — on 21 June, feast of Saint Luigi: certainly in homage to Father Luigi. In the following autumn a popular school for girls also began its activity.

To the Father the oratory lay particularly at heart. On 26 November 1882 he wrote to sister Matilde Osso [6], who a month earlier had arrived from Cormons at Rovigno to direct the schools there and to help in the oratory:

« *You have now the task of sanctifying yourself by sanctifying those girls whom your divine Spouse has entrusted to you, so that you may sanctify them first by example and then by teaching. Yes, dearest daughter, look always upon these girls as if they had been delivered to you by your divine Spouse, and take care of them as of the pupil of his eyes; it will be your consolation to find yourself among them, and it will not weigh upon you at all to give them the necessary lessons.* »

And on 18 January 1883 he wrote to her again:

« *The Lord wishes you there, and there He wishes to be served by you with the tasks that are assigned to you and by seeking the sanctification of these girls, being in a word a missionary of His. What an honor has been granted to you by your divine Spouse; ah, appreciate it!* »

Even upon his deathbed, to the sisters who had arrived from Rovigno to receive his last benediction, he would immediately ask for news of the festive oratory. However, two months after the arrival of the sisters, there occurred a grave unexpected event which was warded off prodigiously — according to authoritative testimonies — by the prayers of the Father.

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[6] Four sisters Osso, daughters of an innkeeper who moved from Vicenza to Udine, were received into the House of the *derelitte*: Emma, Ida, Olga and Giovanna. The first in 1865 had to return to the side of her mother who died of tuberculosis, the last died in the institute at 12 years of age. The other two became Sisters of Providence: Ida under the name of sister Maria Fortunata of Jesus (born in Vicenza in 1851, entered in 1873, reception of the habit in 1875, profession in 1877, died in Cormons on 10 August 1886); Olga under the name of sister Maria Matilde of the Sacred Heart (born in Udine in 1853, entered in 1873, reception of the habit in 1875, profession in 1877, died in Cormons on 17 June 1930).

As superior of the new community sister Fedele Scrosoppi had been appointed. She, either because of the change of climate or because of the fatigues faced in those first times, at the beginning of July fell ill and her substitution was deemed necessary. Father Andrea Ghira, however, wrote to Monsignor Feruglio:

« *Being here already known, loved and esteemed, one cannot describe how unpleasant and painful her departure would result, in case one had to reach this extreme.* »

As soon as such news reached Udine, Father Luigi « *went to prostrate himself before the Most Holy Sacrament, to pray weeping. When he rose from prayer, the superior general was organizing so that they might go to take a sister in another house to send her to Rovigno. The Father made everything be suspended because* — he said — *the Most Holy Sacrament and the Heart of Jesus had to provide* », and he made them telegraph to Rovigno that he had prayed and that the superior had to recover. In fact, the superior of Rovigno began immediately to improve, recovered and remained another seventeen years as superior in Rovigno.

Sister Fedele remained there precisely until 1899. Her recovery must have been very rapid, since Father Ghira on 12 August could write to Monsignor Feruglio « *from the furnace of Rovigno* » (namely, indicating the exceptionally scorching climate of that summer):

« *The sisters are well and are of good humor. They already have Jesus in the sacrament in their small chapel.* »

They had Him from 7 August, feast of Saint Gaetano. The founder had foreseen correctly. He had provided for it, the divine Consoler of the tabernacle, driving away from the house illnesses and anxieties. Animated by His august presence, the new community dedicated itself with all enthusiasm to the works of apostolate.

The Sisters of Providence in San Vito al Tagliamento

San Vito al Tagliamento is a charming small town at eighteen kilometers from Portogruaro. Here the Sisters of Providence had gained an excellent reputation under the wise guidance of sister Cristina Borghese, nicknamed « *caspettina* » (namely, "*small stocking*", because of her untiring industriousness). San Vito also desired therefore the sisters for its hospital, at that time very small, named after Santa Maria dei Battuti. A document of 9 July 1863 relates even then an agreement between the founder of the Sisters of Providence and the director of the hospital, Doctor Filippo Cristofoli. However, the negotiations did not reach a conclusion.

They were resumed at the beginning of 1878, upon the initiative of Mr. Pietro and Miss Paola Morassutti [7], whose father Antonio had left a legacy of twenty thousand lire to the hospital, on condition that the sisters be introduced therein. Not even this time did things proceed smoothly. Five years were necessary before happily concluding the agreement.

[7] Born in San Vito al Tagliamento: Pietro (1839-1891), Paolo (1844-1898). In the death certificate it is stated that both were buried with the assistance of all the clergy, and for Mr. Pietro it was added that the clergy of the forane vicariate also participated. (Arch. parr., vol. 11, pp. 143, 148).

The principal cause of so long an interval of time is to be sought, as usual, in the obstacles placed by the anticlerical climate dominating at that time. San Vito was a stronghold of the Catholic party. Its major exponents were the combative and cultured archpriest of Bagnarola, Father Antonio Cicuto [8], the archdeacon of San Vito and professor emeritus Monsignor Giovan Battista Trevisan [9], the parish priest of Savorgnano Father Giuseppe Trevisan, formerly a professor in the seminary of Portogruaro and a very dear friend of Father Luigi, the patriot and poet Domenico Barnaba, and the Morassutti family, known for their great beneficence and high Christian sentiment, who honored themselves by occasionally hosting Father Scrosoppi. But biting opponents were not lacking even among the anticlericals.

In a first phase, the negotiations were initiated between the Father and the municipality, which watched over the institution of the hospital. Afterward, probably to avoid political connotations, the direction of the hospital took over from the town hall. On 12 May 1882 a preliminary contract was drafted, which however clashed with a legally valid objection from the prefecture of Udine. This latter, in a note of 15 July, declared:

« *It does not appear... that in Udine there has legal existence an institute of the sisters of charity or handmaids of Providence of which the Reverend Father Luigi Scrosoppi is director.* »

The provincial administration continued by maintaining that, if the sisters should fail in the commitments taken, it would not be possible to act legally against a contracting party that officially did not exist; it furthermore pointed out how in the contract the direction of the hospital entrusted « *the whole management into the hands of non-existent sisters.*»

The prefecture concluded by inviting to treat with other congregations.

On 5 October a new project was drafted in which there figured as contracting party Father Luigi in person — so that there might be a directly responsible person — and it was added in article 34 that « *in case of decease of Father Scrosoppi, the administration of the hospital will become free again to continue or not the present contract with his heirs or with another person who should present himself to substitute him.* » But see how difficult it is to operate good!

Not even this version was accepted. Another one was drafted on 25 November, which finally obtained the approval of the province on 15 January 1883. Father Luigi wrote on 20 January:

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[8] Born in Arba (Pordenone) in 1818, graduated in philosophy, he taught religion, moral theology and catechetics in the seminary of Concordia, from which he was removed by the Austrian government. In Trieste he was a writer of educational articles in the newspaper « La Favilla » and founder of an Italian gymnasium. Having returned to the seminary through the interest of Bishop A. Casasola, he taught classical literature and held the prefecture of studies. Then for 33 years he was archpriest of Bagnarola (Pordenone) intent on pastoral care and studies, and there he died in 1895. A man of genius and admirable intuition, he was judged one of the most powerful minds of the Church of Italy of his time. (Cf. R. BIASOTTI, Elogio funebre del dott. Don Antonio Cicuto, S. Vito al Tagliamento 1895, pp. 18).

[9] He was born in 1807. A man of uncommon culture, he was professor of moral theology, for many years parish priest of San Vito al Tagliamento, where he died in 1885. An appreciated preacher of sound doctrine, he was luminous with piety always conjoined with charity. (Cf. P. A. CICUTA, Elogio funebre... arcidiacono di S. Vito, Udine 1885, pp. 18).

« *The affair of San Vito al Tagliamento is concluded and let it be considered that the sisters will repair thither for the first days of March.* »

There arose still some obstacle, so much so that only on 18 June did Father Luigi go to San Vito for the signing of the definitive contract.

« *Finally I shall go on Monday to San Vito al Tagliamento for the signing of the contract... and it is probable that they will begin their holy mission on the first of next July. Pray and make others pray to the Lord so that the sisters destined thither may correspond well to their task, and pray so that the choice may be for the greater glory of our divine Spouse.* »

The first superior thereof was sister Eletta Valussi [10]. On 28 July the founder could affirm in a letter of his:

« *The hospital of San Vito al Tagliamento proceeds well.* »

In the new community Monsignor Tinti, vicar general of Concordia, interested himself much, who obtained from the bishop Monsignor Domenico Rossi from the very first day the private oratory with the Most Holy Sacrament.

« *I do not know how to begin this letter of mine, having very many things to say to Your Reverend Lordship, things that require continual thanks. Could an affectionate father do more than what you have done for the poor Sisters of Providence called by their divine Spouse to San Vito? Certainly not. I ought here to recall how you succeeded in obtaining what the sisters desired; the many journeys made by you as far as San Vito to arrange that the opening of this house should take place, as in fact it happened, with religious solemnity, the blessing of the chapel, and having obtained from His Holiness Leo XIII the apostolic benediction upon this new house, and for all this to address to you my most heartfelt thanks.*

But feeling myself incapable, I turn to the good heavenly Father and say: You who know how much this beloved minister of Yours has done, and with what honest end he did it, which was only Your glory, be generous in giving him the just reward. Good God, hear me! I hope to have fulfilled my duty and that you are satisfied with it. I pray you to consider the sisters there, as well as those of Portogruaro and of San Vito, as your true daughters, since I cannot entrust them to a better person. »

Am I mistaken, or between the lines of this letter flows a singularly sweet and peaceful tone, typical of one who feels departure close, as of one who has almost initiated the eternal colloquy with God? That of San Vito was the last house effectively inaugurated during the life of Father Luigi.

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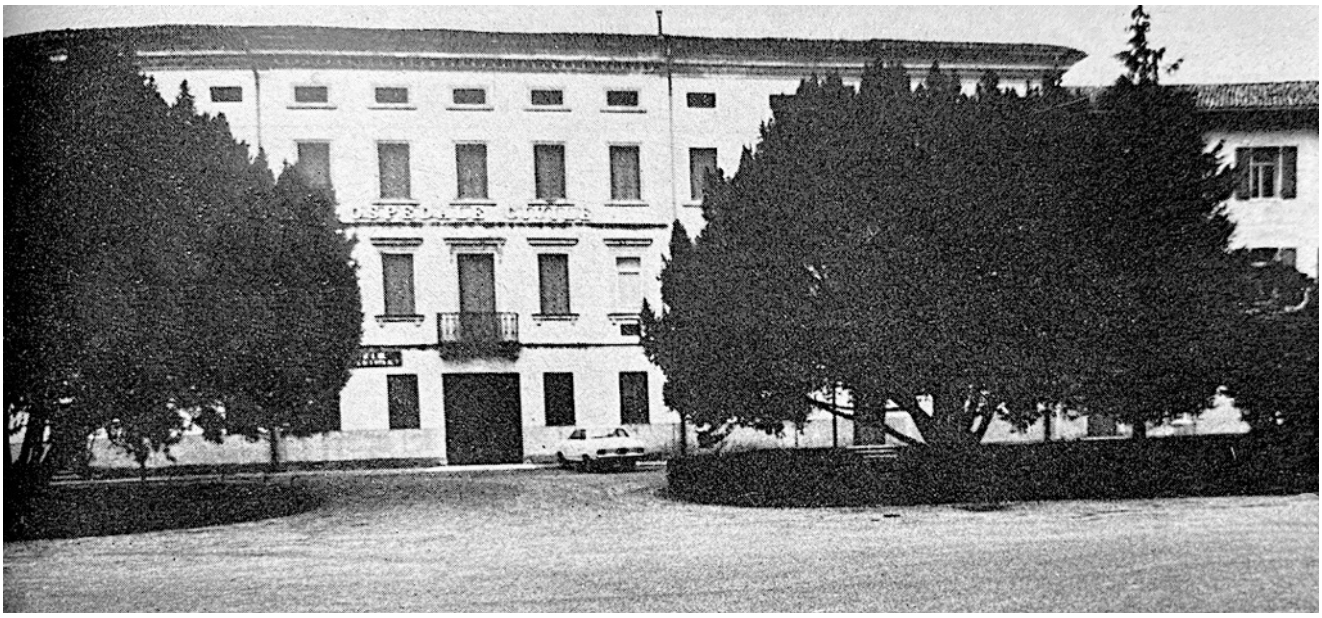
[10] Valussi Francesca (sister Maria Eletta of Saint Joseph), born in Varmo (Udine) on 18-11-1844, entered the congregation on 1-1-1866, received the habit on 14-9-1868, professed on 13-11-1870, died in Udine on 25-7-1923. For notes on her see the Cenni biografici..., ms., vol. II, pp. 277-316.



San Vito al Tagliamento (PN). Old seat of the civil hospital where the sisters began their service in 1883.

Negotiations for Roncegno

During 1883, the parish priest of Roncegno in Valsugana, Father Alessio Pretis, resumed the procedures already attempted in 1870 to have the Sisters of Providence in the small local hospital. This time the initiative was successful.

As early as 7 September, Sister Angela Rodaro, superior in Trento, wrote to him that the superior general granted him three of them and that she herself, shortly thereafter, would carry out an inspection. She conducted it and, on 23 December, reconfirmed the assignment of the sisters — no longer three but four — under certain conditions.

Father Alessio accepted them with a letter of 21 February 1884 and auspicated the coming of the religious women for the period immediately after Easter, which that year fell on 14 April. The death of the founder prevented that rapid dispatch. The sisters repaired to Roncegno only toward the end of 1884 and the first superior of the community was Sister Saveria Pascolatti [11].

Father Luigi hoped furthermore to be able to send, by July 1883, the sisters also to Pirano to render service in that House of Relief; he hoped so, because Istria was by then most dear to him. For a year Father Giacomo Bonifacio, a native of Pirano by birth and at that time assigned to the church of the Beata Vergine del Soccorso in Trieste, had insisted in that sense. The House of Relief had recently passed into the hands of the zealous canon Bonifacio; this circumstance and the excellent success of the sisters in Rovigno made their presence desired also in Pirano. In that city there were many liberals « *as in Rovigno and it appears in greater number* — Father Giacomo wrote — *who are very far from appreciating the services of the angels of charity, however appreciated by the Turks* ». The promoter exerted himself to the utmost, but the faction opposed to religious congregations prevailed. The Sisters of Providence will go to the shelter of

[11] She is the second of the Pascolatti sisters (see part III; chapter 2, note 6): sister Maria Saveria of the Most Holy Sacrament (1851-1929), entered the congregation when her sister was already dead; the first was named sister Maria Saveria of the Sacred Hearts (born in 1847, entered in 1864, received the habit in 1866, professed in 1868).

Pirano only in 1900, to remain there for half a century. They departed from it as exiles, after the second world war.

The Cernazai Inheritance

The last three years of life of Father Luigi were profoundly marked by a long and tormented judicial dispute linked to the inheritance of Monsignor Francesco Cernazai, honorary canon of the metropolitan cathedral of Udine. In his capacity as administrative director of the House of the *derelitte*, the founder saw himself forced on several occasions to resort to legal paths because of contested or unhonored bequests. Whoever should wish to examine with extreme attention — as we have done — his behavior in similar controversies, not only would not find the slightest defect therein, but would have to admire his most pure and often heroic disinterest. This applies above all to this affair, which was by far the most relevant; so important that, to narrate it in a detailed way, an entire chapter would be needed. But to what purpose? Here it will be sufficient to provide a rapid mention of it, so as to put into clear light the behavior of Father Luigi, without losing ourselves in the labyrinth of legal quibbles and of passions that always unleash themselves where material interest dominates.

The Cernazai family, through commerce and agriculture, had accumulated a remarkable fortune during the eighteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, such wealth had passed into the hands of Giuseppe Cernazai, a learned naturalist and collector of art and books, founder in Udine of the Work of the Propagation of the Faith. Another consistent patrimony had been brought to him as a dowry by his wife Orsola Cargnelli, a supporter of the House of the *derelitte* since its foundation in 1816, who had expressed the will to destine her own goods to the benefit of that institution.

Giuseppe Cernazai, in his will of 1 June 1847, had left half of the patrimony to his son Monsignor Francesco and the other half, in equal parts, to him and to the other six children. One of these, Doctor Pietro, who died on 15 October 1858, had also named Monsignor Francesco as universal heir, expressing the desire that his share should serve for the foundation of a male monastery of enclosure at Santa Marizza di Varmo. There was in fact an attempt, not successful, to have the monks of Casamari establish themselves there, expelled from their abbey. Another brother, Daniele, as a sign of his own patriotism, had named Count Camillo Benso di Cavour as his heir.

Monsignor Francesco Cernazai had become thus the manager of a large part of the family asset. He drafted a will in his own hand on 24 February 1862. In it, according to the mentality of the era, he left as heirs the male children of his brothers. However, should the male succession be lacking, he named in one point as « *legatees* » and in another as « *heirs under universal title* » the *derelitte* or Sisters of Providence, indicating Father Luigi Scrosoppi as testamentary executor.

When on 29 January 1881 Monsignor Francesco Cernazai died, a male Cernazai succession did not exist. The brother Fabio had had only three daughters, who went as

brides into the Udinese families Braida, Marcotti, and Mauroner; while the sister Lorenzina had left a son, the noble Antonio de Reali [12].

The inheritance, therefore, should have passed without contrasts to the Sisters of Providence. These, however, although recognized legally in 1865, had legal existence only in Austrian territory, since they were involved in the suppression of religious congregations decreed by the law of 7 July 1866 of the Kingdom of Italy. However, the intention of the deceased was very clear, although the will presented some defects of form, according to the analyses of the lawyers, because of the different expressions « *legatees* » and « *heirs under universal title* »; furthermore, the Sisters of Providence possessed the necessary legal personality, even if only in a foreign country.

It was not difficult to foresee that politics, anticlericalism, legal subtleties and above all reasons of interest would raise a dust storm. The founder intuited it immediately.

« *Father Luigi* — Tinti writes — *grieved by the death of his friend, but even more by the testamentary dispositions, pale in face and shedding bitter tears, said on that very day to the sisters: The canon Cernazai has left his all to the institute. Oh, how many troubles, my daughters, how many troubles are preparing! If someone else had not possessed the spirit of poverty and the confidence in Providence that guided Scrosoppi, he would have rejoiced at the idea of the rich inheritance; on the contrary, the prescient Father grew sad over it, and with reason, as the facts demonstrated later.* »

The will was contested both by Fabio Cernazai and by the noble Antonio de Reali; with harsh methods by the first, encouraged in part by some of his sons-in-law; by the second with legal correctness and with great respect for the Father and benevolence toward the sisters. One can well imagine with what malice the anticlerical newspapers sought to draw advantage from the situation and how many gossips spread in the salons and in the gathering places of the city. To the Father the calumny resulted particularly painful — as easy as it was unjust toward a wealthy priest — which struck the memory of the deceased donor and friend. A few days before falling mortally ill, sending wishes for Christmas 1883 to de Reali, he wrote:

« *May the angelic deceased your uncle obtain for you from heaven all the good that your excellence desires.* »

And almost in every letter, during those three years, he recommended to the sisters to pray for Monsignor Cernazai « *because only in us did he hope, when he was alive, that we would have succored him after death.* »

It would be tedious and useless to follow the entire judicial path of the lawsuit, from the magistrate's court up to the court of cassation. From the beginning, Father Luigi preferred to seek the path of an amicable agreement and once he lost his patience — that patience which, as the proverbs say, sometimes fails even the saints — even against his own lawyer, the lawyer Vincenzo Casasola [13], whom an excessive prudence rendered slow

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[12] Venetian (1834-1887), belonging to an illustrious family. For moral and intellectual gifts, for his patriotism also during the Austrian dominion, in 1876 he was appointed senator of the kingdom. In Venice he had remarkable administrative offices (Cf. I. SARTI, Il parlamento subalpino nazionale, Terni 1890, p. 799).

[13] Born in Buia (Udine) in 1845, died in Udine in 1928, nephew of the archbishop of Udine A. Casasola, lawyer, city councilor, provincial deputy. For more than half a century he was head of the Catholic movement in Friuli and

and distrustful. « *I do not wish to place* — he wrote to Father Scrosoppi on 14 December 1882 — *the slightest obstacle to the agreement, just as I do not intend to assume responsibility of any kind.* »

Father Luigi instead assumed the responsibility willingly; nothing was more dear and urgent to him than a conciliation. And he arrived almost close to it. On 8 March 1883 he reported to Casasola:

« *Today at 16:00 Mr. Fabio Cernazai has been with me and we have concurred upon the agreement to be made... Perhaps he will return tomorrow with the complete draft of the transaction studied by Doctor Billia.* »

Since de Reali expressed on 12 May the doubt that Cernazai might evade the commitment taken, Father Luigi responded to him immediately « *that Mr. Fabio shows himself to be very desirous of seeing implemented the agreement established on 19 February last* » and prayed de Reali therefore not to resume the litigation initiated by him against his uncle to demand the rendering of accounts of the administration of the last two years.

The relationships between Cernazai and Father Luigi had returned therefore cordial and frequent. He was happy about it because charity is worth more than any sum of money and because in charity every problem finds an easy solution. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Fabio fell ill almost immediately and at the end of July his conditions were already grave; he died on 5 April 1885.

The final agreement was signed with his heirs on 5 April 1885, when the Father had been dead already for a year, and followed exactly the line that he had suggested since the beginning. On the basis of it, the Cernazai patrimony was divided into three equal shares, one of which fell to the Sisters of Providence, valued at 140,000 lire. However, the founder had already committed a large part of it — as we have said — to sustain the works of Father Giovanni Dal Negro.

« *The good Father Luigi* — Tinti writes — *was no longer alive at the moment of the signing of the agreement, and therefore for the three preceding long years he had to suffer immensely because of the oppositions relative to this inheritance. In him two very delicate sentiments contrasted: on one side, the disinterest that pushed him to renounce any right; on the other, the love for justice so as not to damage the rights of the sisters. However, he bore displeasures and contrarieties with holy resignation, without ever losing his calm, because in every happy or adverse event of his life he had always as sole objective the just, holy and blessed will of God.* »

We could not desire a more informed and authoritative testimony than this, because Monsignor Tinti was spiritually close to Father Luigi and to his works and because his

from him, under both aspects, depended every Catholic work and institution; by Leo XIII he was appointed knight of Saint Gregory the Great, then commander. Esteemed also by his adversaries for the sincerity of his openly professed faith and for his vast culture, he always safely asserted his Italian identity. (Cf. La Patria del Friuli, 9-4-1928 and Giornale del Friuli, 10-4-1928).

father, who was a lawyer [(14)], had a fundamental role in proposing and sustaining the agreement, in perfect accordance and indeed upon inspiration of the Father himself.

The founder certainly did not solicit that inheritance: perhaps he knew nothing of it until the death of Monsignor Cernazai. Otherwise, prudent as he was, he would not have failed to suggest to him the necessary corrections to the will, especially after the political events of 1866. If he had not plotted for the inheritance of his aunt Rosa Lazzarini, much less did he do so for this one. During the dispute he sought anxiously only one thing: peace, at the cost of any renunciation. There is then a singular episode that demonstrates his scrupulous respect for justice, even in its legal aspect. It seemed to him, at a certain point, that the lawyers were studying legal expedients to elude the tax authorities, to which a little less than a quarter of the patrimony would have gone in taxes. It was Doctor Billia, lawyer for the counterparty, who in a long letter of 13 August 1883 had to commit himself to demonstrate that that of the Father was an « *excessive scruple* » and that « *there is no shadow of fraud* ».

This long story has its teaching. Let us say it clearly, even if it leads us a bit far from the principal argument. Charity is better done while one is alive. Or, if one does not have the courage for such a noble detachment and if the inheritance is consistent, it is better to have the will drafted by an expert lawyer; otherwise, over the prey those harsh and interminable contentions nourished by egoism and interest will certainly unleash themselves.

When Father Luigi and Monsignor Francesco Cernazai met in Paradise, his friend will have said to him:

« *Forgive me: I believed I was helping you and instead I have given you only troubles and displeasures.* »

And the Father will have answered him:

« *What can we do about it, blessed one? Things of down here!* »

[14] Tinti Girolamo Bartolomeo (1806-1893) of Pordenone, of a noble family originating from Gandino in the Bergamo region, president of the bar association, knight of Saint Gregory the Great.

Chapter 11

NOVITIATE FOR HEAVEN

Come, Lord Jesus

Everyone grows old and dies in their own way, including saints and pious souls. At times it can happen that melancholy shadows of old age cloud the sunset of life. If only physical strengths fail, it is no wonder. But sometimes the imminent undoing of the body seems to upset, albeit without fault, spiritual life itself.

However, if the physical rhythm remains normal, the soul nourished with humility and charity does not grow old; or, rather, old age transforms into a gift of God, which increases serenity and spurs toward the last race toward the divine Friend, by now arrived at the doors.

Indeed, in the last earthly days, the soul is pervaded by a sense of lightness, of freedom, of peace and of joy. The thorny briars will continue to scratch on the outside, although the scratches are perceived less distinctly. On the inside, grace intones the song of the highest freedom and makes one taste the savor of the total disappearance of one's own self.

« *I long for my dissolution to be with Christ.* »

« *Come, Lord Jesus!* »

Faith itself becomes almost a lucid glimpsing into the brightness of the morning, which announces the full and blazing vision face to face. And charity surpasses hope in the joy already anticipated of the encounter always desired. One single thing sinks and vanishes far away, down there: the earth with its tormented miseries.

Speak therefore of dawn, not of sunset.

Thus it happened to Father Luigi.

Old age brought him nothing but some physical discomfort. A troublesome skin rash, suspected by those close to him but hidden by him with his usual reserve and with patience. His legs were a bit vacillating, both because of the weight of the years and because of the pains of arthritis. One day they heard him fall noisily. They ran: he had already risen again and was wiping away the blood that was coming out from his nose and from his mouth.

« *It is nothing* », he said.

Evidently his body — namely, brother ass — was at its last labors. Shortly it would rest too, poor thing.

An Exceptional Document of Humility

But the soul of Father Luigi felt the need to accomplish something still. And what, if not to bring to completion what he had always done? If to that poor man of Scrosoppi there remained still some caprice or some hint of pride, if he had not been bent completely, it was necessary to humiliate him definitively. Father Luigi subdued him. It is after all true that the end of a life is coherent with how it was lived — namely, *talis vita, finis ita* —, and that just as one lives, in the same way one dies.

19 March 1880: feast of his most beloved Saint Joseph.

The Father began that day his novitiate for Heaven.

And « *to begin* », for Christians, is synonymous with humiliating oneself. A perennial beginning, particularly clear for him who declared himself a disciple of the « *good Pippo* » (Saint Philip Neri): the « *always restarting* » (*semper incipere*) of Saint Carlo Borromeo, another holy patron who had adorned his own coat of arms with the word *humilitas*.

We are about to relate integrally a truly extraordinary document of that novitiate. It links itself very well to the purposes of about thirty years before, when Father Luigi in 1852 had prescribed for himself the third degree of humility, following the example of Jesus buffeted and crucified: and it concludes worthily the sacerdotal life of him who had begun it in 1827 with the sermon on humility.

Let us approach with trembling respect this episode of the interior life of Father Luigi, so that a superficial and indiscreet astonishment may not prevent us from catching its profound beauty — namely, the highest poetry.

In truth, he is not struck by it at all who knows the life of many saints, formed according to an ascetical method severely desirous of mortification and of humiliation. Perhaps it is a difficult concept to understand in our days, but it does not seem that today spirituality is deeper.

Before, however, we must mention the critical question of the author. The document, in fact, is anonymous; and in the tradition of the Sisters of Providence it has been attributed now to one person, now to another.

Who Drafted the Document

Tinti, who relates long extracts of it, affirms that « *our Father Luigi chose for himself a wise person, but of a rank and age much inferior to him, relying upon her as upon a spiritual director for the external sphere* »; he adds that he learned what he is about to relate precisely from the words of this mysterious and extraordinary director. Tinti uses the masculine in the references, but the document indicates clearly that it was a question of a sister. He chose this form for a sort of reserve, in the fear of exposing the Father to the derision or to the malevolent judgments of his contemporaries. It is a question of a caution which today has no longer reason to exist, both out of respect for historical truth, and because, at least for those who know how to catch with rectitude the « *excesses* » of the saints, the figure of the Father emerges on the contrary valorized from it.

But if it was a sister, who was it? Concerning the authoress of the document we have some certainties: before 1880 she rendered service in a hospital visited often by the Father, identifiable with all probability in the hospital of Portogruaro; she lived in Udine at least from 1880 until the death of the founder, holding toward him the unusual office of mistress of novitiate; subsequently she returned to operate in a hospital where female patients affected by mental illnesses were admitted; in 1894 she was still alive, since she provided her own written testimony to Tinti while he was completing the biography of the Father.

In the document the final words strike: « *I pass to sign with my own hand* », followed by a cross traced with firmness. This detail suggests that the text was dictated, either because the sister was illiterate, or because toward 1894, because of illness or old age, she was not in a position to affix her own signature. She demonstrates, however, a soul of extreme sensitivity and discretion, so much so as to make us recognize in her a religious woman of high profile.

Our accurate researches have not led to a definitive identification. All the gathered elements would seem to coincide only with the figure of sister Agostina Pez [(1)], who before 1880 was at the hospital of Portogruaro with administrative tasks; in November of 1880 she is in Udine [(2)]and between 1881 and 1883 she is charged with guiding the novitiate, a task which however she can perform only partially by reason of precarious health, so much as to require the temporary intervention of Father Luigi; subsequently she returns to the cited hospital which, until September 1894, hosted also psychiatric patients. All the details agree, except for a vague account of the tradition according to which sister Pez, precisely because of her conditions of health, would have remained in Udine only a few months to then return immediately to Portogruaro [(3)]. From 1891 until her death, which occurred on 20 October 1893, sister Agostina lived again in Udine forming part of the board of administration of the college. In the lists of the minutes her signature appears until October 1894, but written by another person. This would explain the cross traced at the end of the document and the drafting of the same by third parties: in fact, if sister Agostina was the protagonist of the story, not being illiterate [(4)], one cannot attribute to her a writing that shows the lack of the most elementary orthographical rules.

There exists however a report on the virtues of the founder that indicates in sister Giacinta De Monte the « *secretary of his mortifications and penances* » [(5)]. However, according to the available information, it appears that sister Giacinta never distanced herself from Udine, if not for some years spent in the nearby Orzano, and never rendered service in the hospitals [(6)].

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[1] Pez Laura (sister Maria Agostina of the Good Shepherd) born in Castions (Udine) on 25-10-1834, entered the congregation on 15-10-1864, received the habit on 26-2-1867, professed on 19-3-1869..

[2] L. TINTI, o.c., p. 422. It is not excluded that she had been in Udine already in March

[3] See Cenni biografici..., vol. II, p. 192.

[4] ...« belonged to a noble family, very rich, her mother was a countess ». .. (Ibid., p. 190).

[5] A.L.S., fasc. 29, doc. 9, c.r. 85. For sister Giacinta De Monte see part II, chap. 4, note 8.

[6] In the tradition of the sisters this extraordinary master of novitiate was identified in Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, and an explicit echo is found in the deposition of some witnesses at the ordinary process. Sister Vittoria Biasutti, who

Whoever the authoress may have been, here now is the document in its completeness, adapted in form to render its reading easier.

Abyssal Humility

Having despoiled himself of every material good in 1879, Father Scrosoppi felt the need to despoil himself of his own self, plunging into an abyssal humility. Let us not forget that we are speaking of a holy priest, almost seventy-seven years old, by now surrounded by universal admiration and by the prestige of the many works promoted and brought to a good end. A priest who hungered and thirsted for humiliations.

« *I can say then* — the document says — *that in the year 1880, on the 19th of the month of March, a sister passing in front of the door of his study, he came out and asked: Who is she? — She stopped and answered: — Do you command?*

Then he made her enter, closed the door, and said to her: Reverend Mother, you must know that I am superior, but full of defects; and unfortunately a thousand times I give scandal to the whole community by my pride and arrogance. To these a thousand other defects follow and I have no one who will do me the charity of warning me. I pray for charity (then he placed himself on his knees with open arms), today is the day of Saint Joseph; therefore I pray you to receive me as a novitiate for a year (I leave to those who read to imagine the embarrassment of that poor woman) and to watch over me always and to come every evening to listen to my accusations. »

But she began to make all possible difficulties and to excuse herself in every way, to exempt herself. All in vain: since he did and said and prayed so much, even to tears, that she also with tears had to yield and accept.

He thanked her and, seeing her grieved by such a command, began to comfort her and animate her to the practice of virtues, in a special way of holy humility.

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entered the congregation on 12-11-1880, referring to sister Cherubina Voncini, who had professed in 1863, deposed: Father Luigi « prayed Monsignor Antonio Feruglio to act as his spiritual director, since he said he had no one to correct him. And every evening he presented himself to him, humbly accused himself of his faults and suggested to him the titles of contempt with which he was to treat him. Monsignor Feruglio acted as his director for a first year and then behind the insistences of the Father who asserted he had profited nothing, he did so for another year still » (Summ., pp. 113-114, par. 366 in Positio...). Sister Pia Aldegheri, who entered the congregation on 1-8-1895, referring to the same Monsignor Feruglio, testified: « Monsignor Bishop Antonio Feruglio, holding conferences for us in Cormons, reminded us that the Father depended always in his penances both upon his confessor Monsignor Someda and upon himself in the five years that he chose him for his spiritual director » (Ibid., p. 211, par. 807). Colombara accepted this tradition and in his biography An Apostle of Charity (Bergamo, 1929, II ed., p. 107), relating in a somewhat different form a passage of Tinti, adds of his own: « The next day, writes this improvised and extraordinary director, who was Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, later bishop of Vicenza, I had to begin this office of mine as master of spirit to a Father (Father Luigi was then seventy-eight years old) so old and so far advanced in the way of perfection, that I could very well be his disciple. » Now we find ourselves before two facts: the document that testifieth in an irreproachable way that from 1880 onward a sister was the instrument of the mortifications and penances of Father Luigi; a tradition that converges upon Monsignor A. Feruglio, of which the two most valid testimonies have been reported above. That of sister Vittoria, gathered from the voice of sister Cherubina, has details that return in the text of the sister; sister Pia deposed instead generically upon the dependence of Father Luigi « in his penances » upon Monsignor Feruglio, as she heard from the same. These testimonies which show in Monsignor Feruglio the guide of the mortifications of the Father are not in contrast with the document that affirms that a sister was such an instrument. Father Luigi always desirous of mortifications might have made use at different times both of Monsignor Feruglio and of a sister.

« *Let us help each other* — he said — *to become great saints. Before coming to me, present yourself to our dear Mother and Father (thus he called the Madonna and Saint Joseph); ask for their holy benediction and then be faithful to all inspirations. The Lord bless you. Tomorrow morning come to find me.* »

On the next day, 20 March 1880, she began the penance.

Every morning she presented herself in the room of the Father. He immediately rose, completely respectful, with his cap in hand, gave her good morning and asked how she was. And he remained in that attitude until she told him to sit down. Every time then that he ran into her, he stopped, took off his cap — whoever was present — and addressed the greeting to her: — Praised be Jesus Christ.

He never went out of the house without presenting himself to take her benediction, going to look for her wherever she might be. If sometimes he had acted otherwise, he accused himself afterward of being proud and of little account: that is when, so as not to trouble her too much, he had gone out without permission.

Every evening he made his accusation to her; if he had corrected some daughter of his with too much harshness, if he had lacked respect toward anyone, if he had not mortified his eyes, if he had lacked obedience or moderation, if he had not spoken with a low and respectful voice, if he had used little care in practicing humility, obedience, poverty. Every smallness for him was a very great crime; and he supplicated that penance be imposed upon him.

Arrived at the Lent of that year, the holy novitiate set himself with more fervor than usual to prepare himself for holy pardon. He began to deliver from time to time some notes to that poor daughter of his, and these cost her many tears, but not sufficient to make him cease. She did not take care to preserve them: she read them two or three times, then she tore them up, because she feared to lose them and therefore that they might be found by someone. However I remember very well the formula of some.

For example: « *This week for seven times a day enter, passing by, into the room of your novitiate and command him to present the spittoon to you. This being presented, spit upon it.* » At the reading her blood shuddered. Dear Jesus, she sighed, if You wish this, help me! She presented herself in fact and repeated the words of the note. Then he rose from his chair, placed himself on his knees and said to her: — Here is the spittoon (and he presented his face to her): there is no more suitable spittoon. Seeing her hesitating: — Come on, courage, he said to her, for your Spouse everything is little, do me the charity... Then he remained some minutes without cleaning himself.

Another note: « *This week you will add reproaches, accusing me of being proud and other small things that your Spouse will inspire you.* »

Another one still: « *This week as many times as you can you will come to find your novitiate. But first procure from one of the girls the pocket handkerchief, the one you believe to be the dirtiest. Then come and say with an air of command: — Come here, proud man: do you know what you deserve? See: thus you deserve. And you will rub with the turned handkerchief the spittoon (that is, the face) and then you will give him the penance.* »

Another note: « *For five times a day you will come and say to him: — What are you doing there, proud man? Come here, kneel down, for I shall make you see what you deserve; and then you will give him some slaps or pulls of the ears. — Here is what you deserve! Other than superior, if they knew you for what you are.* »

Another one still: « *This week and all Fridays of the year procure to exercise me in every sort of virtue and in particular in penance. This week you will come seven times to slap me and strike my hands with the strap for the many shortcomings committed.* »

In the evening, after the community had gone to rest and he was well secure from indiscretions, he had himself tied by this daughter of his to a large armchair, blocked with iron fetters at his hands and feet, and in this state he remained for half an hour. Meanwhile his daughter went all that time before the Blessed Sacrament, then returned to set him at liberty again. He also then repaired before the Blessed Sacrament and remained there in prayer even until after midnight. Other times he had himself tied with open arms to nails driven into the doorpost and into the door that led from the study to the bedroom, and he remained thus until this daughter of his, in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, felt inspired to go to set him at liberty.

Here the sister makes a small digression:

« *And often —* she says *— he disciplined himself and wore hair-shirts until his deathbed, when the doctor had them removed. I can say also that, this daughter of his finding herself in a hospital, as soon as he arrived he recommended to her to prepare for him one of those heaviest shirts that those poor things used or one of their pocket handkerchiefs, and he used them for all the time he stayed there.*

He was all happy and blessed in seeing that shirt made of patches and so much mended that the seams were no longer recognized: he took it, pressed it to his breast and kissed it over and over again: and the same he did with the handkerchief. Thus he did, here, in the house, every time a used handkerchief was provided to him. I must also say that, I finding myself in a hospital and having to tie an agitated female patient (namely, a mentally ill woman in the grip of delirium), it gave me a bit of pain to face her alone, but I took courage and said to her: — Like a good girl, get into bed.

She looked at me and said: Do you want to tie me? I go immediately. She went and accommodated herself in such a way that I made no labor. After having placed fetters at her hands and feet — those already used for the Father (which evidently the sister had preserved as relics) — and having secured her to the bedstead, she said to me: — Now are you content? I answered: — I yes, I am content. And she: — I more than you because with these a saint was tied. And I: — A saint? She smiling replied: — Do you not know it? — I no. — Well I know it, she concluded; go away indeed, for I remain most content for the reason I have said. And in fact she calmed down. »

Then the sister returns to that singular novitiate:

« *For a year —* she says *— he practiced the mortifications and the exercises of virtue of which it was spoken before. Completed the year the sister presented herself on the day of Saint Joseph with the intention of terminating, but the Father as soon as he saw her threw himself on his knees and said: — This year I have made no profit and unfortunately I have been a cause of scandal to the community with my little humility, obedience,*

charity and mortification; so I pray you to continue the charity to me, but double the severity. Address frequently the reproach to me: — It will be always time that you know what you are! Truly you are a fool, a stupid man; if they have made you superior I do not understand even myself the reason; you would not deserve to stay even in the last corner of this holy place. Have you understood? And then down some slap, repeating to me: — Have you understood? Go to your place. Or: — Go there (indicating a corner of the room) and for ten minutes think of what you are; and amend yourself once for all, for it will be always the time. And this you will tell me about three times per week... »

That poor woman remained there without words for a bit, seeing that it fell to her to continue to carry such a cross; then she sought to avoid it by raising some difficulties. But he:

« *The Lord wishes that you continue to carry this cross and one day He will give you the reward for it. If you consider me as your father and love the soul of your father, you must help him so that he may not be lost.* »

She wished to present still some difficulties to exempt herself. He then said to her:

« *I have used charity to you. I order you by obedience: now you use charity to this ill-mannered sinner. Thus it must continue until it pleases the Lord.* »

She weeping had to accept her cross and proceed.

That reciprocal exchange of charity explains itself very well if the words of the Father are read in this way: — I have had the charity to substitute for you before the novices; you use the charity to me to continue in my novitiate. This would confirm the identification of the authoress as sister Agostina Pez, who ceased from the office of mistress of the novices in 1883, but might have remained still in the house of Udine, there being no document that determines the date of her return to Portogruaro.

The document terminates by saying that the sister had, although weeping, « *to take her cross and go forward until it pleased the Lord to call him to Himself to receive the prize of his labors.* »

The report closes thus:

« *Of everything that I have written I am more than certain. That indeed I have limited myself to the principal things, and I do not believe I have exaggerated. So much is the certainty that I pass to sign with my own hand.* »

Whoever has read attentively this exceptional document, will have been struck by that "*living spittoon*" and by those rubbed handkerchiefs, to the point of smiling at it. And perhaps he will have been so much distracted by it as not to ask himself the question that synthesizes the value of the testimony. We shall pose it to him: did this sister believe yes or no in the heroic sanctity of Father Luigi?

Did this sister, while declaring repeatedly her surprise and her discomfort before those extraordinary exercises of humility, not show herself perhaps aware of having had to do with a saint, whom she explicitly calls her « *holy novitiate* »?

She did not stop at the bewilderment; she understood the sublime longing for humiliations and abjection that burned in the heart of the founder. There is only a modest and heartfelt sadness: that it had fallen to her to perform the part of the servants of

Caiaphas and of the soldiers of Pilate in spitting upon, scourging and crucifying him who was her venerated spiritual Father.

Father Luigi took seriously two paradoxes of the Christian life, living them concretely: one is that to ascend means to descend; one cannot be great if not at the price of making oneself small. And if the personal spiritual edifice has raised its summits very high, there is one thing to do in the last days: to dig and plunge beneath the ground to consolidate the foundations. What foundations? Those of humility.

Around him a flourishing religious family had grown; the works had multiplied and proceeded well; even among contradictions, a universal veneration surrounded him. A breath of wind is enough to make the poplar tops sway; the mere breath of fame is enough to cause dangerous swaying. Who do you believe you are, old fool?

The other paradox is this: the authentic Christian must desire and seek the sunset in humiliation. Jesus began His earthly life in the humility of the cave and concluded it in the atrocious humility of the passion. Blessed the old age marked by silence, by abandonment, perhaps by derision: blessed spiritually, for those who know how to understand it. If nature does not help you with humiliating ailments, if men do not help you — who often do it willingly — throwing you away like a piece of refuse, ask a poor sister for the charity to maltreat you and to maltreat you again, doubling the severity.

Father Luigi Master of the Novices

For over a year, starting from 1881, the founder held the office of substitute master for that small group of novices remaining in the house of Udine. That period remained impressed in the memory of the sisters who were initiated by him to the first steps of the religious life.

He became famous for certain singular external aspects. For example, the Father frequently forgot that the majority of his listeners was from Trento and slid willingly into long explanations in Friulian, desiring to give to the discourse a more simple and familiar pace. It is easy to imagine how the face of those young novices illuminated with astonishment and smiles. The Father then resumed the thread of the discourse in Italian and never grew irritated at the smiling reminders of his daughters; rather, he was the first to enjoy such distractions.

In the same way, when he went to hold some small lesson for the orphans — perhaps on his beloved astronomy — he accepted with holy cheerfulness their small mischiefs. He liked very much cheerful and extroverted temperaments, while dark and closed characters left him worried and perplexed.

That period remained famous above all for the essential solidity of his formation. He could have spoken not in Friulian, but in Arabic, and there would have appeared equally, with clear relief, the model of sister that he proposed with sweetness and firmness, as in the riddle of Samson.

The testimony of sister Maria Pia Bortolotti, who professed on 8 May 1881, suffices for us among all. Here are some significant passages:

« *When the mother mistress was infirm, Father Luigi took her place. He came frequently to the novitiate, now to explain the sacred rules to us, now to hold conferences for us. He was then always ready to listen to us at any hour of the day and, when he knew the necessities of anyone, he accomplished any sacrifice to comfort her.*

He punished every delay with severity, even if legitimate. Once when he was in the novitiate for the conference, a novice arrived some minutes after the signal because occupied in something else. What did the good Father do? He reproached her harshly and commanded her to remain in the middle of the hall until the lesson was finished.

Among the things that he mostly transmitted in the instructions, there was the way of behaving in the choir. Therefore he said: The novices must stay composed, with the person upright, the hands joined and the eyes low to dispose themselves always better to recollection. When you are in the choir — he said — *think before whom you find yourselves...* »

In the sequel he passed to recommend the exact observance even of the most minute rules, citing phrases from the Holy Scripture and from the saints.

Sister Pia provides us with a list of the maxims that recurred most frequently upon his lips. Among these, naturally, there was his motto: « *To Do, To Suffer, To Keep Silent*. » But above all emerged that « *tremendous* » monition — Bortolotti underlined — that « *tremendous Redde rationem* » (namely, render account of your administration).

It was a reminder of the evangelical parable in which the master asks the factor for an account of his management.

Father Luigi must have deeply shaken those youthful souls with very vibrant reminders to commitment and to responsibility before God if, at half a century of distance, there resounded with the same vigor that « *tremendous Redde rationem*. »

Sister Pia — and certainly the others together with her — perceived very well the inspiring motive of so much firmness, since she relates of the Father:

« *He added then that the novices can be compared to tender small plants. As they form themselves when young, so they will grow old. And he brought to us as an example the life of the saints, especially of Saint John Berchmans, who did always well every thing.*»

Scalpel or plow as one may wish to call it, Father Luigi used them especially to cultivate humility. « *If anyone* — sister Pia continues — *through inadvertence or other, had caused displeasure to a sister, he wished that pardon be asked immediately or at any rate before going to bed: Knee to the ground, my daughters — he said — knee to the ground: to humiliate oneself always. Thus one never errs.*

When some shortcoming was committed, especially if public, he wished that immediately penance be asked for it, both so as not to give it won to the devil, and to give glory to God: an end — as he said — *that the sisters must always seek in their actions.*»

And the sister seems almost to please herself in relating episodes of humiliation that struck precisely her:

« *One day, passing from the stairs to the corridor, I met four professed sisters with the mother superior, while the Father was there, near the door. I did not know to whom to*

address my greeting first. I did it to the Father. Meanwhile the sisters passed beyond. But he looked at me with a severe eye. Then he called back those mothers and made me prostrate to kiss their feet. The superior wished that I should kiss also those of the Father, but he commanded me to kiss the earth. »

Here also there is the explanation:

« *He wished that the novices respect the professed sisters as so many queens, they being* — he said — *spouses of the immaculate Lamb, of the King of kings.* »

Another time she went to the Father to ask him to have her shoes repaired, but she forgot to say:

« *For charity*. »

« *The Father let me speak; then he addressed a harsh reproach to me and without adding anything else he dismissed me. The following day he had me called and asked me if I had been touchy and how I had welcomed the reproach, adding: See, my daughter, a Sister of Providence must always ask what is necessary for her with a spirit of true humility, and ask it for charity, remaining then indifferent whether it be granted or not to her.* »

Indeed, the founder organized for her a lesson in the style of Saint Philip Neri:

« *One day, while the door of the study of the Father was ajar, I passed through the corridor and he invited me to enter. Without saying a word — two priests were also present — he offered me a small cup of black coffee. Those two priests stood to see how it would end. After I had taken the coffee, the Father began to make fun of me, saying that I was greedy and a lover of sweet things, and sent me away all ashamed.* »

The narration of Bortolotti proceeds on the thread of dear and edifying memories, marked by joy. But probably more than one will have felt the robust bite of the curb. The fact is that Father Luigi aimed, with his usual tension to the essential, to build a sister with very precise features. Sister Pia affirms it still:

« *A novice of the Sisters of Providence — he used to say — must seek to acquire a true spirit of sacrifice, a continual renunciation of her own will, a profound humility and a perfect detachment from every created thing.* »

His paternal severity in the formation of the novices of every time returns in many small episodes, preserved in the tradition of the sisters.

For example, to one of them who had let slip an incivility, the Father made a large tongue of red cloth hang from her neck and pretended that she remain on her knees, so arranged, during all the time of the dinner, precisely in the middle of the refectory.

Another, who with her twenty years ran too much through the stairs, was tied for a bit to the handrail so that she remain there, before everyone, to do penance.

In 1858 Stellina Gaspardis entered among the sisters, who will take the name of sister Teresa Serafina and from 1872 to 1915 will be superior in various houses and finally also general assistant. But to become the excellent religious woman that she was, the Father made her try every sort of discipline. He made her wait three years before admitting her

to the reception of the habit. The motive? She was very gifted and she was aware of it; her embroideries remained famous. It was necessary therefore to form her with vigor so that she impregnate herself with humility. And since she was "*small star*" in name and in face, every time he ran into her, the Father told her brusquely: « *Down with those eyes!*»

And she was blessed for having let herself be modeled. Of such anecdotes there are very many.

An echo of this strong education returns in a poem recited for the fiftieth anniversary of religious life of sister Giacinta De Monte, who entered as a novice in 1846. Upon the mouth of Saint Martha these words are placed:

« *However rigorous was the time of the trial, since the fervent Father passed every boundary*. »

The authoress of this poem was probably sister Pia Valle of the Sacred Heart [7], skilled in composing similar small verses. Having entered as an aspirant in 1877, she could provide a direct testimony of those demanding novitiates that went beyond any limit. However she herself recalled that the founder, in his personal relationships with the young sisters, was sweet and understanding « *more than a father* ».

Once, she having need of pens for writing, went to ask them from the Father, who promised them to her but then forgot about them. A week later she returned to ask them and Father Luigi, to punish himself for the forgetfulness, made her kneel before him and forced her, by virtue of holy obedience, to repeat to him three times:

« *Liar! No one is like you: good only in words, but in deeds no*. »

She recalled still how the Father used to say to her and to the religious women:

« *My daughter, you are my mistress because spouse of Jesus; and I your servant, because servant of him*. »

The novitiate, for the Father, had to be fatiguing and painful; the strong education that he imparted therein had to become a spiritual investment capable of giving fruit for all life.

When then the professed sisters began their apostolic activity, the method changed. With fine and delicate psychological intuition, Father Luigi felt that to the "*combatants*" two things were necessary: to follow them always, one by one, and to comfort them constantly, knowing to how many trials they were exposed. The firmness or the severity of the training yielded completely the place to a diffused goodness. A fascinating proof of it is his epistolary.

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[7] Valle Emma (Sister Maria Pia of the Sacred Heart) was born in Udine on December 1, 1855, entered the congregation on March 19, 1877, took the habit on May 3, 1878, professed on September 24, 1880, and died in Udine on December 12, 1915. For information on her, see A.L.S., ms. M. Pia Valle, pp. 12. The episode in which Sister Pia was the protagonist recalls the novitiate of Father Luigi in humility.

The Epistolary of Father Luigi

« *The copious epistolary correspondence — Tinti writes — which Father Luigi kept in the long period of his life, unfortunately went in large part lost.* »

However, in the eighteenth appendix of his biography, he relates the complete or partial text of one hundred and seventeen letters, of which one hundred and five are addressed to the sisters. To these latter ones it is necessary to add three, reproduced by Tinti in the course of the narration, and another seven which result still unpublished. All the letters are concentrated in the decade that goes from 1873 to 1883. But, among the one hundred and fifteen sent to the religious women, about seventy were written from 1880 onward. Since among these at least five or more are addressed to a single sister — and Father Luigi certainly did not make preferences — it can be reasonably presumed that the letters would amount to several hundreds, if they had been all preserved to us.

For the founder, writing to his spiritual daughters was at the same time a need of the heart, a duty of office as an attentive director — especially toward the superiors of the various houses — and above all an exquisite means of apostolate to comfort and revive souls. This apostolate intensified precisely in the last three years, especially toward the farthest sisters, since by then it would have resulted too burdensome and almost impossible for him to visit them in person.

Let no one expect, however, long letters from Father Luigi. He was not at all wordy and least of all rhetorical. It was mostly a question of short and lean writings, as was typical of his personal style; but they were always living and precise communications, furthermore always overflowing with a profound fatherhood.

And let no one expect from him those letters long meditated and built with wisdom, not rare in the lives of the saints, which seem to transform themselves at times into small treatises of spiritual theology. The Father did not have the slightest pretension to act as a doctor. Rather, he pleased himself in appearing simple and little educated, even more than he really was. We could even say that he played the part of a man of little account, if we did not know how authentic his humility was. A master of spirit, even if he does not intentionally transform his epistolary into an instrument of formation, is often led to relate and repeat in his letters his sermons or spiritual instructions.

Father Luigi, instead, did not. A few lines were enough for him to awaken in the heart of the readers the teachings of old times. Therefore the spiritual reminders, scattered in his correspondence, are nothing but rapid brushstrokes or at times luminous patches. However, for the sisters they were more than sufficient to feel the strength of soul of the holy founder vibrate.

When did Father Luigi write?

Apart from the correspondence with the superiors, to answer their queries or to give the necessary directives in the various circumstances, he used to write to them to keep them informed, together with the other sisters, on the progress of the congregation and especially to ask for prayers with the aim of knowing the will of God in the difficulties or problems that arose from time to time.

But there were occasions in which writing became almost a ritual.

For example, when a sister or a benefactor died. His very vivid devotion toward the deceased did not allow him the slightest delay: he placed himself at the desk, sometimes as soon as he returned from the deathbed, gave news of it and recommended the prayers of suffrage. Sometimes he limited himself to a synthetic postcard, but more often he paused in a moved funeral memory, always joining to it a thought of monition and of consolation.

It was furthermore very dear to him to take advantage of the festive occurrence of the name-day to offer wishes enriched by spiritual teachings.

What to say then of Christmas and Easter? For the most part he wrote to his daughters before receiving their wishes. Especially at Christmas, since he felt a joy of Franciscan style in contemplating the Word of God made baby in the cave of Bethlehem.

This epistolary apostolate Father Luigi continued precisely until the end. In fact, this last letter of his dates back to 23 December 1883, in which some of the cited motives return together:

« *Having communicated to you with the postcard of correspondence the decease of our good sister Maria Orsola (this was Sister Orsola Drigo, who died on December 18, 1883.), without adding other news, I do not know why you interpreted it as if I could have something bad against you. No, because I acted in the same way, out of haste, with the other sisters. Do not believe therefore that you have offended me with some involuntary shortcoming and that I am angry with you.*

No, no: I desire only to see always more that you follow your divine spouse Jesus on the path of holy humility.

Meditating in these holy days upon all the acts of humility of your divine spouse, yes, enamor yourself of this beautiful virtue, foundation of Christian perfection, and your way of treating everyone, even subordinates, will be always humble, sweet and respectful. Here is what lies close to my heart to have you always more as my dear daughter.

Our beloved father Fantoni for some time has almost lost all his strengths and for days has been in bed. Pray, pray for this great benefactor of yours, who considered you all as his beloved daughters and who, as an affectionate father, never failed to help you in every necessity.

I leave you all, with our most cordial wishes for the Holy Festivities and the new year, in the Most Sacred Hearts. »

« *This was* — Tinti notes — *the last most precious letter written by Father Luigi Scrosoppi.* » Last lesson of his life: humility.

The Blessing Strips

As a crowning of this untiring apostolate of the Father, we want to remember a pleasant habit of his.

When he wrote to a superior, he used to insert at times in the letter a small note for each sister of that community. They were nothing but strips of paper with a few lines, in which he knew how to find for everyone, thanks to his happy psychological intuition, the suitable small word, accompanied by his benediction.

He did it because he felt himself, in his paternal affection, the need for a direct, although very brief, colloquy. But he did it above all for his wise pedagogical method, which gave the right and realistic importance to the personal relationship face to face. In this way, each sister felt remembered and considered individually; and the Father, although being so attentive to community life, demonstrated his delicate respect for the value of the single person.

He did not content himself, however, with those small notes sent in a common envelope. He encouraged, rather he asked, that each sister write directly to him, and he hastened to answer. In this he acted even against the system of the era, when the right to be the sole medium of correspondence was attributed to the superiors, which had to be delivered open so that the superior could control the letters in arrival and in departure.

« *I expect from you two lines* — he wrote on 9 April 1879 to sister Filomena Suoch — *that may not be seen by anyone, as also here by no one they will be seen. I want to see your open heart...* »

Here, however, we want only to underline a profoundly human and significant gesture of the sisters.

Whether it was a question of small notes or of letters, they used to cut out from the writings of the Father the last lines, those in which he gave them the benediction and entrusted them to the Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus, of Mary and of Saint Joseph. Yes, also of Saint Joseph, because his heart had pulsed in unison with those of the Lord and of the Holy Virgin.

They cut out therefore those lines and preserved them with an almost religious jealousy. At the mere re-reading or touching them, they found comfort and encouragement in their mission, often difficult, or in the sufferings of soul that tormented them.

At almost a century of distance, there remained to us still some of these fragments which have assumed almost the value of relics.

We do not believe we exaggerate by saying that the sacral preservation of those small strips is the most immediate, strongest and most touching proof of the faith of the sisters in the sanctity of their founder, as well as of the affection they nourished for him.

In comparison, even the most extensive and eloquent testimonies grow pale.

Chapter 12

LAST DETACHMENTS AND LAST FAREWELLS (1881-1883)

The Death of Three Dearest Friends

« *Father Luigi* — Tinti writes — *had progressively lost his dearest friends and his most valid benefactors. This is the inevitable fate of those few who, having reached advanced age on this earth of exile, turning their thoughts to past times, see fallen to the right and to the left, as on a battlefield, relatives, friends and acquaintances; and so it happened to our venerated founder.* »

Among those who left him in the last three years, the most reverend priest Tommaso Turchetti from Tricesimo, Mr. Giovanni Feruglio from Feletto and, finally, the sweet Father Francesco Fantoni deserve a particular remembrance.

Father Tommaso Turchetti died on 28 September 1881. Two days later, Father Luigi wrote to sister Luigia Dario, superior at Primiero:

« *With the greatest displeasure I communicate to you the death of the most reverend priest Tommaso Turchetti, administrator of the goods of the archbishopric, my great and faithful friend and very interested in your congregation. He died the day before yesterday after thirty days of an illness degenerated into typhus. Pray and make others pray for this worthy person.* »

Father Tommaso, together with his brother Father Francesco, a professor in the seminary, was one of the most beautiful figures of the Udinese clergy of the nineteenth century. It has been written of him that, endowed with a most agile mind and an extraordinary ability in business, he was appointed bursar of the seminary in 1840, when he was still a seminarians. He maintained that office until 1853, when the Austrian police demanded his removal because of the patriotism demonstrated in 1848. When in 1856 Monsignor Casasola became bishop of Concordia, he took him with himself as administrator of the bishop's table; he wanted him then with the same office in Udine, from 1863 until his death. He was a diligent and precise administrator, a counselor and a canon universally esteemed by the clergy of Concordia and of Udine, as well as an able defender of the ecclesiastical patrimony against the laws of expropriation, which after 1866 had reduced it to shreds. To these administrative qualities he joined a very high sacerdotal spirit, unshakeable in principles and profoundly faithful to the pope. He lived a life rich in every virtue, distinguishing himself above all for an ardent love toward God. In his last hours, after having received the sacraments with great devotion from Father Giuliano Casasola, secretary of his uncle the archbishop, he wished that the Passion of Christ be read to him, to unite his own death to that of the Lord whom he had so much loved. He was sixty-three years old.

From the same letter of Father Luigi it is understood that he was indebted toward him for some counsel concerning the interests of the Sisters of Providence. But what made

him a great friend of his was without doubt the profound spiritual harmony, up to the common and ardent devotion toward Jesus crucified.

Mr. Giovanni Feruglio, of the Tinìn family from Feletto Umberto, died on 15 August 1882 in Staranzano, near Monfalcone. From his two marriages he had had three priest sons: Monsignor Antonio, future bishop of Vicenza, Father Stefano and Monsignor Domenico.

How close the bonds of Giovanni with Father Scrosoppi were emerges clearly from the fact that all three sons had almost consecrated themselves to the service of Father Luigi; in fact, Monsignor Antonio was then substitute director of the House of the *derelitte* and Father Stefano performed the office of confessor in the same house, until the death that struck him on 11 July 1885.

How profound the religious sentiment of Giovanni was is testified to us by the registers of his native parish of Feletto, where the annotation of the decease concludes with these words in Latin:

« *His memory will be blessed for his piety, charity and faith.* »

But the testimony becomes still more intense under the pen of Father Luigi, who on 16 August 1882 gave the sad announcement of his death in these terms:

« *Most Reverend Mother, Mr. Giovanni Feruglio, father of Monsignor Antonio, died in Staranzano, near Monfalcone, struck in a few days by a respiratory infection. I can well say that he was among my dearest lay friends; he lived as a saint and died as a saint, assisted by his canon son and by all the family that was there. Behold how the Lord warns us to remain always ready for the departure toward eternity. Pray and make others pray for this benefactor of ours who now more than ever, seeing our necessities, will have compassion on us.* »

Father Luigi wrote the same day the following letter to Monsignor Antonio:

« *Dearest Friend,*

only the Lord knows how much surprise and how much sorrow your telegram has caused me; I have offered to God the sacrifice of the dearest friend I had.

Let us comfort ourselves, dear brother in the Lord, thinking that our dear mother Mary Most Holy wanted him with herself on the glorious day of her Assumption, to make him participate in that glory which the angels and all the saints render to her up there, as a reward for the great devotion he bore to her.

I am near you in sorrow if, together with your beloved brothers, you weep for so great a loss, but raise your gaze to Heaven and you will have the comfort of seeing him up there while he gives you his holy benediction.

Salute for me indistinctly all the family members and offer them my condolences. I have not failed to pray and to make others pray for the beloved deceased.

For your information, I communicate to you that your father, for some time, had entrusted to me his sealed will; when you come here, I shall present it to the royal magistrate's court, but I warn you that it will be necessary to present at the same time also the death certificate of the testator. »

As happens between true friends, there was therefore between them not only a communion of affections and of ideals, but also the most total confidence in the practical questions of life.

« *There remained to him still* — Tinti writes — *the most worthy priest Francesco Fantoni, with whom he lived in a fraternal friendship; therefore he felt an unspeakable sorrow when, infirm himself, in December of 1883 he went to visit his dying friend.*

In the last visit that Father Luigi made to Fantoni, the latter, seeing him so suffering, said to him: Go, my friend, and get into bed, because you are worse than me. »

Born in 1802 from a branch of the homonymous family of Gemona that had moved to San Vito al Tagliamento, he had arrived in Udine still a child. During the years of the seminary he gave excellent proofs of intellect, diligence and good conduct, so much so that, ordained priest in 1826, he was confirmed as professor until 1853. For a certain period he was also responsible for the seminarians— namely, prefect of the clerics —, charged with reporting to the bishop on the candidates to orders; scrupulous and at the same time sensitive, he hesitated until the day of the ordination, 28 July 1839, before writing to the bishop his negative opinion on a seminarian. Monsignor Lodi removed the unfortunate youth in the best possible way, but removed also Fantoni from the office. We remember this episode because to it is erroneously attributed, by an anonymous report, the removal of Fantoni from the seminary. We know, instead, that Fantoni remained there as professor for another fourteen years and that his removal was imposed by Marshal Radetzky, when he purged the priests who had shown themselves too fervent patriots in 1848. It appears that Fantoni was calumniated by someone whom he then knew and forgave; « *almost as if his mouth — Blasich writes* [(1)] *— were closed by a heavy stone, it never happened that he let the name of the guilty party escape.* » It is licit to suppose that that calumniator then appeared, after 1866, as a most pure patriot; these are things that happen!

Fantoni was persecuted by the Austrian police together with De Apollonia, Liccaro and Tommaso Turchetti. He was appointed then librarian of the archbishopric and shortly after, in 1855, chaplain of the Dimesse sisters, offices which he maintained until death. In 1869 he had succeeded Benedetti as inspector of the Kindergarten of Charity and, from 1854, he had been for twenty-five years vice-director of the House of the *derelitte*.

« *That easy and witty word which came out spontaneous and cheerful from daily relationships* — Blasich continues — *he made become living and eloquent on the pulpit and from the chair of truth; and although nature had not granted him that sonority of voice which unfortunately pleases so much but which should not be preferred, upon hearing him speak of Jesus Christ and of His mysteries, of Mary and of her greatness, of man and of his destinies, one was forced to repeat: behold the true Catholic preacher. For this reason his popular missions, the spiritual exercises for the young seminarians and for the religious women, and the Marian month were his favorite gymnasium; for this many parishes of our and of other dioceses desired him and called him; wherever he could, he ran willingly, without ever refusing for love of quiet or for fear of excessive*

[1] F. BLASICH, Obituary of the priest Francesco Fantoni of Udine, in Il Cittadino Italiano (last year 1883); Ecclesiastical Chronological Notes, manuscript, pp. 152-153

labor; when he was not occupied elsewhere, he willingly assumed the commitment of the Sunday preaching in the church of the Philippine fathers. They loved him so much more because the great commitment was pleasing to him, and he was of a frank and open nature, pleasant in conversation, affable in relationships, able in difficulties and patient in contrarieties.

Knowing perfectly the new times that had supervened, he was ready to participate, as much as was possible for him, in those works required by social change; therefore we see him among the first to offer his name and his offering to the Pious Work of Catholic Congresses, to the O'Connell League and to the Peter's pence; when in the diocese there was founded, a few years ago, the Pious Work of Priests, he, not looking at the bureaucratic formalities of that primitive statute but only at the charity which is the purpose of it, constituted himself a founding member together with the Scrosoppi brothers, paying the necessary capital sum. »

For several years he had become almost blind, so much so that on 20 March 1878 he had been granted the special dispensation — namely, the indult — to celebrate the votive Mass of the Madonna. However he preserved until the last hours of life his usual, prompt and acute intelligence.

Father Francesco Fantoni died on 20 December 1883 at five o'clock in the morning.

« *Rich in virtues and in merits* — Blasich writes still — *after a few days of illness, sustained by all the comforts of religion, he passed to eternal rest. At the first announcement of the sad news, although not unexpected, there wept for the departure of this priest, true pearl of the Friulian clergy, so many pious souls, so many religious women whom he assisted for years, the children of the Kindergarten of the Immaculate which he directed since 1869, the numerous girls entrusted to the care of the Sisters of Providence, the city clergy of whom he was a loved master, and whoever knew how to appreciate wisdom, true science and solid virtue.* »

On the morning of 31 December the funerals were celebrated in the church of the Carmine. Although Fantoni had not held offices of public resonance, all Udine moved to render him honor. At the obsequies there participated the most reverend metropolitan chapter, the professors and the seminarians of the archbishopric, the college of urban clergy, the Institute of the *derelitte*, the children of the Kindergarten, the Tomadini Orphanage, the Patronage of Holy Spirit and many other priests of the city. The coffin was covered by many wreaths of fresh flowers and carried by four Seminarians; an immense number of torches, sent by citizens of every class, accompanied the funeral.

We have spoken at length of Father Fantoni because he deserves it and because Father Luigi would say to us: « *More, more.* » It was a cold and windy day. Nothing could have prevented the Father from following the coffin of his friend, yet he was not there. For three days he was by then forced to bed. His friend acted as his pioneer — namely, as a guide who opens the way — toward Paradise.

A Strange Malaise and a Heroic Vow

Father Luigi was the longest-lived among the members of his family. His mother died at 74 years of age, his father at 75, his half-brother Father Carlo — who yet seemed the healthiest — at 68, and Father Giovanni Battista at 76. He, instead, reached seventy-nine and a half years of age.

During his life — as has already been said — he did not suffer from particular illnesses, nor were the ailments of old age of great import. He was slightly bent and stiffened in his joints; his sight had weakened to the point that he always wore spectacles; he suffered from that troublesome skin rash and from some rare and slight fever.

Rather, in the course of 1881 he seemed to regain vigor. He himself, writing to the superior of Primiero on 25 November, related that everyone paid him compliments because he appeared rejuvenated.

However, in 1882 he was struck by a singular malaise. We have news of it from a letter of his of 4 August addressed to a superior:

« *I reply* — he writes — *to your most esteemed and dearest letter of the 31st past with a very effective plaster inside for calming the respiratory difficulties to which I am subject almost every week, especially on Saturdays.* »

Clearly there does not exist a pathology that is necessarily linked to the day of Saturday. How can one therefore interpret this singular reference?

It is difficult not to discern therein a completely personal phenomenon, probably of a psychological and spiritual nature.

In Christian devotion Saturday is the day dedicated to the Madonna; and it is not necessary to repeat how devoted he was to the Holy Virgin, especially under her title of Our Lady of Sorrows.

We do not believe at all that Father Luigi asked the Madonna to be associated with her with particular sufferings on the day sacred to her: if he had done so, he would not have sought remedies for those pains. We believe rather that behind that malaise a painful interior trial was hidden. Moreover, we shall see that until his very deathbed he was tormented by inexpressible anguishes of the spirit.

There is no reason to wonder. Did not the earthly life itself of the Savior conclude perhaps with the mortal sadness of the Garden of Olives and with the cry from the height of the cross: « *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* »

Having arrived at the term of his own existence, Father Scrosoppi could not but submit to a rigorous examination the entire course of his life: and perhaps he carried out that examination especially on Saturdays, at the feet of the heavenly Mother.

There fell back upon him then that « *tremendous Redde rationem* » — namely, the rendering account of one's own administration — with which — as sister Maria Pia Bortolotti recalled — precisely in that period he shook to the depths the souls of the novices.

It fell back upon him. And, in his profound humility, the awareness of his own frailty almost took his breath away. A trace of it is found in his letters. On 20 February 1882 he wrote to the superior of Primiero:

« *I then throw myself at your feet and ask pardon for every displeasure that I may have given you, and for not having done all that was my duty for your sanctification, praying you to recommend me to the Lord so that I may finally live as a good priest.* »

To this crushing sense of his own unworthiness there must have joined a devastating aridity in prayer, since on 22 December 1882 he wrote to a superior:

« *May your prayers be addressed to the divine Spouse to ask Him that I may love Him finally as is my sacred duty, and that He may obtain for me the gift of holy prayer.* »

It fell back upon him. And while there scrolled in his memory the long line of the sisters whom divine Providence had entrusted to his guidance, he felt his heart tighten by the fear that even a single one of them might not reach eternal salvation. That this was the constant desire and preoccupation of his soul is confirmed to us by the unanimous voice of the sisters of the era. They, rather, remember a heroic vow of his, expressed probably during his conferences: he had offered himself to God for a Purgatory that should last until the end of the world, assuming upon himself all the shortcomings of his spiritual daughters, on condition that none of them should be lost. A vow of this type is found in the life of some saints, beginning perhaps with the similar one of Saint Paul:

« *I even desire to be separated from Christ for my brothers.* »

The Foreseen Death

In the course of 1883 Father Luigi accused some brief illnesses.

In a letter of 26 April, Mr. Niccolò Prodomo from Rovigno congratulates him on his physical recovery. Some small problem must have manifested itself also toward the end of August. He himself hints in a letter of his of 11 December to another malaise. It seems then that a fainting spell struck him on the morning of 23 December; but he did not give importance to it because, on the same day, perhaps so as not to alarm anyone, he wrote that he was well. However, these were all signs of a near end — namely, of a sunset —, which did not slow down however his usual activity, but rather increased it.

« *As if he had* — Tinti writes — *a presentiment of his imminent end, there increased in him from day to day the attention for the beloved congregation of the sisters. Father Luigi, although an octogenarian, did not avoid repeated journeys to Portogruaro, San Vito, Orzano and Cormons and everywhere he exhorted the sisters to a total sacrifice of themselves, to the precise observance of the rules, to love always more their heavenly Spouse, to maintain themselves poor always and in everything, but rich and generous in the external cult of their churches and chapels; to understand and relieve with maternal affection the poor sick; and finally to make themselves saints, and great saints, to ascend then to a high degree of glory in blessed Paradise.* »

« *The excellent sisters — Tinti continues — guarded jealously in their heart these precious exhortations of the father founder and at the same time feared for his life, it seeming also to them that those holy reminders heard from him very many times, and now recommended in an extraordinary way, were like the act of the last will of the Father who was about to leave his most beloved daughters.* »

The founder did not feel he had the strengths to visit one last time the houses of the region of Trento or the one recently opened in Rovigno. But in those of easier access he wished still to transmit his holy teachings in that exceptional way.

We know that he was in Cormons on 14 June and on the 18th in San Vito, but he had to return thither in the month of November. And especially in Cormons he left a profound impression.

Tinti writes:

« *In fact, a worthy sister relates that, shortly before his last illness, having gone to visit the generalate house and the novitiate in Cormons, he spoke to his daughters with sentiments so tender that all burst into a flood of tears. He left them the most solemn recommendations, said that they would see each other again in Paradise and, much moved in taking his leave, imparted to them his paternal benediction.* »

The superior general certainly came to Udine a few days before Christmas to offer to the venerated founder her wishes and those of the entire congregation. It is to that circumstance that what the concierge sister Filomena Angeli testified is to be linked:

« *About three months before his death the superior entered one morning into the study of the Father together with me. He immediately rises and with an unusual cheerfulness comes to meet us saying: Mother, mother, soon we shall leave each other. The mother, to whom such a discourse did not please at all, completely displeased and grieved replied: Ah, I would truly not wish that that Saint Philip of yours should play one of his tricks! And the Father: Yes, yes, mother, he has been here to warn me that soon I shall die!* »

This « *has been here* » is not to be understood, we believe, as a visible manifestation of Saint Philip Neri to his most faithful son. The fact is that Father Luigi kept in his room a small bust with a relic of the saint, to which tradition attributed certain premonitory signs of an imminent death. And Father Luigi believed he had perceived himself also some mysterious noises or signals coming from it.

How the Father Fell Ill

Precisely at this point a small misunderstanding emerges which led Monsignor Tinti himself into error.

Sister Giacinta De Monte, in a deposition of hers, had declared to him that Father Luigi « *two days before Christmas 1883, while he was in church, was seized by a sort of fainting spell, followed by a strong fever which never left him in the three months and six days that he still lived.* »

In reality, the testimony of the sister is little precise. The three months and six days run exactly from 28 December 1883 to 3 April 1884, the day on which Father Scrosoppi died. That brief fainting spell of the morning of 23 December constituted an episode apart, whereas in the notes of Tinti it ended up by being confused with the beginning of the illness proper. Since however he had in his hands the already cited letter of that same day, he believed he could resolve the question by placing the falling ill of the Father on the following day, namely Christmas Eve.

In truth, Tinti himself signals elsewhere that the onset of that fever did not force him immediately to bed, since he « *with heroic courage — he writes — continued in his laborious and penitent method of life, with immense pain of the sisters who for some time had been aware of the physical sufferings of their beloved Father.* »

However, when the biography appeared, the sisters noticed the error and provided to repair it.

It is certainly to this that the minute account of the last days of Father Luigi before he was forced to bed is due. We wished to underline this small error because from it there stands out once again the great care of the sisters of the era for the precision and objectivity of every information concerning the founder.

Here therefore is the account.

« *It was Christmas Eve of 1883. There was a great labor in the kitchen, both for the cleaning and for preparing something special, even in poverty, which might distinguish from the others a feast so solemn.*

Mother Vincenza Corradini, assigned to the pantry, foresaw that she would not succeed in doing everything. The good Father, having interested himself during the morning at what point the labor was, heard himself answered with frankness that she would not make it in time to cut and prepare the almond nougat destined for the girls, to be distributed that very evening. What does the Father do? Although he was very occupied, he leaves every thing, asks for a knife and solicitous sets himself to the work, which he does not abandon until he has accomplished it entirely. For some time the good Father felt a general malaise, which he hoped to overcome by his own strength of will; therefore his daily activity proceeded as always. He was struck by that evil which, shortly thereafter, would have conducted him to the grave, but as if it were nothing, accustomed as he was to sacrifice, he wished to win the illness with courage and with the contempt of himself. It was charity that pushed him, as in this circumstance, to go to the help of a sister without minding himself minimally.

On the 26th day, after the benediction, the Father held a conference for the religious women; it was the last. He spoke of the happiness of the religious vocation, of the necessity of the observance of the vows and of the rules, of reciprocal charity and of mortification, support of the whole spiritual edifice without which every good will collapses easily. He spoke with so much fervor that he made all those present weep. It was the last time and perhaps the good Father foresaw it; he sought therefore to make his words penetrate into the heart of his daughters, so that they might live as he desired and as he had shown with his excellent examples.

On the 27th day he repaired for the last time to visit his intimate friend and dying collaborator, Father Fantoni. The latter, seeing his suffering aspect, said to him:

Go, my friend, go and get into bed because you are worse than me.

In leaving each other they exchanged the kiss of peace. »

Here the account proceeds with a touch of imagination, attributing to that kiss a mortal contagion: « *indisposed as he was — one reads — he absorbed all the evil.* »

« *The day after, 28 December, he distributed as always communion to the community, but he succeeded in pronouncing the words of the rite only with extreme difficulty. The mother vicar, Mother Strazzolini, noticed it and, having immediately approached Mother Osanna, commanded her that, the Mass being finished, she repair immediately to the Father because he was certainly ill. In fact, after the celebration, Mother Osanna went immediately to him and found him just knelt down to make his customary thanksgiving of about half an hour, all immersed in God. She called him and prayed him to listen to her a moment. Usually, before the thanksgiving was concluded, one could call him for a long time without his answering immediately. That day instead he followed her into his room like a small lamb and asked her what she wished. "Ah, Father* — the sister said — *you are very ill and you say nothing!" How did you notice? — asked the Father. And she:*

This morning, when you distributed communion, you made so much difficulty in pronouncing the words. I pray you, make me see your tongue.

It was in a most wretched condition, swollen and large, and his lips also began to swell. The sister prayed him to get immediately into bed; he consented and sent to tell Mother Giacinta, the head cook, that for that day instead of coffee she should bring him a hot broth. This being all executed, the sister went to the mother vicar to report the event and to tell her that a medical visit was urgent. [2]

The physician having arrived and having made an accurate visit, declared the gravity of the situation and made him despoil himself of his corset, of the hair shirt belt and also of his long and wide scapular of white wool. »

It was the morning of a Friday, the day of the feast of the Holy Innocents.

The authoress of the account is sister Osanna Tisot, who was the personal nurse of the Father in his three months of illness.

She had been recalled from Portogruaro to assist a benefactor gravely ill. The founder used still, at that time, to make the sisters practice the assistance of the sick at domicile.

When that lady died, sister Osanna presented herself to the Father and asked him if she could return to Portogruaro.

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[2] Dr. Gabriele Mander (1846-1907), from Udine, brother of four priests, was a physician by vocation: commitment, professional ability, complete availability to the sick, charity for the poor. (See G. SIMEONI, Caterina Mander, a soul and a benefactor not to be forgotten, Udine 1974, p. 10).

« *No, no — he answered her — you must now assist me. If you had not been here, I should have had to send to fetch you.* »

If the Tisot embroidered a bit with her own imagination by attributing the fault of the evil to the embrace with the dying Father Fantoni, perhaps she was not mistaken entirely. The illness was already present and only the spirit of mortification and of patience still held the father founder on his feet. But the sight of his fraternal friend almost in agony caused him without doubt a shock which gave him the final blow.

And Father Luigi will not rise from bed anymore.

Chapter 13

« SEE YOU IN PARADISE »

The Illness of the Father

We rely now almost entirely upon Tinti to narrate the path of suffering — namely, the Calvary — of those three months of pain.

« *In the first days of the illness he insisted on having permission from the physician to rise, saying to him: — Oh, see doctor, that I must occupy myself with urgent affairs, it is truly necessary that I leave the bed, I must not stay here to idle away for this small indisposition. But at the refusal of the physician and with the worsening of the illness, the venerated Father quieted down and abandoned himself entirely to divine Providence, resigned to a long or short illness, to recovery or to death, since his sole purpose was to do the holy and blessed will of God!* »

« *As soon as the archbishop Casasola had knowledge of the infirmity of the venerated Father Luigi, toward whom he nourished an affection derived from the highest esteem, he immediately made someone write to the apostolic missionary Father Luigi Costantini so that he might free himself from any commitment already assumed and run to assist the sick Father, since he believed that in such a circumstance that place, and no other, was his. The priest Costantini received the letter at Barcis, a mountain parish of the diocese of Concordia where he was for a sacred mission; without losing time, like a most loving son, he was immediately at the bedside of the beloved Father, whom he assisted day and night for three long months, without ever taking off his clothes to rest, sleeping only a few and interrupted hours upon a mattress in the same room of the sick man.*

It is true that Costantini possessed a most robust physical and moral temper, but it is just as true that in this worthy priest the love for Father Luigi remained strong and constant until sacrifice. Father Luigi, at his arrival, felt heartened and, having called to himself Mr. Cristoforo, father of the missionary, made him promise that his son would not abandon him anymore, as in fact happened. »

Father Costantini — we add — was requested with insistence in that period from various parts, above all for the preaching of the Lent of 1884; for example from Valdobbiadene, for which reason the bishop of Padua himself interposed personally with the archbishop of Udine. But Monsignor Casasola reiterated the negative answer that had already been given for other parishes.

« *Father Scrosoppi — Monsignor Casasola writes on 22 February 1884 — avails himself of the work of two priests very close to him; one of these is Costantini. He availed himself of him when he was in health and had need of him, so much more he has need of him now that he is almost dying... How could I remove from the side of a venerated old man of eighty years, and so meritorious, a priest of his total confidence?* »

« *The most reverend superior general Maria Cecilia also ran in haste from Cormons to the bed of the venerated founder who, having noticed her profound sadness, said to her: Courage, my mother, look at the state in which I find myself, observe my hands, I seem a leper.* »

The superior expressing her own sorrow to him, he resumed:

« *What do you wish? Thus it pleased our good Father who is in heaven, and thus it must please us also. Oh, yes, yes! He did well, he did well to make me fall ill, and we must be content also, is it not true, my mother? Who can know how much I must remain here still in bed, with so many businesses of which I should occupy myself? But let the will of God be fulfilled!*

In the meantime the illness progressed; it was diagnosed by the physician as pemphigus, namely a set of blisters of the size of a hazelnut, full of serum, diffused in various parts of the body, a frequent consequence of an infectious fever. The prudent physician wished a consultation and therefore the immediate transfer of the sick man into a larger room and free of bookcases was ordered, since the physicians believed that this illness, very rare in adults, had been caused by the dust released from the many books that he kept in the room.

The priest Costantini, like a merciful nurse, transported in his arms the beloved patient into a spacious room, well aired and with southern exposure. Father Luigi, since always accustomed to hard mortifications even in his usual indispositions, could not give himself peace at the idea of having left his humble cell to be accommodated in a more comfortable and salutary room: he did not understand yet the gravity of the evil and, rather, by the natural instinct of survival, thought to recover in short and to return to his heavy occupations. »

Mother Giacinta adds a detail on this move into the reception room, more airy and sunny, which however did not bring him any benefit.

« *It can be said — she relates in a testimony of hers — that from that day the evil began to make itself more serious, until gradually a cerebral paralysis was added. Some symptom of this paralysis manifested itself one evening, still at the beginning of the illness. He was sitting on the bed, surrounded by Monsignor Feruglio and by Mother Giacinta. In the very middle of his discourse he fell silent suddenly and remained as if absent. Both called him asking him what he had. And he answered: — Nothing, truly nothing.* »

« *In spite of the strong pains, there never came out from his mouth a lament or a groan; rather, serenely he sought to quiet those who assisted him, saying: Oh, do not trouble yourselves for me, to what purpose is it to distress oneself? What God wishes goes always well, let us submit ourselves therefore with love to His divine dispositions, and so speaking, he smiled always with sweetness.* »

« *Several times the worthy priest Costantini, materializing that the illness would be long, proposed to the venerated Father to obtain the necessary authorization from the Holy See to celebrate in his room the holy Sacrifice of the altar, but the most humble Father opposed it, declaring himself unworthy of such a privilege, although listening*

daily to the holy Mass would have given him an immense comfort. He received frequently, after midnight, the holy communion and, when he was advised to receive it still more frequently, he answered: — You do not know the aridity of spirit that I experience since several weeks and you know not therefore in what state I find myself now. I also, at the bed of the sick, comforted them and sought to convince them to receive frequently the divine Sacrament, but, oh God! It is necessary to find oneself in the trials, because one thing is to speak and another is to act. God the Lord purified always more with those pains of the spirit the beautiful soul of Father Luigi, who nevertheless remained always calm, patient and loving with whoever approached his bed of pain. »

« *The physician had ordered that one should seek to sustain him frequently with some tonics, as the sole means to overcome that type of illness. But, having nausea for every food and reduced to lie immobile on the bed, having therefore to be spoon-fed, he accepted with difficulty some refreshment. Solicited with affection to take more of it, so much was the refusal that his stomach experienced from it that with supplicating eyes he repeated: Enough thus, I cannot anymore! When then he was asked if he wished to be raised a little from that uncomfortable position, he answered: Well, well, let them do what they believe, but first let us recite an Ave Maria to recommend ourselves to this loving Mother!* »

« *Grave and excruciating were the pains every time that one had to move or feed him, and it was only in prayer that he found the strength to bear them. — See — he said one day to a gentleman who looked full of pity at the suffering Father — see, my good friend, how we help each other in the strong pains; with prayer we fortify ourselves by recurring to Mary! When then the force of the evil oppressed him mostly, he exclaimed: — Yes, yes, my God, strike me, because I deserve it truly. Bonum mihi Domine quia humiliasti me. Yes, o Lord, I should deserve to be thrown into the deep of hell for my sins. Yes, my God, you are the Holy, you the Just, and I a miserable sinner. Oh! Mary, dear mother, come to our rescue, you who are our good mother, help us!* »

« *During his long dejection in bed, he was visited both by his most esteemed archbishop Andrea Casasola, and by Monsignor Sigismondo of the counts Brandolini-Rota, bishop of Ceneda, and by many other illustrious ecclesiastical and lay personalities, to comfort him and testify to him their esteem and their affection.* »

The meticulous Father Blasich notes the two visits in his *"Note cronologiche ecclesiastiche"*:

« *The day 23 (Saturday) February Monsignor Casasola goes, returning toward the first afternoon from the walk, to visit Father Luigi Scrosoppi of the Oratory, co-founder and director of the Sisters of Providence and of the annexed female orphanage.* »

And on 6 March he speaks of the bishop of Ceneda, who repaired to the seminary and to the Institute of Providence, holding in both places a short discourse; « *he visited also Father Luigi Scrosoppi, co-founder of the sisters and by now close to the end, who felt heartened by this unexpected visit.* »

« *With a delicate thought, the mother superior general* — Tinti proceeds — *made the vicars of the houses of Veneto, of Illiria, of Istria and of Tyrol come in turn, so that with*

their news they might comfort the heart of the good Father and receive from him the last and most precious benediction. He who writes these memories was twice witness of such moving acts, which leave an indelible impression in the soul of those present. What words of ardent affection, what precious counsels and wise reminders the resigned Father gave in those last days to the daughters of his heart! His bed of pain had become a chair from which the true science of the saints was learned. »

Sister Fedele Scrosoppi, then superior in Rovigno, ran twice to the bed of the Father; the first on 6 January and the second on 11 March. On this occasion she was accompanied by sister Matilde Osso.

« *I also* — sister Matilde relates — *had the fortune to see him during his last illness; I came purposely from Rovigno. The most reverend mother general told me to relate to the Father all the good that was done in our house of Rovigno. I then related to him how, in the past carnival, our festive oratory had been very frequented and about three hundred from among girls and young women had spent the festivities with us instead of in the theaters. The good Father wept for joy and, turning to the superior general, said: "I recommend to you that house." Every occasion was for him precious, even on his deathbed, to spur to good.* »

« *The serene greeting* — Tinti concludes — *that Father Luigi addressed to his visitors was: See you in Paradise!* »

The Last Sacraments

The attending physician advised that it would be appropriate to administer the holy Sacraments to the elderly patient, not because the end was imminent, but for the fear that a progressive paralysis might supervene capable of weakening his mental faculties. Father Luigi had as his ordinary confessor Monsignor Domenico Someda, vicar general of the archbishop, a man esteemed for piety and culture, who in his sacerdotal ministry had collaborated with the zealous work of the Philippine fathers in the church of Santa Maria Maddalena. From him the sick man welcomed with great gratitude the invitation to receive the holy Viaticum — namely, the last communion —, which was administered to him solemnly by the priest Luigi Costantini.

After the ritual prayers, at the moment of the « *Lord, I am not worthy* — namely, at the Domine non sum dignus — *Father Luigi, with a radiant face and clear voice, made an explicit profession of faith* », renewed the promises of holy baptism and recited the acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition. He declared with strength his desire to live and die as a most devoted son of the Holy Roman Catholic Church and asked pardon for his shortcomings from the sisters and from all the people of the house; he then blessed every single member of the religious congregation and would have continued still for a long time to give vent to his affectionate sentiments if the priest Costantini, appealing to holy obedience, had not made him keep silent. When he received the consecrated host, he immersed himself in a profound silence, adoring with all the ardor of his heart the divine Jesus.

On the same day it was deemed appropriate to administer to him also the Anointing of the sick, so that he might receive this sacrament of health while he was still in the full

possession of his faculties. However the patient did not yet perceive the grave danger of life in which he found himself, and therefore it was necessary to prepare him also for this last rite. The superior general, showing herself a true strong woman, took upon herself this painful task and turned with tact to the soul of the blessed patient saying to him:

« *Father, I would ask you for a favor as a grace.* »

« *And which one?* », replied the Father.

« *We all, your daughters — the mother resumed — desire that you this evening have the comfort of receiving the Anointing of the sick which, if it pleases God, can give back to you also the health of the body.* »

« *And do you not wish, my mother, that I be ready and content? Oh yes, already since a long time I have offered to God the sacrifice of my life. Yes, yes, let the Lord do with me what He wishes, since I am fully resigned; however I did not believe that there was so much urgency. Has the physician perhaps judged the illness grave?* »

« *Yes, Father, the illness in itself is grave. And could I not wait until tomorrow to prepare myself a bit better for the last sacrament?* »

« *Yes, Father, you could; but we your daughters would be very happy if it were administered to you still tonight.* »

« *Well, mother, I am here ready for everything, let them arrange indeed. Now however I make a confidence to you. Now I understand the motive of the visit. This morning I had a vision. There appeared to me the holy women for whom I cherish a special devotion and whose images, as you know, I kept always on the desk. There came to give me the notice of the departure Saint Anne, Saint Martha and the three holy women Mary Magdalene, Mary of Cleopas and Mary Salome, those dear holy women of mine whom in life I have always loved, honored and invoked.* [(1)] *And then... the four blows given by the relic of Saint Philip are another signal of the call. I pray you, my mother, pray for me.* »

Having said this with the calm and the dispositions of a saint, he received that very evening the Anointing of the sick.

This rite being accomplished, all the people of the institute desired to see him once more, to listen to his holy words and receive his last benediction. The house's own craftsmen, the bricklayers, the gardener, and the shoemaker, having asked and obtained permission from the superior, entered the sick old man's room and, kneeling down, could not hold back their tears and weeping at the sight of that dying old man whom they loved like a very tender father, much more than a master. However, for the fear of causing a strong emotion to the patient, they were with grace invited to go out. Of it noticed however the loving Father Luigi, who immediately asked to call back those dear workmen of his. Having re-entered and arranged themselves around his bed, he addressed to them paternal and holy recommendations and then wished to embrace them one by

[1] The fact was also testified to (or deposed) at the diocesan information process by Sister Santina Gilmozzi (1854-1939), who heard it from the living voice of Mother Cecilia Piacentini. (See Summarium, p. 94, par. 303 in Positio...).

one. A laborer, who wept bitterly, did not dare to approach considering himself unworthy, but the good Father encouraged him saying to him:

« *My Giacometto, come, come you too to give me the last farewell* », and he extended his trembling arms to him. This is the true brotherhood in Jesus Cristo which the sacred ministers of the Lord live toward the sons of the people!

From that evening the father founder continued still for several days to preserve his full mental clarity, so much so that he succeeded, with his special reminders, in being an example and an instruction to the priest Costantini and to the fortunate sisters who could assist him. In this last period, several times he exclaimed in their presence:

« *I have seen in God... I have seen in God.* »

But immediately afterward, out of humility, he interrupted his discourse. On another occasion, the other persons having been made to go out of the room, he revealed to his beloved Don Luigi the highest truths, concerning which the worthy priest Costantini deems he must maintain, for the moment, a prudent silence.

But the Photography No!

Several times Father Luigi, when he was still in health, was exhorted to let himself be photographed, since the religious community desired to preserve his portrait, but he, out of humility, always refused to give his consent. [2] During his long illness recourse was made to every astuteness to succeed in portraying him, but it was all useless; he remained in fact vigilant and, noticing certain preparations arranged for the purpose, reproached the sisters sweetly, to the point that these had to resign themselves to putting away the equipment. Only after his death was it finally possible to photograph the father founder.

Here is a very vivid account of that « *photographic insidiousness* » a narration which in all probability comes directly from the words of sister Osanna:

« One day in which the good Father seemed more weakened than ever, so much as not to appear present to himself, the sisters worked all the morning to arrange draperies and make preparations — at that time the advanced photographic cameras of today — *did not exist, in the hope of succeeding in the intent. The Father looked, observed in silence without understanding, and when he turned to his nurse to have explanations, she answered him that she knew nothing.*

When everything was ready, Monsignor Luigi Costantini and Mother Osanna told the Father that they wished to raise him a little, and helped the elderly patient to sit up on the bed, sustaining him the one on the right and the other on the left. In all haste they positioned the photographic apparatus. In that moment the good Father noticed what was happening and, turning to Monsignor, said to him: Eh! You want to betray me! »

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[2] At the information hearing, several witnesses testified regarding the lack of a photograph of Father Scrosoppi. For its part, the Cittadino Italiano, in its May 5, 1884, issue, published a portrait of Father Luigi on its front page, noting that it was taken on his deathbed by the talented Professor A. Milanopulo and that it closely resembled the real thing. (Stampa, A.L.S.).

Then, turning toward the sister: Big slyboots! You had the courage to tell me the lie that you did not know what they were doing!

Neither prayers nor supplications availed: the good Father, who had never desired anything else if not the greater glory of God, the good of souls and for himself a total anonymity, maintained firm this desire until the end. For this reason he began to move his head continually to the right and to the left, so that they had to abandon the idea and the comfort of having a portrait of his while alive, having to content themselves with taking it after his holy death ».

It appears, in fact, that a photograph of his corpse existed, but it went lost.

Extreme Exhortations

In that period, when the sisters showed themselves grieved at his imminent disappearance, fearing almost that without him the religious congregation and especially the Institute of the *derelitte* might extinguish itself, the venerated Father comforted them saying to them:

« *No, no, my daughters, I do not wish to see you sad and disconsolate. Fear nothing: this is the house of God, He is the master of it, this has been His work and, precisely as He made it be born and grow, in the same way He will make it progress. God has no need of any creature, He makes use of any instrument to accomplish His work.* »

Other times he insisted on recommending to them:

« *Have confidence in God, above all in the middle of the most grave tribulations; you must not discourage yourselves, my daughters, but you must confide in Jesus and repeat: Long live Jesus! Long live Mary! I suppliant you in every circumstance to accomplish always the will of God. Love each other, love each other, so that your heart may inflame itself, burn and consume itself with love toward Jesus, who is all love. Live in charity, since God is love* (*Deus caritas est*) *... I pray you to say always: to die yes, but to offend God, no, no! The will of God is your sanctification, so that you may become true spouses of His divine Son and because the Holy Spirit may fill you with every grace and benediction, so that we can find ourselves all united among the heavenly choirs in Paradise.* »

On another occasion he expressed himself with these words:

« *The congregation of the sisters will have to face many tribulations, but confide in the Lord, my daughters, because this congregation will give much glory to God. It will flourish with vigor and will become the garden that will prepare souls for holy Paradise. Charity, charity: behold the spirit of your congregation; to save souls and to save them with charity!* »

Furthermore, the humble Father showed his displeasure when they called him founder.

« *Oh no* — he responded — *I have not been the founder, I have only helped the work of my brothers, Father Carlo and Don Giovanni Battista; I have done very little and I recognize that I do not deserve this title.* » For last, he happened to say:

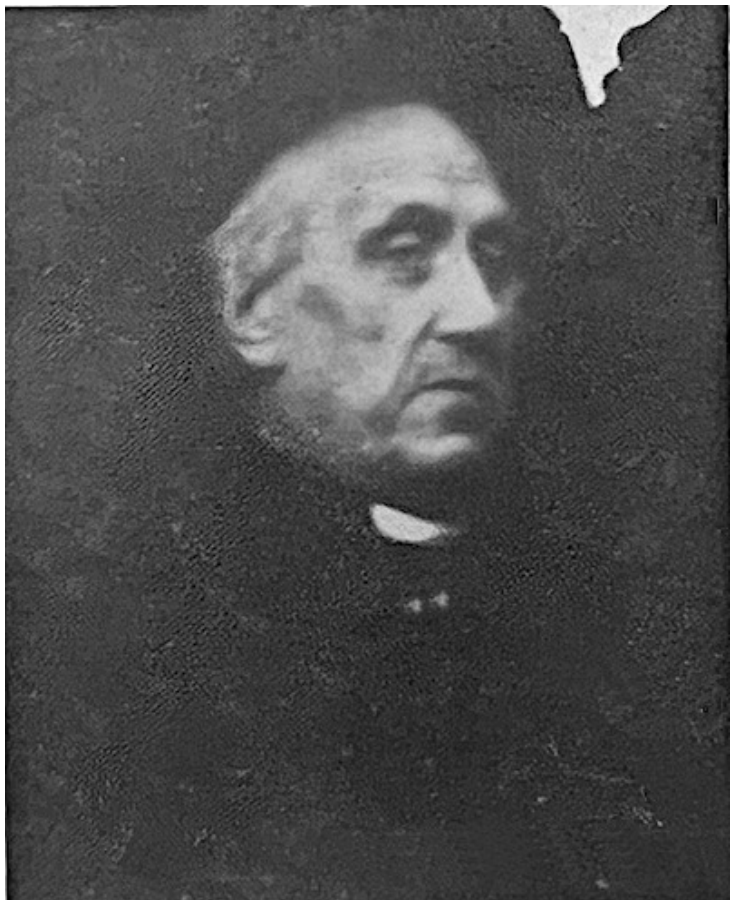
« *I have understood in God that it is necessary that I die for the greater good of the congregation; yes, yes, after my death, for some time the institute will be tried by difficulties, but subsequently it will be reborn to new life. Yes, yes, I must depart for the greater good of the community!* »

With these flashes of intense light, similar to a lamp that is about to extinguish itself, the venerated Father let transpire from his bed of death all the beauty of his soul which, pervaded by divine charity, transmitted nothing else but charity.

The Holy Death

« *In the last days, having lost his speech, being exhorted to perform mentally acts of love toward God and of repentance, and while the Miserere and the Te Deum were being recited to him, he showed that he appreciated them and accompanied with his heart the devout prayers, until, extinguishing himself little by little, comforted, besides by the customary spiritual helps, also by the benediction of the Pope, he expired rendering his soul to God.* »

« *There were present at his holy passing the faithful priest Costantini, the superior general with three other sisters, who until dawn watched in prayer reciting the office of the deceased and other prayers of suffrage for that blessed soul. After the signal of the wake-up, the announcement of the death was given to the community, although foreseen, but not for this less painful and excruciating for the loss of such a Father.* »



Father Luigi Costantini, linked to Father Luigi by a profound friendship, assisted him in his last illness until death.

Father Luigi expired at 10:40 in the evening — namely, at 22:40 — of 3 April 1884 [3], which that year was the Thursday of Passion Week — namely, Holy Week. The first vespers of the festivity of the Seven Sorrows of Mary Most Holy had already been celebrated.

We do not cherish any sympathy for that search for hagiographical perfection according to which a saint must die in an ideal way on the day most suitable to his spirituality. The fact remains that Father Luigi died on the liturgical day dedicated to the sorrows of the Virgin. We think back then to that painting of the Madonna, with her heart pierced by the sword, which impressed itself in the eyes of little Luigi since when, as a child, he began to frequent the church of Santa Maria Maddalena; to that painting which he ransomed, together with that of the Heart of Jesus, from the state confiscation of 1867. Let us remember how much he recommended to the sisters devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows, listing the four graces that she grants to her devout ones: a perfect repentance of faults; the passion of Jesus impressed in the mind and heart; the efficacy of the protection of Mary; a most perfect act of love before expiring. The "*Cenni biografici della vita edificante delle nostre amate consorelle"*, which we have cited several times, say of sister Cherubina Voncini:

« *Like all our elderly mothers, she nourished a most tender devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. Every day she recited the crown of the seven sorrows and experienced then in death completely special effects thereof; among others, a most perfect act of love to Jesus which took her life and carried her directly into holy Paradise.* »

If this could be said of the spiritual daughter, will it not have happened also for the Father who had educated her?

When on the morning of 4 April, at half past five, the small bell of the wake-up rang in the college of Providence, the voice « *The Father is dead, the Father is dead!* » diffused in a flash. « *How many tears at the death of the Father in our college! It was a deluge!..* »; thus Mrs. Margherita Bellò, widow Gremese, still recalled in 1934. She had been received therein an orphan in 1874, upon the request of the parish priest of San Quirino Monsignor Carlo Filipponi, a very dear friend of Father Scrosoppi, when she was only five years old; and she remained there still a year after the death of the founder.

Echoes of the Death of the Father

On the same 4 April the superior general and the Sisters of Providence diffused in the city a sheet with the announcement of the death and the schedule of the obsequies:

« *The funeral function will take place in the oratory of the derelitte at 10:00 of the morning and the transport for the burial at 14:00 of 3 April.* »

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[3] The time of death is recorded in the printed funeral announcement of the Sisters of Providence. This contradicts what we read in Tinti, who is usually well-informed and accurate. The error can probably be explained: the writer confused the time of death with the time of delivery of the telegram containing the pontifical blessing, received in Udine at 11:35 PM, as shown on the form (A.L.S., file 1, doc. 28), but delivered later, with the aggravating circumstance of April 3 still remaining, which he should have replaced with the 4th (L. TINTI, o.c. 236).

Meanwhile Monsignor Antonio Feruglio presented an official request to the prefecture, accompanying it with the medical certificate of Doctor Mander, to obtain the permission to transport to Orzano the corpse of Father Luigi, according to his desire of « *being buried in the chapel annexed to his small villa, it being precisely a question of an isolated locality and of a chapel not open to public cult* » — namely, the decree of 3 April.

The city press made itself the mouthpiece of the universal condolence and veneration. The Catholic daily newspaper Il *Cittadino Italiano* gave the announcement of the death with an exceptional prominence, in the first column of the first page.

« *The city — it said among other things — has lost a great benefactor, the clergy a splendid example of sacerdotal virtues, and the history of Friuli will register his name beside those of Filippo Renati, of Father Micesio, of the canon Tomadini, of Father Carlo Filaferro. For this the memory of Father Scrosoppi will be always blessed. If on one side it is of comfort to repair toward the venerated tombs and bend the knee upon them, it is on the other side painful that the mortal remains of this holy man, in conformity with his expressed desires, must be transported far from the city: His will be done.* »

This last passage expresses clearly the displeasure of many citizens for the fact that the remains of this holy man did not remain in Udine, where they could have venerated his tomb. The same newspaper, then, in the subsequent issues of 8 and 9 April, dedicated to the first page over six columns for a brief biography of the Father written by Don Ferdinando Blasich, a text which was then published as a booklet.

The two liberal daily newspapers, La Patria del Friuli and "*Il Giornale di Udine*", spoke also they with a certain ampleness both of the death and of the funeral. The first, on 4 April, under the title A Benefactor of the People, wrote:

« *He dedicated his entire life to the advantage of beneficence; and without financial contributions neither from the municipality of Udine, nor from the province nor from the State, he maintained and educated the orphans of the people, who almost every year arrived at the number of four hundred... What is good, whoever does it and from whatever impulse he be moved, deserves always the applause and gratitude, and it is precisely for this that, despite the changes of the laws and of the usages, the institute of Father Scrosoppi has been respected, and the people of Udine became affectionate to it, as already happened for the institute of the small orphans of Monsignor Tomadini.* »

It was not easy, in those times, to receive greater praises in a liberal newspaper, since Father Luigi had had a "*defect*" for them unpardonable: he had been a priest, a holy priest.

Much more solemn was the article of the other liberal daily newspaper, "*Il Giornale di Udine*"; and although its tone resounds to us today a bit unusual, we deem it a duty to report it almost integrally:

« *Eighty years spent in the exercise of charity toward unhappy brothers diffuse upon the tomb of a man the perfume of a tender and yet sublime greatness, and the idea for which in the breast of that man burned so high ardor of pious love, is a living, powerful idea and to be held, like every element of civilization, in the deepest veneration. Father Luigi, priest and man of times more serene than ours, gathered like a concave mirror, into a single focus — that of charity — the rays of the many relationships that appear*

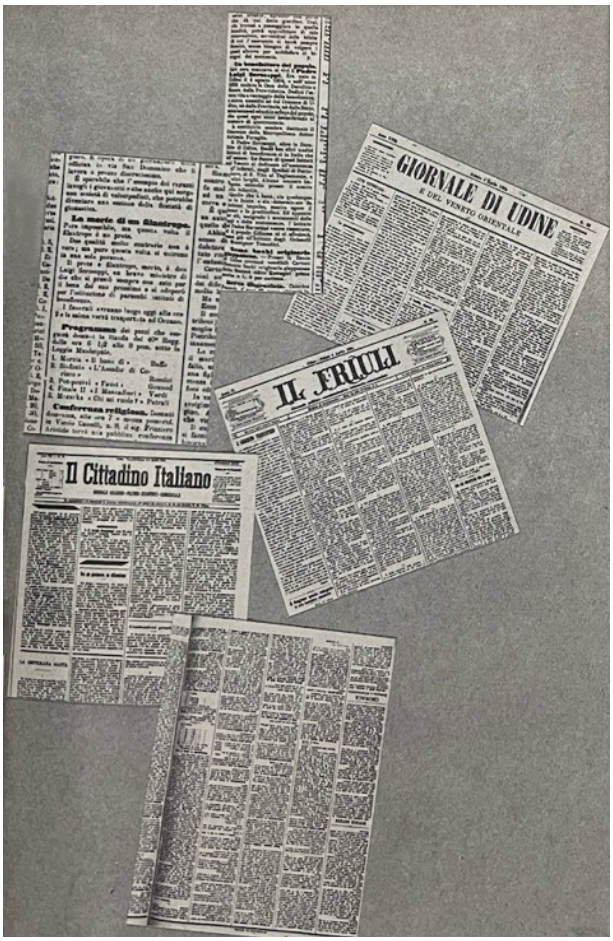
between the two worlds, the infinite and the finite; he was a synthesis and had the prodigious energy that from synthesis always derives.

A man singular and distinguished for the compactness of all innate and acquired forces in a homogeneous nucleus, from the point of view of human wisdom he would not however have been able to embrace men with a gaze of love; he did it instead from that of God, universal love and beginning and end of every great enterprise. They are rare unfortunately priests like the good old man just deceased; but the species does not abound either of others who resemble him, since, at least frequently, charity has become, in the temple and outside, a hypocritical and factious speculation... »

Agreed, there was poison in the tail! But precisely because coming from such a pulpit, still more significant is the beautiful definition of Scrosoppi as a « *synthesis of divine love.* » We have highlighted we some phrases to make stand out the spiritual portrait of the Father, truly incisive, traced by a lay and declaredly anticlerical pen.

The newspaper Il Friuli, which Blasich inserts among those defined as impious, published on 5 April the article The Death of a Philanthropist:

« *It seems impossible, but this time the philanthropist is a priest. Two very contrasting qualities, is it not true? And yet this time they have united in a single person. The deceased priest and philanthropist is Don Luigi Scrosoppi, a good minister of God, who lent himself always with zeal for the good of the neighbor and exerted himself for the foundation of several institutions of beneficence.* »



The newspapers that reported the notice
of the death of Father Luigi.

On 7 April it gave then a detailed notice of the funerals beginning thus:

« *The funerals of the regretted Don Luigi Scrosoppi have been a true demonstration of affection and of esteem* », hinting at an infinite number of citizens who took part therein.

Of it spoke not instead the fifth daily newspaper of the city, Il Popolo, if not in a polemical article of 9 April for the failed participation in the funerals of the government authorities — namely, the prefect and the questor. Of it spoke not maintaining that it was known to all (welfare *lippis et tonsoribus*) that the priests, even under the cloak of charity, work without pause to weaken the unitary State — namely, the national edifice —, and that the Pope — namely, the prisoner of the Vatican — reminds all too often the faithful of his own positions. On the same track placed itself the local periodical Florean dal Palazz and, in a more vulgar way, *L'Esaminatore Friulano* of the apostate Vogrigh, who concluded:

« *If Scrosoppi has deserved well with the clerical party, no one opposes that his party render him great funeral honors; but to pretend that the municipality act as a shoulder to the clericals is a pretension somewhat original.* »

Who did not unite themselves to the general exaltation did it therefore by a clear choice of political hostility.

The great mass of the people of Udine, however, with the practical and acute sense typical of the people, reasoned approximately thus:

« *Father Luigi was a clerical? What else could he be? Did he remain most faithful to the Pope? It was his duty. But how many orphans have those journalists received and maintained? He yes.* »

And to his funerals they ran in infinite number.

The Funerals of Father Scrosoppi

We yield again the word to Monsignor Tinti:

« *The morning of Saturday 5 April, in the church of San Gaetano adjacent to the choir of the institute, after the recitation of the Office of the deceased executed by the Sisters of Providence and by the girls received in the House* (*or the derelitte boarding girls*), *the vicar general himself Monsignor Domenico Someda celebrated the holy Mass. Before the last farewell to the corpse, with that communicative warmth which so much distinguished him, he pronounced brief but spontaneous and moving words of praise of the vanished Father; in giving the farewell to the coffin, he expressed the common hope that that blessed soul were already entered into the line of the saints.* »

« *Toward two of the afternoon there followed the transport of the corpse to Orzano, near Cividale, where the Father had already established to be buried; the accompaniment to the funeral was solemn and extraordinary.* »

« *There opened the cortege the orphans of the Tomadini Institute, the Patronage of San Giuseppe of Cividale with the banner bordered in mourning, the Patronage of Santo Spirito of Udine with the fanfare, which alternated the sad melodies to the singing of the Miserere and to the recitation of the holy rosary, the priests of the confraternity of Saint Peter the apostle and many other members of the city clergy. At the guidance of the*

procession there was the parish priest of the Carmine, in whose parochial territory rises the House of the derelitte. »

« *Behind the coffin, carried on shoulders by the seminarians, followed the mayor Count of Gropplero, the representatives of the archbishop, of the chapter of the cathedral, of the clergy of the city, of the seminary, of the college Giovanni da Udine and of the institutes Renati, Zitelle and, for last, a long line of Sisters of Providence and of orphans with the candles lighted, the Rosanies and the Kindergarten of the Immaculate.*»

Tinti incurs here in an error. The mayor of that time, in fact, was the Count Luigi de Puppi, who participated in the ceremony in a personal capacity. Beside him, the newspaper Il Friuli remembers « *the Count Antonio Trento, the noble Niccolò Mantica, various employees of the pawnshop, the representatives of the congregation of charity — these also not in official guise — and other institutions of public beneficence of the city and of the province.* »

The same daily newspaper defines « *worthy of the excelsior virtues of the deceased* » the funeral praise held by Monsignor Someda.

« *The cortege, without pomp nor noise of the world, proceeded from the street of the Seminary to the square of the Archbishopric and, having entered the street Tomadini, directed itself to the gate Pracchiuso; arrived at the point in which the railway crosses the street that leads to Cividale, the cortege dissolved itself.*

The public opinion and the liberal press, which also had announced the death of Father Luigi Scrosoppi with expressions of respect, lamented justly some non-justified absences.

And in fact, among those present at the funeral it was lamented vividly that the municipality itself had not made itself the promoter of solemn honors for Father Luigi, so well-deserving of the homeland of Friuli; it was noticed furthermore with sorrow the absence of the civil authorities, whereas in other circumstances solemn honors were decreed and participation with great pomp occurred at the funerals of persons famous only for an inconsiderate hatred toward Catholicism. No official recognition, not even the funeral carriage was granted to the priest who had consecrated all his patrimony and himself to the most needy class of the people. The congregation of charity itself, which had several times benefited from the helps of Father Luigi, did not send its own official representatives to the funerals. Sad signs of an era in which the spirit of faction or of sect dominates unfortunately the many institutions of modern society! »

A first strong criticism against this deplorable « *official* » absence was moved on 5 April by "*Il Cittadino Italiano*". But much harsher was an article of Niccolò Mantica appeared on "*Il Giornale di Udine*" on 7 April with the title "*Official Ingratitude*", which was then reproduced by the Cittadino. It was a question of a very biting article. Here are some passages of it:

« *The representatives of the government, who, of good or bad will, bow to the square and to its representatives, did they not know or did they not wish to render homage to a man so well-deserving of the public city charity? Or did they have fear of doing so because the deceased was a priest? The national government, which distributes honors to all those who ask them, and also to the most modest who make themselves be asked, did not remember that in Udine there existed a Father Scrosoppi.*

But Father Scrosoppi operated continually, provided every day instruction to 396 minds and food to 396 mouths; he had no time to make publicity for himself with gossips in the squares, in the theaters or in the halls, or with controversies in the newspapers, and therefore perhaps many of the modern severe critics knew not even of his existence! However the government should have known at least, the day before yesterday, that Father Luigi Scrosoppi was director of the Institute of the derelitte; but unfortunately it has demonstrated to us not to know even this. Is this the way to educate the masses? For our part we lament vividly so much negligence as one of the many sad, most sad signals of the times. »

No one dared to reply directly to Mantica; rather, "*La Patria del Friuli*" joined his criticism. But "*Il Popolo*" and some periodicals, as already hinted, made of it the occasion for a controversy that involved a bit of everything, forgetting however the principal argument, that is the social merits of the Father. We have spoken of these « *meanness* » out of duty of historical chronicle, to give back the climate of the era and also — why not? — as a monition. History, in fact, frequently repeats itself...

The Burial at Orzano

At the dissolution of the cortege, the coffin was placed upon an agricultural cart and, with the accompaniment of some Sisters of Providence and abandoned orphans, to whom joined some girls from the festive oratory and the musical band of the Patronage of *Santo Spirito*, the most reverend Monsignor Antonio Feruglio and the priest Luigi Costantini set out on their journey toward Orzano. Beyond the bridge over the Torre torrent the vicar curate of Remanzacco came to meet them; praying and weeping with sadness, in the silence of nature and under a sky that was covering itself with light clouds, as if it wished to participate in the common sorrow, they arrived at the hamlet of Selvis.

« *Here the two chaplains of Orzano presented themselves with the confreres of the Most Holy Sacrament in red cloaks; here and there the lugubrious tolls of the bells were heard and much people rushed from the countrysides and from the surroundings who, by the hundreds, hastened to render the last tribute of love to Father Luigi.*

The spectacle became moving: women and girls in line with candles and with the rosary in hand; men and young men who had interrupted their labor in the fields and closed their houses to join the sequel. Without exaggerating several thousands of persons can be calculated. The coffin was removed from the cart and carried on shoulders by the most robust and, in this way, for about two kilometers a new and equally devout funeral unwound as far as the church of the curacy of Orzano.

This was certainly not in a position to contain such a crowd; and while inside the building the vespers of the deceased and the funeral prayers were being sung, the people outside the church, astonished and moved, participated devoutly in the sacred rite.

The funeral set out then again on its way toward the small church of the Beata Vergine of Loreto, near the house of the sisters. The coffin was deposited upon the ground, but those people succeeded not in detaching themselves from that precious coffin. Then the priest Costantini, of a vigorous physique, rose upon a platform to be seen and heard by

all that multitude and spoke with the eloquence of the heart concerning the spirit of prayer, of penance, of humility and of charity that had animated Father Luigi Scrosoppi in the long course of his most industrious life, to conclude with the words of the Gospel: For I have given you an example, that as I have done, you also should do (Jn 13, 15). »

The priest Costantini could well speak of the penance of the Father, since he had had the fortune to remove his hair-shirt and to collect many other instruments with which he severely punished his own body. The discourse of Costantini was not a prepared funeral oration, but a rapid torrent of sentiments and thoughts dictated by the heart of one who had been beside him for three consecutive months. The orator was moved since his first words; abundant tears furrowed his grieved face and he transmitted such a sense of emotion to all the crowd that a universal weeping and lament arose. All desired to touch and kiss the coffin that contained the venerated remains of Father Luigi, until it was deposited in the place in which he himself had prepared his tomb.

He, so devoted to the Holy House of Nazareth, wished that his mortal remains should rest in a small chapel modeled upon the Holy House of Loreto. There remains now the wish that this small church of the sisters at Orzano may be soon opened to cult, realizing the vivid desire expressed in life by Father Luigi, who used to say that he wished to have it blessed by three bishops.

On that day, and not far away, in which it will be possible to celebrate therein the holy sacrifice of the altar, how much the sisters and the girls will exult, and the blessed father founder will smile upon them from Heaven!

The small church of the Madonna of Loreto of Orzano was blessed and opened to cult on Monday 18 October 1897, feast of Saint Luke, a little more than a year after the publication of the biography written by Tinti.

The blessing was imparted by Monsignor Antonio Feruglio, then bishop of Vicenza, in the presence of Monsignor Pietro Antivari, titular bishop of Eudoxias and vicar general of Udine, and of Monsignor Francesco Isola, bishop of Concordia. At the singing of the Te Deum in the function of the afternoon the archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Pietro Zamburlini, also intervened. In the chronicle of the celebration reported by "*Il Cittadino Italiano"* of 21 October, Father Luigi is defined: « *the holy founder of the House of the derelitte and of the congregation of the Sisters of Providence* »; it is said that for that sacred rite « *the soul of Father Luigi certainly exulted with joy in heaven* » and it is underlined that the four bishops wished to honor with their presence the blessed memory of Father Luigi.

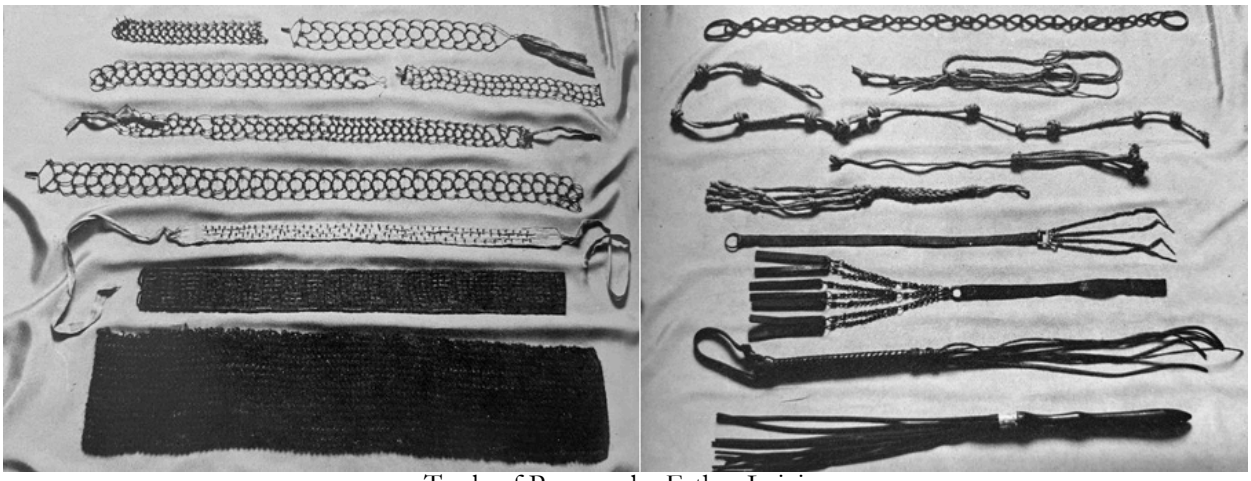
For the occasion a sonnet was printed, of which we report the final tercets:

« *When upon the altar (and the day has arrived)*
the host of peace is offered,
and its perennial dwelling will make in this humble stay,
upon your sisters and the small orphans then
benign descend and hovering around
teach how in Heaven Jesus is adored. »

Upon the tomb of Orzano a tablet was furthermore placed with a Latin inscription destined to hand down to posterity the affectionate remembrance of the sisters and of the small orphans for their protector father.

Holy Remembrances

« *With a delicate thought — Tinti wrote — the excellent sisters collected in a glass case several objects belonged to their venerated Father, which show clearly a poverty and a piety equal to his heroic spirit of mortification. The case is preserved in the private oratory of the sisters at Orzano and contains, among the others, the following objects worthy of note: the cord of Saint Francis, a corset with three wide slats, a belt of harsh hair-shirt, three scourges of rope, a scourge of leather, a scourge of iron with pointed lead small balls, a thick iron chain to gird his flanks, two iron hooks, his usual books of devotion, upon which he had written his favorite phrase: To Work - To Suffer - To Keep Silent, and some sacred images that bear the signs of the devout kisses that he had impressed therein.* »



Tools of Penance by Father Luigi

In front of those instruments of penance, one cannot help but be moved and shudder, thinking that the father founder utilized them with joy of spirit, as if they were instruments of pleasure, and that while they lacerated his flesh they gave him an unspeakable comfort! The venerated Father imitated Saint Paul who exclaimed:

« *When I am weak, it is then that I am strong* » (2 Cor 12, 10).

Here is the great secret that enriches with the most choice graces holy souls: the mortification of the senses and that of one's own will!

The death of the father founder was felt profoundly by all the religious congregation, and the innocent small orphans who so much loved their tender Father Luigi wept for him with sincere tears.

In all the houses of the congregation solemn funerals were celebrated in prayer for the deceased and in Portogruaro, where since 1837 his first foundation of the sisters took place in the city hospital, a well-deserved function was celebrated on the thirtieth day in the nearby church of Saint John the Evangelist, with the participation of much people, of the clergy and of the administrative and municipal authorities guided by the worthy

mayor Francesco of the marquises Fabris; the funeral praise read by him who has now the pleasant task of writing these memories was furthermore published.

In the same way, in all the houses of the congregation the anniversary of the death of the always loved and remembered father founder is celebrated with solemnity, concerning whom it is a common conviction that it is more appropriate to rely upon his intercession, rather than to think that he has need of prayers of suffrage.

THE PEDAGOGY OF SACRIFICE

This sub-chapter wishes to integrate the original work of Monsignor Biasutti with the purpose of offering a modern key of reading to ascetical practices that time has rendered difficult to decipher. The intent is to reveal how the rigorous path of penance was the invisible root of the unshakeable industriousness and of the apostolic resilience of Saint Luigi.

APL – Amici Padre Luigi

If Biasutti, with his undisputed intellectual honesty, has not passed under silence the use that Father Luigi made of harsh instruments of mortification, to us, modern devotees of this Saint, belongs the task of framing these practices not as a dark heritage of the past, but as a necessity sprung from a strength of soul out of the common.

In front of the hair-shirt, the disciplines and those « *cords to the hands and to the feet* » which the Father noted in his purposes of 1856, modern sensitivity can experience a movement of bewilderment. However, for Father Luigi, putting his own flesh to the test was not an end, but rather a need and, above all, a rigorous training of the spirit.

Far from being an anomaly, the ascetical practice of Father Scrosoppi places him in a line of universal saints who have seen in the body the « *brother ass* » to be educated to serve better the spirit. He walked in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi and of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, from whom he learned the « *third degree of humility* »: not only to accept suffering, but to desire it actively to be a « *true copy* » of Jesus crucified who has knowingly accepted the cross. It is the same "*science of sorrow*" that we find again in figures close to us such as Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, Saint Teresa of Calcutta or Saint John Paul II, who have shared physically the weight of the Cross to snatch souls from evil.

The reflection that today emerges with strength is that the immense task of setting up and ruling twelve titanic works for the poorest — beginning with the first and most imposing: the House of the *derelitte* — demanded a temper of steel. Father Luigi never drew back in front of the impossible. His penances were the « *training field* » which allowed him:

To face physical fatigue and humiliation: he who knew how to keep silent in front of the bites of the hair-shirt, knew also how to smile after having received a slap during the « *quest* » or after a day spent acting as a laborer to the masons of the house.

To win the fear of death: the heroic promptness shown on the Good Friday of 1848, when he collected the wounded under the fire of artilleries, was born not from nothing, but from a man already accustomed to daily sacrifice.

To abandon every justification: where other priests, although learned and pious, saw « *material impossibilities* », Luigi answered with the strength of him who had learned to overcome every obstacle and not to seek comforts for himself, provided he gave bread to his « *dear small souls* » and reached his objectives of total donation.

« *To Do, To Suffer, To Keep Silent* »: the famous Scrosoppian trinomial finds here its perfect synthesis. The « *To Do* » (the untiring industriousness) and the « *To Keep Silent* » (the humility of concealment) were sustained by the capacity of « *To Suffer* ». The instruments of penance were the "*armor*" that rendered him strong precisely when difficulties were the prelude to a surrender.

Today, as daughters and friends of Father Luigi, we should not look at those instruments with shame, but as the "*gymnasium*" of an "*athlete of Charity*" who knew how to train his own heart and his own body never to stop in front of the need of the last, of the poor and of the suffering. If Saint Luigi was a giant of social action, it is because he was first of all an example of silence and of sacrifice.

This "*pedagogy of sacrifice*" finds its absolute prototype not only in the mystery of the Cross, but in the human path of Jesus Himself. Before beginning His public mission, Christ chose deliberately to face the forty days of fasting in the desert — namely, an experience that on a human level goes well beyond the instruments of penance of the greatest and most famous saints. That experience was not a passive parenthesis, but a strategic choice of "*spiritual combat*": Jesus wished to submit His human nature to the extreme test of hunger and solitude to win in us, and for us (through His example), the fundamental temptations to which every man is subject.

In the desert, Jesus defeats the "*father of every egoism*", rejecting the enticements of possession (transforming stones into bread), of power (the dominion over the kingdoms of the world) and of success (the spectacularization of the divine). He demonstrates that the "*dominion over one's own body and over one's own impulses*" is the indispensable condition for true liberty.

In this sense, the penances of Father Luigi are his personal ritualization of the "*desert*". He understood that Egoism is the root of every human wickedness and the principal obstacle to Charity. Saint Luigi knew that, to serve the last without reserves, he had first to win in himself the enticements of well-being and of comforts.

While other traditions — from the oriental ones of the Yogis to the lay ones of the Stoics — have sought the dominion of the body to reach interior balance or ataraxia — namely, imperturbability —, in Father Luigi this "*training to sacrifice*" has a very precise goal: the identification with Christ who chose first the desert and then the cross.

It is not a question of masochism, nor of a challenge an end in itself against biology, but of a transcendence of the Self. As the marathon runner faces pain to reach the finish line, or the surgeon bears hours of fatigue to save a life, so Luigi Scrosoppi "*trained*" his humanity. If he was capable of facing the impossible and of never drawing back in front

of the misery of his "*derelitte girls*", it is because he had already won the most difficult battle: the one against his own egoistic "*self*", in the silence of a cell, between the hairshirt and prayer.

He teaches us that there is no true "*To Do*" (social action) that is not nourished by a profound "*To Suffer*" (capacity of sacrifice) and protected by a humble "*To Keep Silent*" (victory over vanity).

In him, penance is not shadow, but the luminous source of a Charity that still today, after almost two centuries, continues to warm the world.

The Celebrations for the Thirtieth Day

We must now turn back a step and say something concerning the solemn honors rendered to the Father on the thirtieth day from his disappearance.

On 3 May Il Cittadino Italiano came out in a special edition, with a graphic dress never utilized for anyone, if not for the archbishops of the city. All the first page was occupied by a portrait of Antonio Milanopulo, which reproduced the venerated image of Father Scrosoppi.

Since Monday 28 April, by will of the diocesan authority, there had met in the offices of the curia the forane vicar of Udine Monsignor Della Stua, the honorary canon and vicar of the cathedral Monsignor Zucco, Doctor Vincenzo Casasola, Count Federico Trento, Mr. Pasquale Fior, Mr. Eugenio Ferrari and the most reverend Don Novelli, as the oldest parish priest, to constitute a committee charged with the purpose.

Here is the report related by Don Ferdinando Blasich in his "*Note cronologiche ecclesiastiche*":

« *Initially one wrote to the municipality communicating that the committee had constituted itself, making itself the mouthpiece of the common desire of the citizens, but specifying that if the municipality of Udine had assumed the initiative of the funeral celebration, the committee would dissolve itself. Since the mayor was absent, the knight de Girolami assembled the junta to decide, but until the 29th no answer had arrived. On 1 May the committee met again and the answer of the municipality was read, which refused the proposal offering however a donation of 300 lire. Then it was decided to have the following announcement printed: Monday 3 of the current month, on the occasion of the thirtieth day from the death of the most reverend Father Luigi Scrosoppi of the Oratory, at 10:00 of the morning, in the "veneranda" church of the archbishop's seminary chosen for the occasion, a solemn funeral function will be celebrated. The committee, composed of laity and religious, which made itself the promoter of this dutiful homage, confides that the people of Udine will rush numerous to pray for the soul of the excellent priest, who dedicated the entire his life of 80 years to the benefit of the city charity.* »

Udine, 10 May 1884.

The Committee

« *On the day of 5 May, at ten o'clock of the morning, the function had its beginning.* »

Blasich proceeds providing us with a minute description of the catafalque, of which he has handed down to us even a pen drawing, and reporting the inscriptions in Latin placed on the four sides. We cite some passages of the one turned toward the high altar:

« *Since his tender years he walked on the straight path, he had at heart the decorum of the house of God, he concluded a life without stain* »; and of the one placed toward the entrance of the church, dedicated to Father Luigi:

« *Subtracted from our eyes, never from our heart.* »

There took part in the ceremony — Blasich continues — the chapter of the cathedral, the clergy of the city, the archbishop, the committee, all the professors of the seminary and some of the college « Giovanni da Udine », the representatives of the institutes Renati, Zitelle, Dimesse, Tomadini and Micesio, the Sisters of Providence and the secretariat of the congregation of charity. After the obsequies, Monsignor Elti (who held the office of inspector of the kindergarten and was dean of the chapter), dressed in mourning, read the funeral oration and concluded expressing the desire that, in this era characterized by a true and proper mania for monuments, one be erected also for Scrosoppi; this monument, however, would have to consist in the reopening of the church of the Philippine fathers, to which the Father was profoundly linked. A most beautiful desire which however, according to human judgment, was destined to remain without effect — Blasich observes —, since of that church nothing remained but the walls, the internal choir having been occupied for the construction of a building used as a barracks for the guards of public security.

A similar auspice was expressed also by Monsignor Tinti in the funeral praise pronounced at Portogruaro and subsequently published.

« I Go Saying: Peace, Peace, Peace! »

If the Father agitated himself so much on his bed of death provided he was not photographed, what would he have ever done or said in front of all that noise and even the contrasts arisen around his coffin? But by now he found himself up there. Up there, where one of the nuances of the most serene peace is constituted precisely by the detached smile toward earthly contentions. « *My God — the saints will say — we knew that they were small; but so small.* »

From up there he would have repeated, and would repeat still, the habitual greeting pronounced on his bed of death:

« *See you in Paradise!* »

Because it is this, in the end, what truly matters.

APPENDIX

1. THE WILL OF FATHER LUIGI SCROSOPPI

Father Luigi died in a state of total evangelical poverty.

On 25 January 1879 he had despoiled himself of every possession to the advantage of the congregation of the Sisters of Providence; from that moment onward, he had considered himself in the same position of a simple guest in the House of the *derelitte*, living in everything like the small orphans. He arrived at asking for charity even the faculty to use his own garments, writing that he let divine Providence occupy itself with him in the same way in which it takes care to clothe the most miserable persons.

However, after his chosen soul had reached heaven, there remained upon the earth some real estates legally registered in his name, maintained in such form above all to ward off the feared governmental confiscations.

He had planned the destination of such properties through a will drafted on 28 October 1879, just two months after the disappearance of his brother Father Giovanni Battista, who had named him as his own heir.

The fact that only two months passed is an unequivocal sign of his timely and vigilant prudence.

Since Father Scrosoppi possessed no close relatives to take care of or upon whom to rely, he was forced to find other solutions to assure that those goods were destined to works of beneficence.

The testamentary document opens with the abbreviation S.L.G.C. — namely, Praised be Jesus Christ.

« *In the name of the Most Holy Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and after having invoked the most powerful help of Mary Most Holy, of the patriarch Saint Joseph and of all my holy protectors, I the undersigned with this act draft my holographic will — namely, written in my own hand. With it I name as universal heirs of all my substance, real estate and movable property, which I shall leave at the moment of my decease, the most reverend Monsignor canon Father Antonio Feruglio of Giovanni, currently professor in this archbishop's seminary, the reverend Father Domenico Feruglio of Giovanni, his half-brother, born of Mrs. Regina Cantoni, and the most reverend Father Luigi Costantini of Cristoforo, a native of Cividale.*

In case anyone of my indicated heirs should die before me, or if for any other reason he should not wish or could not accept the inherited share due, I establish that this be assigned to the most reverend Father Tommaso Turchetti of the late Orazio, current administrator of this archbishop's table, and to Mr. Lorenzo Costantini of Cristoforo of Cividale. »

It is evident that such heirs did not receive the goods for personal use, but acted exclusively as trustees — namely, persons charged with managing goods on behalf of others —, since everything that the Father possessed was destined to his charitable works. However, in that period the congregation of the Sisters of Providence did not enjoy legal

recognition in Italy, and the House of the *derelitte* risked precisely in those years to end up under the administration of the State. It was therefore necessary to transfer the properties, of which he resulted officially title holder, to private persons of absolute reliability, who should guarantee the established purpose thereof.

On 6 February 1884, at only forty days from the beginning of the illness that forced him to bed, the Father transferred by notary deed to the brothers Monsignor Antonio and Father Stefano Feruglio, and to Father Luigi Costantini, several real estate properties of his ownership, among which the House of Providence, which became later a boarding school.

However, among the goods of his ownership there were some of which he had already disposed since the end of 1875; it was a question of what had come to him as a member of the Philippine congregation. In a notebook of his own hand, he established what follows:

« *Should this venerable congregation not be reconstituted, the entire patrimony will be utilized by the venerable church of the Philippine fathers, named after Saint Mary Magdalene, should this be reopened to cult according to the decisions of the archbishop in office.*

If then neither the reconstitution of the congregation nor the reopening of the church should materialize, the properties here indicated, situated in the district of Portogruaro, will constitute a perpetual ecclesiastical patrimony for the sustenance of a poor seminarist, under the management of the diocesan authority. If the beneficiary should dispose of other means to live without such revenues, he will have to respect the desire of his benefactor by destining the proceeds in favor of the poor House of the derelitte, provided this latter be not subjected to public guardianship; in such eventuality, the funds will go directly to the Sisters of Providence.

As far as concerns instead the capitals and everything that is here described, if the restoration of the Oratory or of the church will not occur, the teachers of the House of the derelitte, today Sisters of Providence, will become owners thereof, who, knowing my wishes, will be rigorous in implementing them. The entire group of the teachers will be represented legally by a single individual, who will result as the effective owner of the whole. »

There follows then the list of the possessions of this share linked to the Philippine order. The Father had bought some lands at Cimbo Campi and at Giai of Portogruaro for a sum of six thousand Austrian lire; with all probability he had invested therein the donation left by the deceased Pletti for the formation of a pupil among the Philippines.

The Father mentions furthermore a credit guaranteed by a promissory note of five thousand Austrian lire toward the notary Doctor Andrea Bassi. Of this sum, three thousand lire were returned by 1880 to Father Francesco Fantoni, who had lent them, while the remaining part of his due was to flow into the fund for the poor seminarian; this amount also was reimbursed in 1906.

Subsequently he treats of the high altar of the church of the Philippines, bought at auction by him together with his usual collaborators: Cernazai, Someda, Turchetti,

Puppati, Fior and Luigi Zamparo. He mentions also some liturgical objects, among which the two paintings of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Mary. Finally he registers until the end of 1882 the revenue of six hundred annual lire which he received from the State in his capacity as a former Philippine religious.

Poor Father Luigi! Until the moment of death he preserved the hope that his beloved congregation might be reborn. If it is a duty to underline the meticulous precision with which he notes what belongs to the Philippine sphere, it is equally moving his honesty in including therein even his own state pension, as if he did not wish to destine those goods to his poor house but to a scholarship for a young aspiring priest. In fact, at least until the period of the First World War, there were seminarians who benefited from it.

The will of the Father followed its natural legal and fiscal path and, in the same year 1884, the heirs provided for the payment of 2467.20 lire as succession tax.

2. FAME OF SANCTITY OF FATHER LUIGI

Firefly of the Good God

If even in the sphere of sanctity we are inclined to look for extraordinary gestures and facts, this is completely conformable to our sensitive and easily impressionable nature. However, it will be not the last joy of paradise to see shine, in that place, with a most intense light souls who had not, on this earth, any notoriety. Father Luigi would have desired to be one of those: only a firefly of the good God.

On the contrary, divine Providence has in some way subtracted him from the silence in which he yearned to enclose himself. That same divine Providence in which he believed in so profound a way.

The norms of ecclesiastical right establish that one cannot speak of sanctity, in a rigorous and complete sense, except in the case of martyrdom, if not for him who has exercised all virtues in a heroic degree and for a determined duration before and until the moment of decease. Such heroism must be discerned not so much in external manifestations, as in the perfect intensity of the union with God. To this must be then added the divine seal of miracles and the official sanction of the Church, so that someone be proposed as blessed or saint to the liturgical veneration of the faithful.

Does our venerated Father Luigi deserve to be called a « *saint* » in the proper and canonical sense of the term? We await with confidence the judgment of the Church. And in this confident expectation two observations comfort us.

The first is offered to us by the attentive study of his life. He was not only what one is accustomed to define a good priest, an excellent priest, a holy priest; but much more. Others who lived beside him and nearby deserve such titles; but upon these very ones he emerged as a giant. Nor did he distinguish himself from them or surpass them because he instituted works of charity or because he founded a religious congregation; the gap is

determined by the heroic and perennial magnanimity of his dedication to God. Let it be permitted to us to cite again the judgment that the anticlerical daily newspaper "*Il Giornale di Udine*" gave of it:

« *He was a synthesis and had the prodigious energy that from synthesis always derives. A man singular and illustrious for the compact integrity of all natural and acquired forces* » which reached its « *tender and yet sublime greatness* » and burned with « *so high a blaze of pious love, since he drew from the height of the wisdom of God, universal love and beginning and end of every great event.* »

If one reflects upon who expressed such praise, upon the period in which it was pronounced and upon its content, in front of the corpse of the Father it resounded approximately in this way: if ever there was a saint, he is it.

The other observation comes from the spontaneous popular voice. The saying is not devoid of value: « *Vox populi, vox Dei* » — namely, the voice of the people is the voice of God. Deemed since always a saint, at his death all Udine and all those who knew him had nothing but a single voice: a saint is dead.

It was not a question of an acclamation of purely emotional value and of generic or imprecise meaning; it was dictated by a clear conviction that Father Luigi was a « *saint worthy of the altars.* »

Let it be sufficient, among all, the testimony of sister Osanna Tisot, nurse of the founder:

« *His corpse was clothed in the sacerdotal vestments, with the black liturgical vestment, as customary; and placed in a case of zinc and of wood. He was exposed for two days in the small church of the institute; and very many came to pay him a visit, even persons of regard. For both the two days there was this crush.*

Someone wept, someone touched pocket handkerchiefs or medals upon him or other things, such as small books, etcetera. They would have wished to remove also some fragments of the sacerdotal vestment; but the sisters, charged with the surveillance, did not allow it. They cut locks of hair from him to preserve them as a relic; until it was necessary to raise the coffin and prevent access. Everyone said that he was a saint. »

That precision « *charged with the surveillance* » is truly significant. Therefore it was foreseen that the faithful would seek to possess themselves of everything to obtain some relic of the Father. For such a reason sisters were placed as a guard. But it was not of help. It was necessary to raise the corpse to protect it from that indiscreet devotion.

We have already recalled how the contemporary sisters of the Father related that to him, as on the other hand to many spiritual masters, the maxim was habitual: saints yes, but not for the altar. It is directed against a certain erroneous mysticism, not rare among religious souls, which pushes to singular or exceptional, not to say extravagant, attitudes, making one forget the true substance of sanctity; it is, in brief, an exhortation to humility, which of sanctity is the solid foundation. It is as if the Father had said: upon the altars others will place you, if it happens, after your death; now you think to sweep, to do the laundry or the kitchen, to assist the sick. However, to sanctity he exhorted continually the sisters and as many as approached him. Simply, he did not wish ostentations. And it pleased him not that sanctity should appear as something mysterious and unachievable. For him it was a mystery of simplicity.

« *Dearest daughter — he wrote to a superior — let us adore the wills of the Lord, and we shall become great saints.* »

He, for his part, had done nothing else during all his life.

And we are firmly convinced that, through such a road, he became truly a great saint: precisely so much more « *great saint* » as simply and sincerely saint, without clamor and without interruption. This conviction, born from a study lasted ten years upon every gesture of the Father down into the smallest details, is certainly profound.

But a series uninterrupted of testimonies proclaimed since the beginning the sanctity thereof with the strength of a pure immediacy.

We shall cite only some of them.

The Veneration of the People of Orzano

Sister Osanna Tisot, with her frank and lively simplicity, related what follows:

« *He said he wished to be buried at Orzano to be able to rest with greater tranquility, far from the bustle, so that no one should remember him: motives that we defined* "*foolishness.*" »

This was the only will for which he maintained a firm and constant attachment, he who had always shown himself indifferent and detached toward any material good.

Perhaps, to the desire for isolation there joined the will to reside among the good people of the countrysides, who preserved still genuine the simplicity of faith and of Christian customs. Without doubt he nourished a profound affection for the inhabitants of Orzano and to many of them he had confided the desire to remain, once deceased, in the middle of them. He loved them and was reciprocated by them. And when his remains arrived at Orzano, they welcomed them as a sacred gift which they would protect with extreme care.

The first to testify such sentiments was the parish priest of Remanzacco, under whose jurisdiction Orzano fell then. In transcribing on the *Liber Defunctorum* — namely, the register of the deceased — the transfer of the corpse, he takes care to inform us that the burial had been completed five years before, in 1879.

« *Deceased therefore — he writes in Latin tongue — on the day 3 of the current month at 22:40, today, accompanied by a solemn funeral rite and with profound devotion, he was welcomed by the priests of the parish and by the faithful of Orzano in the middle of a very vast participation of people. Always of immense moral example, having reached the age of eighty years and full of merits, especially after fifty years dedicated to a sincere faith, to a fervent commitment and to a boundless charity toward innumerable orphans, he delivered back his soul to God; a soul which we confide firmly will be numbered among the blessed and the saints.* »

The author of this significant annotation is Father Pietro Braidotti, born at Rubignacco of Cividale in 1832, who became vicar curate of Remanzacco in 1877 and was appointed in 1903 resident canon of Cividale, where he passed away on 6 October 1911. He knew Father Luigi since at least a thirty-year period and since about seven years he had him almost as his own parishioner.

To Father Luigi some miraculous healings were attributed at Orzano since the first days. It is narrated that a mother obtained the healing of her only small son after a triduum of prayers — namely, three days of devotion — celebrated to invoke his intercession, between the festivity of Easter and 15 April 1884. About a month later, on 11 May, a child of only sixteen months died and the father was so struck by sorrow as to attempt several times to take his own life. Mother Eletta Valussi repaired promptly to the tomb of the Father and prayed him so that he might obtain for that man Christian resignation. In that same hour the man quieted down and the following day found the strength to accompany his son to the burial, showing himself so serene as to marvel his fellow villagers who had witnessed his desperation.

It is not hazardous to maintain that the inhabitants of Orzano considered subsequently Father Luigi as a particular protector of theirs in Heaven, to the point of attributing to him the merit of being spared from hail or from other misfortunes linked to agriculture. They would have even lighted candles upon his tomb or would have deposited ex-votos — namely, objects offered for a grace received — there, if the sisters had not forbidden it to them.

The devotion of the inhabitants of Orzano is fully comprehensible both for the modalities and for its strength. There influenced in part also the local pride: it was a vaunt for them to be the custodians of those sacred remains. However, the veneration remained intense and constant also in Udine and in other localities.

Some Contemporary Testimonies on the Sanctity of Father Luigi

The dedication « *to the holy memory of Father Luigi Scrosoppi* », placed at the beginning of the second edition of the work « *La vita di San Filippo Neri* » by Alfonso Capecelatro, archbishop of Capua, published that year in Milan, bears the date of the festivity of Saint Angela Merici — namely, 31 May 1884. The dedication is subscribed with the abbreviation Father G. L., whom we identify as the priest Giuseppe Lange. In that writing, in fact, reference is made to Trento; and precisely in Trento the priest Giuseppe Lange, born in Rovereto in 1827, who was professor of ecclesiastical history, of patrology and of canon law at the seminary of Trento, performed the office of confessor of the Sisters of Providence.

An illustrious friend of Father Luigi during his life, as well as a supporter after his decease of his sanctity, was Don Valentino Colomba, priest of the hospital of Udine, who passed away on 30 August 1884. He had drafted his own will in favor of the Father; however, the latter having deceased before him and Colomba not having provided to modify his own testamentary wishes, what remained of his patrimony was assigned to the legitimate heirs.

Even the press of liberal orientation held him in the highest consideration. When he fell ill, the newspaper went so far as to publish the daily medical bulletins on the state of his health. Furthermore, as Blasich relates, at the moment of his death it wrote of him with the maximum praise, though not failing to profit by the occasion to manifest its own contempt toward the rest of the clergy, without however touching minimally the memory of Father Luigi.

The daily newspaper "*Il Giornale di Udine*" of the first of September 1884 announced in this way his disappearance:

« *He has passed away. Don Valentino Colomba, priest of the hospital, is dead. His existence resembles the sound of a single string — namely, an instrument with only one chord —, but of the chord of gold: charity. He unfortunately closes the line of the Bricito, of the Filaferro, of the Bergamaschi, of the Tomadini, of the Scrosoppi, priests of a merciful and human God; authentic apostles, for whom to preach the gospel meant to wipe away tears and give relief to torments.* »

A profound veneration for Father Scrosoppi was nourished by Mr. Eugenio Ferrari, who was one of the principal representatives of the rising Catholic Action in the territory of Udine. Such sentiment emerges, almost by contrast, from some observations of his addressed to Monsignor Antonio Feruglio.

Comparisons are always unpleasant; and certainly no one could have succeeded the Father obtaining the same esteem and the same affection. Monsignor Feruglio was an extremely worthy figure for gifts and for sacerdotal spirit; a short time later, the new archbishop Monsignor Berengo will name him his vicar general and, eight years later, he will be elevated to the episcopal office of Vicenza. Yet, as soon as the Father had expired, Mr. Eugenio Ferrari finds the way to say to him:

« *I have deemed to have still alive in you Father Luigi Scrosoppi, whose charity demonstrated toward a daughter of Mr. Giovanni Pupatti he celebrates, through those acts of care that only an authentic father could offer.* »

Monsignor Feruglio, subsequently, carried forward the work of charity begun by Father Scrosoppi in that circumstance.

Mr. Ferrari entered into conflict with Monsignor Feruglio also because of the financial difficulties linked to the works of the Patronage of *Santo Spirito*. On 7 April 1884 he sent him a letter with rather harsh tones in which he affirmed among other things:

« *To be a worthy successor of Father Luigi, seek to acquire that confidence in the Lord of which he spoke to me in his last hours saying to me:* "*Guard yourself against accomplishing even the least action that may result displeasing to the Lord, and for the rest confide fully in Him.*" »

We make no labor to believe that Monsignor Feruglio did not reach the level of total abandonment in God proper to Father Luigi. However, it is not difficult for us to hypothesize how he desired to put back in order the administration, acting not without a certain severity. Perhaps there had been those who had profited by the extreme goodness of the Father.

Already in a communication to Don Giovanni Dal Negro of 29 September 1883, he manifested his own determination for the purpose of saving a new bitter and useless displeasure to the excellent Father, who certainly deserves very much else than to be grieved.

Also Monsignor Someda, who in August of 1884, after the decease of the archbishop Monsignor Casasola, had become capitular vicar — namely, temporary administrator of the diocese —, had the opportunity to remember his friend and penitent during a controversy between Monsignor Antonio and Don Costantini, caused principally by the

incompatibility between Costantini and Don Stefano Feruglio. The affair will reach its culmination on 6 August 1885, when the resignation of Costantini from the office of vice-director of the House of the *derelitte* was officially requested, in the name of Monsignor Berengo; resignation which was submitted two days later. In the context of such divergence a letter of Monsignor Someda to Feruglio of 27 December 1884 inserts itself probably, with which he requests him, in his capacity as capitular vicar, that one pass to the appointment of an administrator or treasurer of the institute different from Feruglio himself. Monsignor Someda begins the missive with these words:

« *Following the death of the never enough praised Father Luigi Scrosoppi, co-founder of this institution of beneficence, this diocesan authority, by decree of 17 April of the current year, appointed you director of the same.* »

We have cited these details not so much because they possess a value in themselves, as because they demonstrate how the remembrance of Father Luigi resurfaced continually, surrounded by affection and devotion, even in business communications or in bureaucratic documents.

Count Federico Trento, the lawyer Vincenzo Casasola and many others spoke of him constantly as of a saint. And Don Costantini, whom at the end of 1885 we find again linked by mutual and total confidence to Monsignor Feruglio, treated of the sanctity of the founder during his sermons addressed to the sisters in Cormons.

A Pilgrimage of Mother Strazzolini

Mother Serafina Strazzolini had become an aspirant Sister of Providence on 6 May 1850; subsequently she held twice the office of superior general and was superior of the house of Udine from 1855 until her disappearance, which occurred on 18 March 1889. She lived therefore beside the Father for thirty-four consecutive years and, probably, no one could have known him in a more thorough way.

Behold how the "*Cenni biografici della vita edificante delle nostre amate Consorelle"* report a pilgrimage of hers to the tomb of Father Luigi, carried out at the beginning of June of 1885:

« *In 1884, after the decease of the venerable Father Luigi, others were requested — namely, the request for sisters for the recent foundation of Pergine. Several sisters were removed from the kitchen of Udine, to the profound displeasure of the responsible Mother Giacinta De Monte. This latter repaired quietly to complain to the Mother vicar — namely, the substitute of the superior —, since she was not in a position to manage the labor with the only novice left to her.*

Poor Mother Giacinta, she was to be understood, since she managed an extremely fatiguing kitchen. She had moreover to perform the duties of person assigned to reception; therefore to prepare and serve coffee and other beverages to the visitors and to the supporters who arrived numerous at the convent, and the good Father desired that they be treated with every regard.

The poor Mother vicar knew truly not whom to send to her. The sisters had been assigned elsewhere, removed from the schools, from the wardrobes and from the various

workshops. In a provisional way she placed beside her some small orphans, but of these, as is obvious, she could not have a total confidence.

One day she repaired to the kitchen and said to Mother Giacinta: Today I repair to Orzano to pray Father Luigi so that he send us two valid and able aspirants for the kitchen; pray you too, Mother Giacinta, the good Father; I am certain that he will grant our request.

We shall see — namely, Viodarin —, answered the always frank Mother Giacinta.

Mother Serafina was accustomed to rely upon him constantly, in every necessity, and almost always with a favorable outcome. Said and done, she imparted the order to Beppo — namely, Giuseppe Sebastianutti —, shoemaker of the institute and also coachman, to get ready immediately the chaise — namely, brun — and the horse and departed.

Arrived at Orzano, she entered immediately into the small church, prostrated herself with open arms upon the tomb of the Father, supplicated him with tears and fervent prayers to succor her; then, feeling herself reassured, she rose, greeted the sisters present and made her return to Udine.

A short time later there presented herself at the entrance an esteemed young woman who asked to enter among the Sisters of Providence. It was the day of Saint John the Baptist. »

The account proceeds explaining how the admission of that young woman — Maria Conti, who became later sister Annunziata — had to be postponed by a couple of months. « *In this span of time — the Cenni report still — Father Luigi sent another young woman, Nobile Rosa, a valid creature.* »

That turning to the Father in every occurrence and that pilgrimage to his burial demonstrate clearly how profound the faith in the sanctity of the Father was on the part of her who could offer the most elevated and sure testimony of it. We see her there, Mother Serafina, stretched out with open arms; we see her while she rises again comforted.

The coachman who accompanied her in that pilgrimage, Giuseppe Sebastianutti, released some years later to Father Tinti the following declaration:

« *I can affirm with all sincerity that Father Luigi Scrosoppi was my authentic consoler and protector since the first day in which I began to frequent him. He exercised his charity toward me especially when I came to lose my consort and had to provide by myself for the maintenance of seven children.*

The firstborn was only fifteen years old and the last a few days. I was immersed in the darkest sorrow. The most sensitive heart of Father Luigi did not remain indifferent to my misfortune and, after having called me to himself, said to me these words: Courage, courage! I shall take care myself of two of your daughters and shall welcome them into the institute; one of the other small ones, instead, I shall make enter into the Tomadini Institute.

In this way, with these and other acts of charity of his, he relieved in part my condition of misery. »

Effectively a daughter of his, Teresa, was welcomed in 1878 and remained there until 1884; another, Anna, admitted into the institute in 1880, went out from it in 1891.

Iconography of father Luigi

On 22 December 1885 the superior general Mother Cecilia Piacentini wrote to Senator Antonio de Reali at Dosson di Treviso:

« *You will receive, if you have not already received it, the portrait of our unforgettable Father Luigi Scrosoppi, which your most illustrious lordship will deign to accept as a sign of my profound esteem and well-deserved gratitude. The portrait depicts the venerated Father in the act of imparting the benediction; and there is no doubt that he from heaven blesses your most illustrious lordship and your noble family.* »

It is without any doubt a question of a reproduction of the oil painting still present in the college of Providence in Udine, which bears precisely the date of 1885 and the signature of the painter, Antonio Milanopulo. In it the Father is represented standing, with his right hand raised in the act of blessing, while with the left he holds between his fingers the crown of the rosary. In the background, on the right, a bookcase stands out and on the left the desk of Father Luigi is perceived, with some devotional images and an envelope with the address of the Father himself and the postmark of Milan — namely, we know not the identity of the sender of that letter — dated precisely 3 April 1884.

In the same college another portrait of his is found, whose original is preserved in the previous generalate house of Gorizia; on the back of this latter it is noted:

« *realized by the photographic studio of the Count knight E. Graziadei.* »

Such work must be subsequent to the pontifical approval of the rules, granted on 23 September 1891, since the left hand, instead of holding the crown, is leaned upon a roll of parchment — namely, a scroll — which reports the spiritual motto of Father Luigi: *To work, to suffer, to keep silent*, and there beside a crucifix and the volume of the rules are depicted. This representation of the Father is particularly significant in showing how much he was already considered a saint, since, besides the blessing hand, it portrays Father Luigi invested by a bundle of light which descends from above — on the left part — and surrounds his head almost like a diffused halo.

The marked celebratory — namely, hagiographical — style of the second portrait is on the other hand nothing but the consequence of an event that occurred in 1890.

A Page from the Diary of Mother Giuditta Defrancesco

We have already treated previously of this religious woman, who held the office of first superior at the hospital of Pergine, in the region of Trento. Subsequently, from 1890 until the moment of her decease, which occurred in Cormons on 24 December 1909, she performed the duties of vicar general of the congregation. She was an illustrious sister and of high spirituality, to the point that the Jesuit Father Leonida Grazioli published her biography in 1939 with the title: "*Cenni biografici di madre Giuditta Defrancesco"*.

From such volume we report integrally some passages:

« *Toward the end of 1889, the most reverend mother general Cecilia Piacentini convoked Mother Giuditta to Cormons and proposed to her to accompany her to Rome, since it was necessary to occupy oneself with the important practice relative to the confirmation of the sacred rules and to the approval of the constitutions — namely, the fundamental norms of the order.*

The devout pilgrim women, provided with the letters of testimony of bishops and archbishops and of other recommendations, began the journey on 11 January 1890, entrusting the path and the good outcome of the mission to the Mystical Rose and to Saint Joseph.

At the holy house of Loreto, the mother general deposited the constitutions at the feet of the prodigious statue of the Virgin Mary, with the purpose of invoking upon them the benediction of the Mother of God.

She kissed repeatedly those sacred walls in the name of each of her own spiritual daughters and addressed fervent prayers in that small habitation, toward which the venerated Father had always nourished a most ardent devotion: a holy dwelling which reminded the moved sisters of the small house of Udine, the one of Cormons and the small house of Orzano, which guards the mortal remains of their father founder.

Arrived in Rome on 16 January, they were admitted to the audience also by the holy father Leo XIII. And while they awaited with patience the outcome of the evaluations and the fulfillment of the numerous bureaucratic procedures, they had in the meantime the comfort of visiting the splendid churches of Rome and of being present, on 26 January, at the solemn ceremony of beatification of the servant of God Pompilio Pirrotti. »

Here is how Mother Giuditta refers of it:

« *Praised be God in His angels and in His saints. Today, Sunday 26 January, we have had the fortune to be able to assist at the beatification of the religious Pompilio Maria Pirrotti, belonging to the order of the Pious Schools. Monsignor Mezekinki provided us with the entrance ticket. At 9:15 we set out toward the Vatican and arrived at the place extremely fatigued and heated, but the sacred function and the emotion experienced were an effective relief to our physical discomfort.*

There rose into the pulpit — namely, the rostrum — a priest who gave reading of the papal decree — namely, the brief — of beatification and of the summary of the life of the blessed. No sooner had he finished, than the solemn singing of the Te Deum accompanied by music had its beginning, and that was an instant of authentic heavenly beatitude. Certainly, even if I should live a hundred years, there will never be erased from memory an impression so sweet, a remembrance so precious! As if by magic, the curtain that concealed the image of the blessed was lowered and we saw him there, surrounded by the angelic hosts, with an aspect that made him appear in the act of entering into eternal glory. It was not possible to restrain tears out of the strong emotion. The most reverend mother then wept for a long time and would have desired that all her daughters had been present, to draw incitement to accomplish good, to love the spirit of sacrifice and to be constant in the observance of the sacred rules.

Our thought turned immediately to our beloved Father Luigi, expressing the wish that one day the Sisters of Providence also may experience so great a joy in seeing him elevated to the glory of the altars. »

Not even six years had passed since the founder's death.

The hope of seeing one day Father Luigi recognized as an authentic saint for the altar is expressed with the maximum naturalness, as if it were a question of a shared and peaceful expectation, of an event that had necessarily to be accomplished.

A Dialogue Between Saint Cajetan and Saint Joseph

The sisters, for their part, already imagined him resplendent in the Kingdom of Heaven, in cordial and friendly familiarity with the great saints.

They were accustomed to organizing, within the various houses of the congregation, small celebrations on the occasion of special anniversaries. This was a custom in place from remote times, which the Father himself had overseen with loving dedication. We are aware of short academic plays and entertainments in which he had his own parent, Signor Domenico, participate, from which Signor Domenico derived immense enjoyment; and Signor Domenico passed away in the year 1851.

In those performances, poetic compositions were declaimed, some fine hymn was sung — and the help of his friend Don Jacopo Tomadini was certainly not lacking! —, and some dialogue or short play was staged. The professors of the seminary of Udine or other men of letters probably offered their collaboration; however, very soon there emerged among the religious women those who were capable of composing works of value. Mother Giuditta Defrancesco herself was a talented author of short devotional works. But for the small academic representations, Sister Pia Valle distinguished herself in Udine, and Sister Virginia Zalateu in Cormons.

A « Dialogue between Saints Joseph and Cajetan », transcribed in the handwritten chronicle of the Cormons house, is likely due to the latter; it was performed during the feast of the Maternity of Mary Most Holy in 1894, which is to say on the day when, by an ancient tradition that continues still today, religious vows were renewed. A short fragment of it is reproduced here:

« Saint Cajetan: ... Therefore, as far as it lies within my power, I assure you that I will always lend you assistance, for I too harbor a deep affection for these blessed sisters; and furthermore, Father Luigi, their founder, warmly entrusted them to me.

Saint Joseph: Oh! That noble Father Luigi, I know him perfectly; there is someone who is drawing up the chronicle of his existence; and he, filled with solemnity and glory from his heavenly throne, feels joy when, turning his gaze toward this earthly world where evil abounds, he discerns among others the small troop of the Sisters of Providence who strive to accomplish a little good to the honor of God. He does nothing but recommend to me these most beloved daughters of his, and every single one, none excluded, since he would wish to see them all holy, filled with humility as he himself was, animated by a spirit of sacrifice and total self-abnegation. »

It is appropriate to remember that Zalateu began her journey as an aspirant in 1863 and, consequently, knew the Father for a period of over twenty years.

These are but modest testimonies. However, they demonstrate with limpid simplicity how neither the rural quiet of Orzano, nor the wearing and implacable action of time, nor the clamor of the world's turbulences ever succeeded in suffocating the hope of seeing him raised to the altars. At least within the narrow circle of those who had known him deeply and drew life from his charism. But not only in that sphere, nor exclusively within the feminine devotion of his spiritual daughters.

The Biography by Monsignor Tinti

As early as 1894, Monsignor Doctor Luigi, Noble Tinti, was engaged in writing the life of Father Luigi.

Born in Pordenone on August 6, 1834, Tinti resided for several years in Udine, where he also attended the local high school. His father, in fact, practiced law in Udine from 1836 to 1858. It is probable that even during that period the young student had met Father Carlo Filaferro and Father Luigi, while frequenting the church of Santa Maria Maddalena.

Subsequently, he entered the seminary of Portogruaro, where he was ordained a priest in 1856. He obtained a doctorate in theology and dedicated himself to teaching in that same seminary, initially dealing with literary subjects and later with dogmatic theology and sacred eloquence *(that is to say the art of preaching)*. In a short time, he became one of the most eminent figures in the diocese of Concordia, holding the most prestigious offices until becoming dean of the chapter and vicar general to two bishops. He passed away in Portogruaro on November 26, 1908.

It has been written of him that he was a priest of deep faith, animated by an untiring fervor for the good of the faithful, representing the authentic minister of God in all the excellence of the term. A man of action, he gave a strong impulse to the Catholic movement, promoting on every occasion demonstrations of devotion to the Church and loyalty to the pontiff. A refined writer of vast culture, as well as an excellent orator, he used his works and words to spread the glory of God and the benefit of souls. He combined wisdom and intellect with great affability, possessing a simple and cordial manner that made him widely known and esteemed throughout the Venetian territory.

He published about twenty works of various kinds, nine of which were biographical; among these are numbered the life of Father Basilio Brolo of Gemona, a Friar Minor and missionary; that of Blessed Odorico of Pordenone; of the missionary bishop Monsignor Giuseppe Rizzolati of Clauzetto; of the Capuchin Father Marco d'Aviano; of the Franciscan tertiary Sister Elisabetta Vendramini; and of the Canossian Sister Maria Ghezzi.

His first publication in this field was precisely the « *Memoirs of Father Luigi Scrosoppi D.O., Founder of the Institute of the derelitte and of the Sisters of Providence under the Patronage of St. Cajetan in Udine* », published in Udine by the Tipografia del Patronato in September 1896, although they bear the date of 1897.

From the preface, he proves to be fully aware that he is narrating the existence of a saint:

« The Catholic Church — he states — reveals herself holy in every place and in every era. Among the many Italian cities, the noble land of Friuli and Udine can rightly boast several most virtuous citizens who gave rise to holy institutions. The name of those sincere benefactors of the people who were, among many, Renati, Micesio, Venerio, Tomadini, Filaferro, still sounds dear to the people of Udine. In this list of citizens deserving of religion and the homeland, a place of honor is also occupied by Father Luigi Scrosoppi D.O., who dedicated his entire existence and every effort to the benefit of his neighbor, whom he loved in God and for God. »

On page XIII, he writes: *« In the course of these Memoirs of the life of Father Luigi Scrosoppi D.O., words and actions are attributed both to the venerated father founder and to some Sisters of Providence which appear superior to purely human capacities, so much so as to seem prodigies, prophecies, and favors granted by God through his intercession »*; for this reason, he declares himself *« respectful of the most venerable decrees of Pope Urban VIII and other supreme pontiffs in this matter »*, submitting entirely to the judgment of the Holy Apostolic See.

The volume bears the approval of Monsignor Pietro Zamburlini, recently appointed Archbishop of Udine, who advised its distribution.

We believe that the most demanding critic, after a careful reading of the biography of Father Luigi, could express the following judgments.

Regarding historical truthfulness and precision, Tinti proves to be an always meticulous and generally accurate witness. His objective is to describe the character in his interiority and actions, prioritizing the former over the latter. For this reason, he did not lavish effort on research that might have enriched the description of this or that individual episode, contenting himself with what was necessary and sufficient to offer an essential profile of Father Scrosoppi and his works. To achieve this purpose, he avails himself of documents, writes with an evident direct knowledge of the facts, and resorts to the testimonies of others, subjecting them, however, to a careful re-examination. Sometimes he falls into some minor inaccuracy, but these are details of little importance.

If one then evaluates the profound value of what he relates, these aspects emerge. Regarding the holiness of the protagonist, he never slides into the slightest excess or celebratory enthusiasm. He brings out his spirit and describes his virtues, but with prudent reserve and a delicate moderation. He almost seems moved by the fear of magnifying even minimally the figure of his subject, preferring to reproduce it exactly as it had been.

In making mention of extraordinary mystical phenomena, he uses a sober writing style, even attenuating their exceptional nature, undoubtedly also so as not to lend himself to the criticisms of the skeptics of the era, to whom he sometimes makes explicit reference.

Perhaps for the same reason, namely the fear of malevolent or disrespectful interpretations, he corrects here and there some statements of which he made use and of which we preserve copies, as well as the correspondence *(that is to say the collection of letters)*; for example, he turns to the masculine what in the original source is feminine,

or transforms, in the letters, the "*tu*" into "*lei*". Furthermore, in the collection of letters, he usually maintains anonymity regarding the recipients, probably out of a form of reserve toward persons still living.

In conclusion, one has the clear impression that Tinti expresses, out of a sort of delicate caution, less than he actually thinks regarding holiness. However, already from what he expounds, it is evident that Father Luigi, however humble and modest, appeared to him to be of heroic spiritual greatness.

The fact that Tinti's biography was published in Udine, the city where Father Luigi was born and had lived, and just a few years after his death, when an entire people could confirm or deny what was written; in a city not at all inclined, by regional character, to exaltation and even less to the creation of myths; in a city where the noise caused by certain events, such as those relating to the Cernazai inheritance, had not yet died down; this single element is sufficient, in our opinion, to demonstrate how Tinti was certain that his presentation within a framework of holiness was the correct one. There is not, either between the lines or beyond them, the slightest sign of a hazardous assessment. One seems to read there only: behold who Father Luigi was, as you all well know.

A confirmation came from the reviews of the work.

The first to write about it was the Abbot Professor Lorenzo Schiavi in *Il Cittadino Italiano* on December 2, 1896. Schiavi, born in Pordenone on January 12, 1829, was part of the clergy of Udine until 1865 and was a teacher of religion in the city's gymnasium-lyceum; later, mainly because of his intransigent rigor, he had to move to Capodistria. He is the author of numerous publications, especially of a defensive character regarding the faith. In his review, he unites Father Carlo Filaferro and Father Luigi in a single praise, recalling the ardor of their charity and their heroic fervor, defining them as the "*two united champions of charity.*" For Father Scrosoppi, he highlights a particular aspect:

« In Divine Providence he confided uninterruptedly; and he proceeded manifestly sustained by her. »

Regarding Tinti, he states that he wrote with sobriety and at the same time with vivacity of expression and a pleasant style, showing on almost every page men who labor for the cause of God. He concludes by maintaining that from the reading of the volume there arise incitements to virtue and to works moved by an authentic love of God, in addition to the presence of Providence which dominates from beginning to end.

The Catholic daily of Venice, *La Difesa*, also published a valuable review of Tinti's biography on December 31, 1896, defining it as the fruit of patient and scrupulous research. From it, the great virtues and the traits of the sweetest personality of Father Scrosoppi emerge clearly, together with all the signs of the charity of this holy priest, a most pure soul who, forgetful of self, had as his sole earthly purpose the glory of God and the good of his neighbor.

« And so that the portrait of Father Scrosoppi — one reads therein — should turn out as faithful as possible to the truth, Monsignor Tinti has respected with extreme rigor the exactness and sincerity of the narrative, which always proceeds with admirable clarity

and with a simple and elegant style, animated by the deep affection and respectful friendship that bound the author to the venerated Father of the Sisters of Providence. »

Even more incisive is the review that appeared in the magazine *Civiltà Cattolica (anno 48° - 1897 - p. 609)*, in which it is stated, among other things:

« Father Luigi Scrosoppi is one of those men illustrious for virtue and great works undertaken for the glory of God and the benefit of souls, whom the history of this second half of the 19th century will always remember with the highest praise. »

The mind runs immediately to the great figures of Saint John Bosco, Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, Saint Joseph Cafasso, and others.

« But of great enterprises — continues the reviewer — none come to completion except by saints, and Father Luigi was a saint; austere and rigorous with himself, he was full of sweetness with others, humble to the most sincere contempt of self, filled with faith and an extraordinary spirit of prayer. In addition to his natural gifts as an excellent superior and administrator, he received from God in no common measure the gift of counsel and even of a profound knowledge of hearts. »

The testimony is so explicit and offers such a vivid image of the Father — with nuances that do not appear even in Tinti's biography — as to lead us to believe it is the work of some Jesuit in close confidence with Father Luigi. We recall, in fact, that he had very frequent contacts with the Society of Jesus; he attempted to open one of their houses in Udine, hosting some of them for over a year in the house of the congregation of the Oratory; he had Father Giuseppe Rossi as the spiritual guide of the house of Cormons for many years; and he was close friends with other Jesuits, such as Father Moser and Father Banchich.

We do not believe that one could desire a more unanimous and at the same time more authoritative consensus in praising the holiness of a humble provincial priest, intentionally hidden and a lover of reserve; nor do we think that those witnesses could have affirmed the holiness of Father Scrosoppi with greater clarity, speaking explicitly of heroism, of virtues out of the common, and even of mystical charisms.

Graces Attributed to the Intercession of Father Luigi

We have already previously mentioned two graces attributed to the intercession of Father Luigi, obtained in Orzano immediately after his burial; it is noteworthy that one of them is a grace of a « spiritual » nature, namely the gift of Christian resignation granted to a father driven to despair by the loss of his little son.

During the summer vacations of 1884, precisely in the months of August and September, the news of the healing of a tumorous *(that is cancerous)* sore, also attributed to prayers recited at his grave, spread widely in Orzano. The episode aroused great emotion among the population and among the pupils of the House of the *derelitte* who were residing in Orzano for their vacation period.

The fame of Father Luigi's holiness grew in parallel with the expansion of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence into the different regions of Italy, and with it, devotion toward him constantly increased.

Within the scope of the two canonical proceedings, the informative and the apostolic *(that is the phases of the beatification process)*, direct or indirect testimonies regarding significant favors and graces were not lacking. Miss Luigia Pellizzari of Udine, born in 1865, who attended the festive oratory when the Father was still alive, declared during the informative process:

« I learned that several people addressed prayers to Father Luigi, obtaining graces through his intercession. I myself made an appeal to the Father, finding myself oppressed by such sufferings that it seemed to me I was enduring the pains of hell; following this request of mine, made with trust in him around the years 1896-97, I felt relieved. »

Sister Maria Agnese Delugan, born in 1876 and admitted into the congregation on March 30, 1901 — who twice held the office of Superior General from 1921 to 1933 and from 1939 to 1947 — repeatedly confirms in the same process:

« Since the time of my novitiate, I used to hear talk of graces and favors obtained through his intercession. »

Both the religious women, convinced of his holiness, and other persons moved by a profound trust in his protection, turned to Father Luigi's help. Invoked with faith, he obtained from God healings from the most diverse pathologies and support in circumstances of grave necessity. Many of these events are documented by written accounts penned by the beneficiaries, by direct testimonies, or by medical certifications.

Physical healing was often followed by spiritual conversion, and numerous people, thanks to Father Luigi, rediscovered their bond with God, from whom they had distanced themselves. Such favors, although less evident than material graces since they occur in the depths of the soul, are no less important or extraordinary because of that.

Unfortunately, the systematic gathering of the memory of these graces and favors was begun with a certain delay; nevertheless, several hundred of them have been cataloged.

In this place we shall publish none of them, as we await with devout respect the official pronouncement of the Church. We have made mention of them solely so that it may appear evident that this confirmation to Father Luigi's fame of holiness was not lacking either. If during his existence extraordinary wonders, healings, prophetic gifts, or the capacity to read into the depth of hearts were attributed to him, after his passing there was the certainty that his supplications were powerful before God: a solid and uninterrupted conviction, though maintained with discretion and reserve.

3. THE PROCESSES FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF FATHER LUIGI SCROSOPPI

Over Forty Years of Waiting

The question naturally arises as to why no one thought immediately of undertaking the cause of beatification for Father Luigi. Why wait nearly half a century? And yet, the desire for beatification had always been present from the very early years: Mother Cecilia Piacentini and Sister Giuditta Defrancesco had wished for it as early as January 26, 1890. The biography written by Tinti and published in 1897 could have constituted an excellent foundation for such a proceeding.

The witnesses who took part in the informative process *(that is the first phase of the inquiry into holiness)* offered two reasons — one of a psychological nature and one of a practical character — to explain this delay: on one hand, the very education imparted by the founder to his religious women may have had an influence, a teaching entirely aimed at humility and reserve and far removed from any form of ostentation; on the other hand, as the same witnesses observe, the congregation did not have at its disposal the necessary financial resources to employ in this holy undertaking.

To these two reasons, others were added. Father Luigi, in our opinion, was undoubtedly a saint. We must, however, admit that neither his personality, nor the institutions he initiated, nor the spiritual favors attributed to his intercession had a resonance such as to make that process, so to speak, an urgent and inevitable act. These factors have their own relevance. It seems almost as if Divine Providence intended to lead Father Luigi toward the glory of the altars "*sottovoce*" *(that is in a discreet and silent manner)*, just as it had guided him with discretion during his existence.

This was a style very dear to him. Furthermore, as in any human event, an enterprising personality would have been needed who possessed the courage to decide and the competence to promote the long-desired cause of beatification. However, Monsignor Antonio Feruglio — who upon the death of Father Luigi had become director of the House of the *derelitte* and of the congregation of sisters and who aspired to the honor of the altars for the Father — was appointed Bishop of Vicenza in 1893 and became totally absorbed by the responsibilities of his episcopal ministry.

The hypothesis of initiating such a process was taken into consideration during the first years of the episcopal mandate of Antonio Anastasio Rossi, precisely thanks to his interest. This occurred around the years 1912-1913.

In the meantime, the fame of the Father's holiness remained very much alive among the Sisters of Providence and manifested itself especially on the occasion of the small celebrations organized in honor of the religious women who had been his contemporaries.

In 1905, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the religious clothing of Sister Angelica Gervasoni, a poetic composition *(that is a long poem)* recalled the education in every virtue received from the « Father and angel », who now, seeing the results, praised

that spiritual daughter of his from Heaven, considering her a worthy bride of the King of kings.

In 1913, for the same anniversary concerning Mother Cecilia Piacentini, she was exhorted to contemplate in heaven the « *chosen troop of holy advocates* » (that is the celestial protectors) of the congregation: that is, Saint Joseph, Saint Cajetan and, above all, the founder, defined as « *holy and pious Father* ».

However, the First World War intervened (1914-1918) and this was followed by the difficult post-war period.

Yet, precisely during those tormented years, devotion toward the memory of Father Scrosoppi re-emerged with force. Accounts of visions of him and even of his physical appearances in defense of his houses in Orzano and Udine spread; day by day, reports of graces obtained through his protection grew more and more frequent.

The Diocesan Informative Process

The mortal remains of the Father, buried in the chapel of the Madonna of Loreto in Orzano, were moved for a first time in 1896, on the occasion of the final works necessary for the blessing of the chapel itself and its official opening for worship, which took place on October 18, 1897. Since, according to the original positioning, the tomb would have been located right under the altar slab (that is the cafeteria), it was necessary to translate it slightly outward.

In that circumstance, tradition has it that the bricklayers found the sepulcher flooded with water. The workers, uncertain of what to do, walked away for their afternoon break, turning to the Father with these words:

« If you are a saint, you see to finding a remedy. »

Upon their return, they found the tomb completely dry. It became necessary, however, to prepare a new wooden coffin, while the inner zinc one had remained entirely intact.

The remains of Father Luigi rested in that place for over thirty years. Inside the chapel, a memorial tablet had been placed in 1896, but the exact spot of the grave — the opening of which was close to the external wall of the apse (that is the terminal part of the church) — remained without any distinctive marks, until a luxuriant bush of Indian shot plants grew over it.

It is not known whether the water infiltration had been noticed during the construction of the tomb in the years 1879-80 or at the time of the burial in 1884. It is probable not, since otherwise a different placement would have been chosen or a remedy would have been sought. Afterward, that spring of water continued to flow abundantly, remaining clear and transparent. The religious women used it for the needs of the house, and during the years of the conflict in 1944-45, all the inhabitants of Orzano drew from it because the aqueduct was out of order.

On December 20, 1927, at 11:00 a.m., the exhumation was proceeded with under the supervision of the local physician (that is the health officer) of Remanzacco, Doctor

Ferruccio Del Fiorentino, and the clerk Luigi Turcutti. Present were Don Emidio Rizzi, chaplain of Orzano, and Don Giuseppe Grosso, administrator of the seminary of Udine and for some time rector of the College of Providence; the latter had been tasked by the curia with representing the diocesan authority, which had granted permission for the exhumation. Also assisting were several sisters, including the Superior General Mother Agnese Delugan.

The religious women, guided by the general secretary of the congregation Sister Berchmana Stua, had provided for the cleaning of the bones to remove the layer of mud that had penetrated them.

The Father's remains were then placed in a small zinc casket, which was in turn inserted into a wooden one, and laid back in the same tomb, although in a higher position relative to the ground. A few months later, a sort of small monument (that is a shrine) supported by two columns set against the outer wall of the choir was built; a niche was hollowed out in the wall where the casket was placed.

Meanwhile, the Jesuit Father Pietro Colombara was writing a new biography of Father Luigi, published in its first edition in the autumn of 1928 and in its second the following year, under the title: *"An Apostle of Charity: Father Luigi Scrosoppi, Priest of the Oratory of Udine and the Institute of the Sisters of Providence Founded by Him"*.

Father Colombara himself declared that he had used Tinti's work as his main source, integrating it with observations and information provided by a dozen sisters still living who had known the founder well. In the biographies of the religious women placed in the appendix, he summarized what was preserved in private manuscripts written by reliable witnesses.

In reality, Colombara did not carry out any particular research to integrate Tinti's work, limiting himself to giving it a more current linguistic form; only rarely is new information encountered. His greatest commitment was concentrated on describing, in the fourth part of the work, the successes and merits of the Institute of Providence.

The preface was dictated on August 20, 1928, by the new Archbishop of Udine, Monsignor Giuseppe Nogara, who among other things wrote:

« The instinctive devotion of the faithful, which is usually a correct evaluator of virtues and merits, foresees that perhaps the day is not far off when the authority of the Church will be able to decree the honor of the altars to Father Luigi Scrosoppi and to some of the religious women, his spiritual daughters. »

The renewed fervor around his figure was supported in a particular way by Father Giovanni Battista Tommasi of Bassano (1866–1954), from 1911 Superior General of the Stigmatines and from 1922 consultant to the Congregation for Religious and apostolic visitor *(ovvero an inspector appointed by the Pope)* to numerous institutes. In September 1927, he was in Udine, at the College of Providence, for the revision of the fundamental norms of the congregation according to the new provisions of the Code of Canon Law. Joining his voice to that of other priests and religious, he strongly urged the initiation of the canonical process for beatification.

It is appropriate to emphasize here that, in addition to Father Tommasi's personal value and experience, his incitement was founded on very solid and authoritative bases. Since 1900, the Stigmatines had opened the « *Bertoni* » archiepiscopal college in Udine, precisely in the palace that had formerly belonged to the Cernazai family, which had fallen to the Sisters of Providence as the third part assigned to them in the contested inheritance of Monsignor Francesco Cernazai. Furthermore, it was the sisters themselves who donated the library of Father Luigi and his two brothers to the Stigmatines for their new house in Udine. Father Tommasi, therefore, did not express a generically devout opinion, nor did he urge the cause without knowing the merits of the founder. He manifested a feeling and an opinion rooted in time and widely shared.

From April 20, 1926, Mother Pia Aldegheri had been elected superior of the College of Providence of Udine — the former House of the *derelitte* — and simultaneously one of the general assistants of the congregation. Born Maria in Cavalese, in the Trentino region, on May 8, 1876, she had entered as an aspirant on August 1, 1895, and had pronounced her vows on October 24, 1898, assuming the name so dear to the founder of Sister Maria Pia of Saint Joseph; a name that honored the holy father Pope Pius IX and had already been borne, since 1879, by Rosa Schnitzer and Giuseppina Pizzini. A determined woman and a religious of great spiritual depth, Mother Aldegheri dedicated herself with all her heart to this noble enterprise.

« I recognize that I was the promoter of the cause of beatification — she declared in the preliminary process — because I was exhorted initially by several priests, later by the Archbishop Monsignor Giuseppe Nogara, and finally by Father Tommasi. Precisely the latter, Father Tommasi, imposed this task upon me as a moral duty; and as I expressed worry over the lack of financial resources, he exhorted me to rely on Divine Providence. »

The Superior General Mother Agnese Delugan declared in the same process that she had welcomed the invitations of Monsignor Nogara, Father Tommasi, and Mother Aldegheri, *« who exerted a gentle pressure on me for the beginning of the cause. »*

She also stated that she had always harbored devotion toward the Father, *« whose imitation I have constantly recommended, especially regarding the virtues of humility and reserve. »* She explained that she had not made up her mind previously *« because I preferred to honor the father founder within the intimacy of the house. »*

However, the time established by Providence for his glorification had now arrived, so that his good works might be known beyond the circle of his spiritual daughters and glory might be given to the Father who is in heaven. The Superior and the General Council officially resolved to promote the cause on October 18, 1931.

On January 29, 1932, Monsignor Giuseppe Nogara appointed Monsignor Giuseppe Drigani, professor of dogmatic theology in the seminary of Udine and honorary canon of the cathedral, a man illustrious for both doctrine and virtue, as the officer in charge (that is postulator) of the cause; on the 31st of the same month, he was joined, as vice-officer, by Don Giovanni Pigani, a priest of deep piety and a skilled musician.

On February 12, 1932, Monsignor Nogara presided over the official opening of the process, which concluded over four years later, on December 30, 1936, after having in the meantime also carried out the verification on the absence of an unauthorized public cult (that is the process « *de non worship* »).

On February 22, 1937, the vice-officer Don Pigani delivered the official documents of the process to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. After its closure, other writings by Father Scrosoppi and a substantial documentation concerning his life and works were found. The entire material was transcribed into twenty-nine files which, validated by the Udine curia, were sent to the aforementioned Sacred Congregation at the end of 1946.

The transfer of the corpse to Udine

Already immediately after the conclusion of the informative process — namely, the first phase of the inquiry into sanctity —, the hypothesis of transferring to the college of Providence in Udine the remains of the founder had been advanced. However, the idea did not surpass the stage of a vague desire, also because in 1939 the beginning of the second world conflict made vain every purpose.

On 19 November 1950 the superior general Mother Lia Felicetti wrote from Gorizia — where in 1908 the novitiate denominated « *Nazareno* » had been instituted and in 1925 the seat of the generalate house had been transferred — to the archbishop of Udine Monsignor Nogara, requesting the authorization to execute solemnly the so much desired transfer. The archbishop, having received a favorable opinion from the sacred congregation of rites so that the ordinary — namely, the local bishop — might proceed according to his own authority, issued the decree of authorization on 29 October 1951.

Already from 7 August 1951 a formal memory had been sent to the municipality of Remanzacco to highlight the opportunity of the transfer. Subsequently, on 24 March 1952, the presidency of the council of ministers issued the decree that allowed the privileged burial in the chapel of San Gaetano of the Institute of Providence.

On 16 April a manifesto signed by « The Committee » was posted through the streets of Udine which announced the event: the mortal remains of Father Luigi would depart from Orzano at 8:00 on 24 April, to arrive at 9:00 on the square Paolo Diacono, in the northern zone of Udine. From there the corpse would be conducted solemnly into the church of the "*Santissimo Redentore"* — where Father Luigi had received baptism — and finally to the chapel of street Ronchi.

However, the events unfolded in a way very different from what was planned.

On 23 April at 10:00 they proceeded to the removal of the wall and to the recovery of the coffin. The minutes were subscribed by Monsignor Giuseppe Grosso, by the priest Vincenzo Mauro, by the Capuchin Father Cesario from Rovigo, by the municipal secretary of Remanzacco Igino Di Piazza, by Luigi Turcutti and by the religious women Lia Felicetti — namely, the superior general —, Agnese Delugan — namely, the vicar — and Niceta Simion — namely, the superior of the house of Udine. There were present furthermore Doctor Del Fiorentino, formerly the physician charged in the recognition of

1927, the new health officer Doctor Bianchi and other sisters, from among whom sister Rita Dorigotti and sister Giovanna Usilla.

The rite should have accomplished itself in the most absolute reserve; for such a reason the gates and every other access had been barred. However, every precaution was overturned by the devotion and by the resentment of the inhabitants of Orzano.

It is necessary to remember that that people attributed to Father Luigi the merit of having been preserved for sixty-eight years — namely, since the distant 1884 — from hail and from contagious illnesses — namely, the epidemics —; to him they vituperated the salvation of six fellow villagers returned from captivity and it was narrated of an extraordinary light that one night had illuminated the sky of the village, radiating precisely from the tomb of the Father.

Since months there was murmuring against the project of the transfer and there was no economy of harsh words. One of the most common affirmations was: « *The Father established in his will to wish to remain among us, and a will cannot be modified even by the Pope!* » In reality, such disposition does not appear in the written will of Father Scrosoppi, although it was an explicit desire of his expressed by voice.

Sunday 20 April, the chaplain announces from the pulpit the imminent and painful transfer; at the same time the manifesto is posted on the door of the church. It was like setting fire to a heap of straw. The evening of the 22nd, women and children run with vessels and bottles to collect the water from the tomb of the Father, since they deem it « *holy water*. » The morning of the 23rd, while the minutes are being drafted, the bell tolls back — namely, with rapid tolls to give the alarm — to protest against what they define a "*theft.*"

In vain Monsignor Grosso tries to bring back calm among the crowd:

« *Be good! If we carry away the mortal remains, the spirit of the Father will remain always here in Orzano.* »

« *Well* — they answer him — *the spirit you may carry away indeed, but leave the bones to us!* »

The situation risks to degenerate; the police escort promised by the authorities has not arrived yet. Father Cesario mounts into the automobile to solicit helps; someone strikes the hood of the carriage with a shovel.

There was certainly a component of local pride — namely, spirit of the steeple —, but the principal motivation resided in affection and in faith.

When the small coffin is carried into the chapel, the crowd destroys in an instant a bush of hawthorn in blossom to cover the remains of the Father, while prayers and weepings arise. Outside some young men plot to subtract with force the corpse, while the elderly try to negotiate with the superior general and the priests. Mother Niceta watches over the coffin keeping a hand firm upon it for fear that it be carried away.

Finally Father Cesario returns with a vehicle of the police and twelve from among agents and carabinieri. The bell resumes to toll the alarm. Profiting by a moment of

general distraction, sister Niceta and sister Giovanna hide the coffin under the seat of the vehicle. No one perceives it and shortly after the vehicle departs.

« *Poor Father!* — a chronicle written by hand reports — *He flees secretly, even more than his profound humility would have required.* »

The carabinieri remained on the place until 9:00 of the following day, Thursday, to give the impression that the remains were still there.

Thus Father Luigi makes return in silence to the small church of the house of Udine, transported in the arms of an agent of police. This latter, not finding anything prepared, deposits the coffin directly upon the altar.

A religious woman runs through the institute crying: « *The Father has arrived! The Father has arrived!* »

The sisters, between astonishment and incredulity, run into the church. He is truly there, in the small wooden coffin upon the altar where for half a century he had celebrated Mass and lived his own sacrifice.

In the sequel, the remains are carried into the room of the "*professato*" — namely, the hall where the sisters emit their vows — and then again to the chapel. The night passes in wake of prayer.

The morning of Thursday 24 April, at 9:00, a long cortege moves from the square Paolo Diacono toward the church of the *Santissimo Redentore*, where the vicar general Monsignor Luigi Venturini celebrates the Mass of suffrage and holds a homily, while the archbishop Nogara imparts the last benediction — namely, the funeral absolution. Then the coffin, transported by the seminarians — namely, the clerics — as had happened in the funeral of 1884, is placed upon a white carriage and conducted in private form to the college of Providence.

Toward evening, Monsignor Grosso recites the prayers provided by the rite and the loculus, obtained in the left wall of the chapel, is closed with a slab of green marble with white and black veins. Later there will be placed upon it a tablet with an inscription and the image of the Father in the act of blessing.

The daily newspapers « *Il Messaggero Veneto* », « *Il Gazzettino* » and the weekly « *La Vita Cattolica* » referred amply of the transfer and of the events occurred; they returned to write with profound devotion of Father Scrosoppi on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the death, in 1954.

For the circumstance, sister Fidalma Longo composed an hymn that exhorted to joy and to imitation the spiritual daughters of the Father, the sisters of Providence, by now present in ninety houses between Italy and South America. The first signs of the official glorification were by now glimpsed: « *The glory outlines itself for the pious founder.* »

In the meantime a project sustained since 1938 by Monsignor Luigi Pilosio, parish priest of the Redentore, materialized, namely the naming of a city street after Father Luigi. Monsignor Pilosio, born in Udine in 1876, was a witness of the esteem and of the faith that the people of Udine nourished toward the founder; he himself had made a tablet be

placed near the baptismal font of his church. The proposal was represented at the end of 1950 and on 9 January 1951 the commission for toponymy approved it, assigning the name of Father Luigi Scrosoppi to the stretch of street Ronchi comprised between street Treppo and Largo Cappuccini, where the college of Providence and the Kindergarten of Charity rise. President of such commission was Doctor Antonio Scrosoppi, son of Luigi and a distant relative — namely, a third cousin — of the Father.

The Apostolic Process

After the consignment to the sacred congregation of the Acts of the ordinary processes unfolded in Udine between 1932 and 1936, the activity for the introduction of the cause had its beginning, which from that moment was to be discussed in Rome. The first person charged — namely, the postulator — was the Philippine religious Father Carlo Naldi, whom other members of the Oratory succeeded. On 24 March 1952 the cause was entrusted to the Passionist Father Mauro Liberati, general representative of his congregation and already curator of several causes, from among which that of Saint Maria Goretti. On 14 March 1952, the examination of the writings of Father Luigi being completed, the sacred congregation issued the decree so that one might proceed, according to the canonical norms, to the subsequent passages necessary for the introduction of the cause.

On 18 February 1964 the same congregation discussed on the opportunity of initiating officially the cause and on the 27th of the same month, with the approval of the supreme pontiff Paul VI, the relative decree was published.

On 3 November 1964, at 11:00, in the private chapel of the archbishop's palace of Udine, in the presence of the archbishop Monsignor Giuseppe Zaffonato, the first session of the apostolic process — namely, the inquiry conducted directly by the papal authority — was held. In such occasion the members of the ecclesiastical tribunal took oath and the other formalities provided by the rite were fulfilled; Monsignor Riccardo Travani, archpriest of the cathedral — noble metropolitan —, was appointed vice postulator.

During the development of the process, the sacred congregation granted the authorization so that the specific proceeding concerning the two miracles which were believed obtained through the intercession of Father Scrosoppi be instructed also. After the cause was opened, Father Mauro resigned from his position due to age and health reasons, and was replaced by his brother Father Federico Menegazzo, who had been the general director of causes for his congregation since 1953.

On 8 April 1965 a new recognition of the corpse was executed, also with the purpose of guaranteeing a better preservation of the bones through adequate chemical treatments. Such operation was accomplished by the commendator Doctor Osvaldo Zacchi of Rome, medical expert of the process, in the presence of some priests — from among whom Monsignor Giuseppe Grosso, the Capuchin Father Cesario from Rovigo and Monsignor Corrado Roiatti, rector of the college of Providence — and of numerous sisters of the congregation. In this circumstance it was ascertained that the height of Father Luigi must be of about 1.70 meters. The skeleton resulted complete, exception made for some small

bones of the fingers — namely, phalanges —, since during the exhumation of 1927 a subtraction of bone fragments had verified itself; the teeth preserved only two elements, while the cranium and the lower jaw — namely, the mandible — appeared exceptionally well preserved, especially if it is considered that the corpse had remained immersed for thirty-eight years in water and in mud — namely, the silt.

Exposition of the remains of Father Luigi at the end of the procedure of exhumation of 1927 by the care of Doctor Osvaldo Zacchi of Rome, medical expert charged.

The apostolic process concluded on 3 September 1966. After having examined some writings of Father Luigi found recently, the sacred congregation recognized the validity of the proceedings on 15 July 1968.

After a long period of expectation, on 4 October 1977 the special congress met to discuss the exercise of virtues in a heroic degree — or the heroism of virtues — on the part of Father Scrosoppi; to this followed the plenary assembly of the cardinals on 17 January 1978. The solemn decree on the heroic virtues was issued by Paul VI on 12 June 1978.

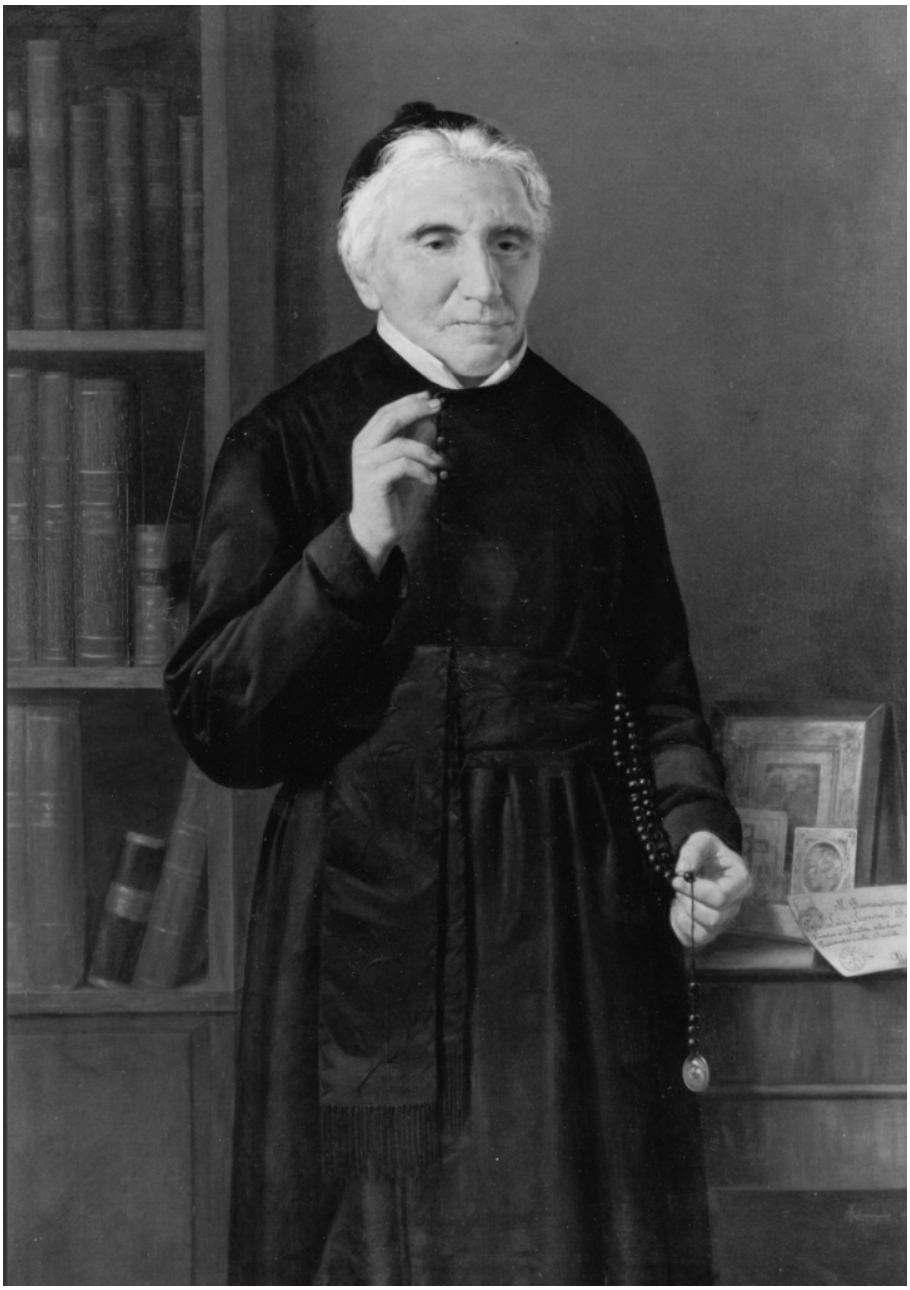
Now, to his spiritual daughters, the sisters of Providence, and to all those who desire that God be honored through his faithful servant, there remains not but to sustain with fervent prayers the prosecution of the cause, so that the pronouncement of the Church confirm soon the conviction that resides in our soul. And perhaps to the religious women a still higher task belongs: to revive in their own souls the heroic spirit of their holy founder, since this represents, without any doubt, the best way to implore from Heaven his glorification.

4. CONCLUSION

We have drafted these pages with all the care and attention that have been possible to us. Since we felt the profound responsibility that we had toward God and the Church, we have accompanied our labor with constant prayers, so that it be permitted to us to describe the figure of Father Luigi Scrosoppi with the maximum impartiality — namely, objectivity.

Without doubt, in the future one will be able to write of him with greater elegance of language — namely, eloquence — and depth of analysis. However, we dare to deem that it will not be possible to express words more precise than those which we place here, at the term of our labor, as a synthesis of what Father Luigi was and transmitted:

« *My God, my All! Humberly!* »



Portrait of Father Luigi executed in 1885 by the painter of Udine A. Milanopulo.
It is the unique and most faithful portrait existing of this our loved saint.

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