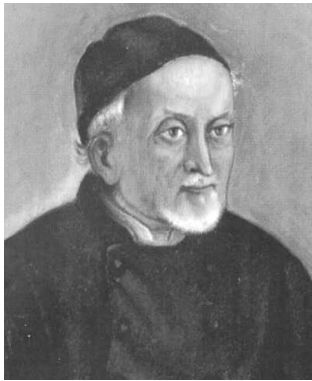


Biographies of the Early Stigmatine Community



Venerable Gaspar Bertoni
[† June 12, 1853]



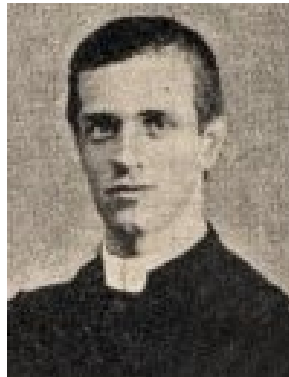
Rev. John Mary Marani
[† July 1, 1871]



Rev. Louis Bragato
[† October 13, 1874]



Rev. John Baptist Lenotti
[† September 5, 1875]



Rev. Antonio Conte
[† December 18, 1888]



Rev. Peter Vignola
[† August 23, 1891]

English Translation:
Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS – 2006

Electronic Edition:
Tereza Lopes [Lay Stigmatine]

OUTLINE

**Reminiscences concerning
The Fathers and the Brothers
of the Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries
for the Assistance of Bishops**

Volume I:

**Venerable Gaspar Bertoni
[† June 12, 1853]
and Necrologies of the Early Stigmatine Community
[1839 - 1859]**

Volume II:

**Additional Early Necrologies of the Stigmatine Community
[1860 -1872]**

Volume III:

**Necrologies of other Early Stigmatine Apostolic Missionaries
[1874 -1883]**

Reminiscences of the life of Father Antonio Conte

[+ December 18, 1888] - By Fr. Paul Gradinati

Brief Biographical Sketches

Volume I

**Father Peter Vignola, Superior General [† August 23, 1891]
and his brother, Father Vincent Vignola [† April 20, 1889]**

Volume II

Father Joseph Marchesini † May 18, 1903]

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Reminiscences

concerning

The Fathers and the Brothers

of the

**Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries
for the Assistance of Bishops**

Volume I

Venerable Gaspar Bertoni

[† June 12, 1853]

**And Necrologies of the Members of the
Early Stigmatine Community
[1835 -1859]**

VERONA

**Prem. Tipografia Vescovile P. Colombari
1886**

**English Translation:
Rev. Joseph Henchey, CSS - 2006**

**Electronic Edition:
Tereza Lopes [Lay Stigmatine]**

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Dedication

**To the
Very Reverend Peter Vignola, Superior General
on the
Occasion of his Golden Priestly Jubilee,
September 24, 1886**

Very Reverend Father,

The friendship of many years, with which you honor me, that kind of kinship that unites us, and above all that great benefit that I alone know and profess to have received from you, for a long time now, have made me feel the need of paying tribute to you, with a public attestation of sincere affection.

It is because I have agreed wholeheartedly with the thought of presenting to you, on the most happy occurrence of your Priestly Jubilee, these brief *Reminiscences* of those Father and Brothers of the Congregation, over which you preside with such wisdom. These men have already returned to the bosom of God, to reap the reward of their virtues. These *Reminiscences* were given to me by some of your sons. To them, it seemed only just that these early products might extend their influence even beyond that cloister where they lived. In this way, there would be enhanced the cherished hope that the example of these men, whom the Congregation was called upon to bring to spiritual maturity, might have an even greater effect.

Accept, then, Very Reverend Father, these precious *Reminiscences*, as a sign of my gratitude, and of the ardent best wishes, that on this happy day, I offer up to the Lord for you, and for all of your beloved sons, in whose jubilation, with all my heart, I consider myself fortunate to be associated.

So, then, Very Reverend Father, if I might hope – and I do hope - that I may not be forgotten in your prayers before the Lord on this day. I would thus believe that I would then be compensated, with interest, for the little that I have been able to do on so happy an occasion.

Permit me, lastly, with all respect, to kiss your hand – in this act, I profess that I am filled with a holy joy!

Verona, September 24, 1886

Your most devoted and affectionate servant,
Fr. Ferdinand Colombari

Preface

If the death of the just is precious before the Lord – *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints...* [Ps 115:15] – then, so, too, are their virtuous acts. It is from these that their lives may be understood, and what it was that rendered them worthy of the Crown of Heaven. To gather *Recollections* about them, is a duty of piety toward the deceased, and it offers a useful service to those still living. What a beautiful inheritance has been left to us by the words and examples of the Reverend fathers and Brothers who have preceded us! The sweet odor of virtue, especially of some of them, still remains fragrant in our midst, and in our city and throughout the Diocese. However, since time destroys everything, it has already robbed us of a good part of so many pious memories, it was the earnest wish of all that these *Reminiscences* should be written.

The thought of ever having them printed did not dawn on us until a short time ago. As the celebration of the Priestly Jubilee of our Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola approached, this thought came to us. Therefore, there was much haste in compiling, as best we could, the information contained herein. We present here the results of our efforts, in the short time that was available to us. Hence, there are not a few defects, but may the reader pardon us, considering rather the good intention we had of satisfying the desires of all, and of adding one more tribute to the anniversary being celebrated by our most beloved Superior and Father.

Verona, from the Stimmate, September 1, 1886.

The Priests of the Stimmate

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BRIEF REMARKS

THE CONGREGATION OF APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES: FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BISHOPS

Its Origin – Difficulties – Nature and Scope

During the year 1810 ¹, all religious orders were suppressed. A man of God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a gem of the Veronese Clergy, was transferred by Bishop Liruti to the Parish of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. As a Curate for ten years in his home parish of St. Paul's in *Campo Marzo*, he had accomplished much good. However, it was in this next parish where he went to live that the Lord was waiting to communicate to him His special designs. A most successful Parish Mission was conducted at Saints Firmus and Rusticus by the celebrated Missionary Apostolic, Monsignor Louis Pacetti. With his ardent zeal, Fr. Gaspar took an active part in this Parish Mission. During it, he felt within himself ever more clearly, the inspiration from heaven to dedicate himself to this type of life. He manifested this idea of his to a group of priest friends of his, who had long considered him as their Father and Master. They gave their word that they were ready to follow him.

Therefore, on November 4, 1816, he, with his former pupil of the old Oratory of St. Paul's in Campo Marzo, Fr. John Mary Marani [2] and his beloved Paul Zanolì, first withdrew from the world. They took up residence as poor men, in a little house next to the Church of the Stigmata ². The property included all the area of our present House, as well as that of the Convent of St. Teresa ³. The Church and the gardens had been offered to him by the Very Reverend Father Galvani ⁴.

In addition to these, there was another piece of property, including a garden, at the *Dereletti*, situated near the Parish Church of St. Stephen's – and still another building near the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity ⁵.

From the outset, they were occupied in teaching school to young boys. Somewhat later, other priests joined them: Fr. Gramego, Fr. Farinati, Fr. Bragato, Fr. Brugnoli and Fr. Cartolari. They were able to offer a complete high school

¹ Translator's Note: in the course of this translation, the page numbers of the original Italian edition of this work will be added in square parenthesis, as follows: [...].

² This was an old Oratory under the care of the *Confreres of the Stigmata of St. Francis*, which had been disbanded by the law of Napoleon's suppression.

³ This was an old Monastery of Discalced Carmelites.

⁴ Fr. Galvani was a priest of great talent, vast knowledge and exemplary virtue. He was 'Lector' of Theology in our Diocesan Seminary, and Arch-Priest of St. John's in Foro. From the time he had Fr. Bertoni as his student, he came to love and esteem him for his virtues. When he learned of the great good he was doing and had planned for the Church, Fr. Galvani asked him to accept all those places he had purchased by himself from the Government. He wished only that Fr. Bertoni would assume the gratuitous duty of giving a liberal arts education to the young boys, then being taught there by two priests, whom Fr. Galvani was supporting in the little House next to the Stimate.

⁵ This was part of a very ancient Convent and Abbey, founded in the 12th century, together with the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, by the Vallambrosian Monks.

curriculum, and some elementary classes. The place certainly did not provide any comfort. The Church, although architecturally it did have some merit, had served previously as a black-smith shop, and was badly in need of renovation. On one side, there was a little Oratory, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is still standing today. Next to the Church and this little Oratory, five little rooms had been added on to the eastern and northerly sides. These were in a sad state of disarray, and could not have been improved without undertaking costly renovations. The entire complex, then, was in very poor condition. In order to maintain the School, our Fathers had to transport the furniture in and out of these rooms every day, and return it all in the evening. This was required because at night these rooms would serve as bed rooms, and then in the morning, they would be converted into class rooms. After serving as sleeping quarters for two, or more of the Fathers, in the morning they would have to provide these same rooms with all the necessary implements for school⁶.

[3] However, these few rooms did not suffice. The choir stall, the sacristy and the body of the Church were also used as class rooms. Once the Church was renovated and suitably decorated, thought was given to improve their own living quarters. Fr. Gaspar, therefore, took back from the Convent of St. Teresa a small piece of land, so that a suitable building might be built, that would require this additional extension. His idea was to construct a comfortable dwelling for his sons, and also provide the much needed space for the eight classes which the school soon included.

For this reason, in the year 1823, a well-planned and pleasant building was begun. It was to be a solid structure, and even elegant, that was of uncommon practicality. In addition to its advantages of style, it was well ventilated by means of a court-yard, which covered the entire interior of the plan. On the north side, it was closed off by a wall, that separated it from St. Teresa's Convent.

The new house was then provided with a copious library. Fr. Bertoni had set aside the two largest rooms in the center of the building for this purpose, and filled them with more than a thousand volumes of the rarest and most accredited editions. This library was so well planned that its books sufficed to serve magnificently for any group of studious men⁷, especially of the sacred sciences. We should point out here that our early confreres assisted in the construction of this building.

How wonderful and edifying it was to see them, right after they had left their class rooms, put down their books and pens, to take their place at the side of the workmen. They assisted them in carrying the lime and bricks, and joined them in their fatigue. May their labors, on this holy ground protect it, sanctify it, and make it fructify!

At last, the building was furnished, the Church was opened and new Oratories were built, and the old ones were renovated. The thought behind it all was that an education in school was not considered **[4]** more important than was the moral and religious training of the boys. Our Fathers consecrated themselves with renewed vigor

⁶ cf. The Biography of Fr. Bertoni written by Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe.

⁷ cf. Fr. Giacobbe's Biography of Fr. Bertoni.

and fervor to the well-being of the youth, by means of teaching school. The Very Reverend Father Bertoni was the Prefect, or the Director of all the classes.

However, this was not the only work that our early confreres undertook. **They preached the Word of God, either through catechism classes, or the Spiritual Exercises.** They sat for long hours in the **Tribune of Penance**. They assisted the **imprisoned** and the **sick**, and they dedicated themselves to long **study** and **prayer**. For them, this activity was their daily bread. As for their virtue and perfection, this is still on the lips of everyone who knew them. The odor of their holy lives still is diffused strongly and sweetly.

The example of the Founder, and the observance of his every word and example, was for them the only Rule and Constitution. Thus they lived without the title, as men bound to regular observance. The world, which is ever most curious, and capable of spying on such souls and finding defects in them, could only say of them that in mortification, they were excessive beyond measure. This was particularly noted in that they ate and drank as poor men.

Who would believe that in this discomfort and voluntary poverty, they were also so happy and content that it was a pleasure just to see them, or to listen to them. They were ready to bear any burden or fatigue, as if these things were nothing, or not difficult for them. They would accept the most arduous and displeasing assignments, as well as those that were distasteful to them. They acquiesced to all that their Superior asked of them ⁸.

They continued in this life until 1844. During that year, the Jesuits opened a high school at St. Sebastian's. Because of the great esteem he had for those priests, Fr. Gaspar felt that they would provide better for the literary and religious formation of the youth. Furthermore, he was also short handed, so he closed the school at the Stimmate.

[5] Then began a period of trial for the holy man. A number of his priests had died, others had left, and practically no one had the courage to give his name to this Congregation. The reason, it was said, was that the penance of Fr. Bertoni was fearful! Some priests of the Oratory of St. Philip, who were very close to him, had told him many times in jest that if he wished his Congregation to grow, he ought to place over the door this inscription in large letters: *Here you can eat, drink and sleep!* However, it is hardly likely that anyone one would have believed it.

His answer to this comment would be: 'In the early days of a foundation, what will be mitigated of itself, with changing times and changing needs, could never be considered excessive.' However, several years before his death, he made it known that everyone was to have proper nourishment. They were to keep a just balance between abundance and need, and this was written into his Constitutions. Nevertheless, his beloved family, rather than growing, was becoming smaller right before his eyes, as the years passed.

⁸ ib.

Now it seems incredible, but Fr. Bertoni did not lessen in the least his efforts to increase and improve this family. He tirelessly gathered books from every source that he could, he organized the library, he dictated the rules and discipline and governed the house as though the Congregation was flourishing more than it ever had; So great were his hopes that success would crown this endeavor, which God Himself had inspired, that he would say that if he knew for certain that on the morrow the world was to end, he still would have gone on in his work. To inspire his afflicted sons with this same confidence, he used to say: 'Have courage! – Let us trust in God, and let us leave to Him the future, as He can do all things!'

When anyone would leave, he would turn to the others and say: 'And do you, too, wish to go? I will stay here alone, with the help of God, until my death.' In brief, then, it can be said of him that **he hoped against hope!**

Then, the year 1848 came, the period that was so disturbed because of the insurrection among the people. The Servant of God rules [6] over his sons with such prudence that they did not suffer too much in those troubled times. There was, however, one exception. Two of the priests were falsely accused of trying to bribe some soldiers. It was said that while the soldiers were going to Confession, the priests offered them some money to desert. They were put in prison, and they faced the danger of even worse treatment, even the death penalty. A number of important citizens intervened for them, and finally, their innocence was established, and they were set free⁹.

Between the years 1849 and 1850, many soldiers were camped in Verona, in an effort to stamp out the rebellion. Since our House was large and spacious, and almost entirely uninhabited, it was taken over and used as a barracks for soldiers. This provided a new field for the zeal of our Fathers and Brothers, and they managed to win many souls back to the sacraments and to the practice of Religion. The soldiers remained until 1854, but, the year before, our Venerable Founder was called to heaven to receive the reward of his heroic mortification and constancy. He named Fr. Benciolini as the heir of all his ownings.

Fr. Marani succeeded the Venerable Founder. In the year 1854, he was in Rome, at the feet of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Pius IX. The Pope blessed him and the little Congregation, and he expressed the desire that this **Little Flock** [these are the very words of the Pontiff] **might grow** [**Crescat Pusillus Grex!**] – and be diffused **for the glory of the Lord, for the good of souls and for the assistance of Bishops!**

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars examined the spirit of this new Congregation, the End to which it tends and the laws by which it is governed. On the 16th day of April 1855, it published a Decree in which was stated that His *Holiness* *has ordered that this Congregation, and its Scope, by this present Decree, is to be commended and accorded the most ample praise* [**Decretum Laudis - the Decree of Praise**].

⁹ cf. The Life of Fr. Innocent Venturini, an early member of the Congregation.

On the 30th of September of that same year, in the Church of the Stimmate, the Solemn Canonical Erection of our Institute was held with special ceremonies. The day was all the more sacred due to the presence of His excellence, Bishop Benedict deRiccabona. To him, Fr. Marani, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, made his Profession of Vows. The others, then, one by one, kneeling before him, for the first time, they pronounced the Formula of Vows of perpetual Poverty, Chastity and Obedience¹⁰.

The blessing of Pius IX, and his expressed wish – ***that the Little Flock might grow!*** - soon began to reap fruit. 'Outstanding priests' of Verona, and of other places, as well as many young men and boys of varying ages, began to seek admission¹¹.

The Convent of the Most Blessed Trinity, mentioned above, was renovated, and done over in a most suitable manner. There, the young members were trained, and they lived there peacefully until 1866. When the political storms of that era broke, a period that was so threatening for the Church and Religious Orders, Fr. Marani sought for our men another place to live. For his Success, we will profess eternal gratitude to His Highness, the Prince-Bishop of Trent, Benedict deRiccabona, for his most cordial hospitality. The storm then unleashed in all its fury, and it struck us most forcefully. On August 27, 1867, there began a time of most harsh trial for our religious family, that was almost totally destroyed.

Our House and meager funds were confiscated by the government. The Convent of St. Teresa, and a great part of the House of the Stimmate were taken over, and used as schools. A few of our confreres were treated as tolerated guests in their own beloved home, so that they could care for the services in the Church. Fr. Marani, with extreme regret, retired with a few others, to a rented house. This was the Massalongo home, facing the Giusti Gardens, in the Parish of *Sancta Maria in Organis*. He died there in near oblivion in 1871.

This sad state of affairs lasted for six years, during which time it appeared clearly [8] what esteem the citizens of Verona had for the Congregation. These people were the heirs of the faith and the piety of their grand-parents who had been students at the Stimmate. They brought material comfort to the agony of an Institute that had always given of itself, without asking for any material retribution. Other benefactors also were not lacking. They were prompted to come to our assistance by that Father, Who from heaven, watched over His afflicted sons.

In Him, we have placed all our trust, and in the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, the Patrons of our Congregation and we were not deluded. The legal justice of our case that was most evident, finally forced the government to propose a

¹⁰ These priests were: Cajetan Brugnoli, Francis Benciolini [who is still living], Innocent Venturini and John Baptist Lenotti. The Coadjutor Brothers were: Paul Zanoli, Louis Ferrari [who is still living], and Francis Stevanoni. Many periodicals in Germany, and some papers in Italy, as well as the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* [Series II, Vol. XII, p. 702] had articles concerning our Congregation.

¹¹ The practice of accepting and training young boys for the Congregation was begun by Fr. Bertoni. He himself accepted Louis Ferrari, aged 14, Charles Fedelini, who was 16. John Baptist Lenotti and Louis Biadego were also very young. This conforms to our Rule that determines the minimum age for acceptance to the 14 years.

compromise that was accepted: whatever pertained to the substance of the property would be restored, but not the expenses incurred in the long course of the litigation. Complete justice is not to be hoped for on this earth.

By this time, the Superior General was **Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, who was an heir of the genuine spirit of Fr. Bertoni, by whom he had been trained.** He completed the negotiations begun by Fr. Marani, to have a House of our own, in the vicinity of the city of Trent. Shortly afterwards, he recalled the students to Verona, and lodged them in St. Teresa's Convent. Fr. Lenotti died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1875, and he was succeeded by our present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. He established at St. Theresa's the Novitiate. Before 1866, this was conducted at the House of the Most Holy Trinity, which in 1877, was sold to the Salesian Sisters.

In this same year, a House was opened at Bassano, with **a youth program** and **a high school.** In the meantime, this has been converted into a high school. In 1876, **a House was established at Parma, where our Fathers, in addition to teaching elementary school, also conduct the Oratories, teach Catechism, preaching the Spiritual Exercises, and perform all ministries to which they are called.** On the 4th of November last year, the Congregation also went to Pavia, where the Fathers conduct a **night school** during the winter; for the remainder of the year, they have practically continuous **preaching assignments** in every part of that diocese.

Among all the Houses of the Congregation, however, because of its antiquity, and the good done there, ***Santa Maria del Giglio, or the Dereletti***¹², mentioned earlier in this historical sketch, merits a place of honor. In 1836, when Fr. Marani and Brother Zanoli were sent there by the Founder to take up residence, there was only a squalid dwelling. Even at that time, it was already old; there was also the dark and decaying Church. Concerning this Church, Fr. Marani had begun the construction of a new one, but the work was interrupted by the happenings of 1866. It was then completed by Fr. Lenotti in 1874. The House was most recently rebuilt and renovated for the use of the community, by the present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. The Fathers conduct there an **Oratory** on holy days, for boys. There is a **religious instruction** every night, and the priests are frequently called to **preach** in the parish church of St. Stephen's. **More than anything else, they hear confessions**, especially on the Vigils of the solemnities until about mid-night. They start right in again the next morning for about four more hours. In this work, after Fr. Marani others have been assigned, and have labored with great zeal, but Fr. Francis Benciolini merits a special mention.

Turning now to the Mother House, that is the Stimate, we will note that in the last decade, the number of workers has grown, so that **the elementary school** was reopened in 1878. Gradually, there was also added the **high school** course, and all the teachers have received the required diploma. The other members render an assiduous contribution to **the sacred and apostolic ministry.**

From what has been said up until now, **the nature and the purpose of the Congregation can be seen.** It is entitled: ***Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops.*** Our Founder did not limit himself to this, or that ministry, nor

¹² This was formerly a place for accepting abandoned orphans.

to a few determined cases and matters. The Congregation was intended to **assume every good work in the service of God and souls**, so that all those who have embraced this manner of life, **must be prepared and ready for this**. However, it is **proper** for this Congregation, **in addition to occupying itself in giving the Holy Missions [10]**, to **teach** every branch of literature and the sciences, to hear **Confessions**, to give the Spiritual exercises to every class of souls, to explain the **Catechism** in the schools of Christian Doctrine, to establish the **Marian Congregations** in the Churches of the Congregation. These should be promoted where it is possible. The members of the Congregation are to assist the sick and the dying, they instruct and assist those in prisons, they substitute for, and accept permanently **Chairs of Philosophy and Theology**, and **lend whatever assistance the Bishop may have need of**, even unexpectedly.

The manner in which *the* Institute fulfills its end is, as our rule states: ***to serve, or to assist the Bishop, in those things in which, due to different times and circumstances, he may have need.*** The Bishop, then, asks the Superior of the Congregation, for one or more, **to perform some office, or duty, in conformity with the spirit of this Congregation, and according to its rules**. There must be in this Congregation, individuals who are qualified in the judgment of this same Superior.

This Institute is placed under the protection of Mary most holy, and of St. Joseph, whose examples are proposed for our imitation, with divine help. This is required of anyone who desires to serve His Divine Majesty in this Congregation.

This, then, is the simple and very brief history of the beginning and the development of this very small **Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries**. This is the **nature and spirit** that pervades it. It also makes clear that this union of priests, which was brought together by the fortunate decision of Fr. Bertoni, was not a work of chance. Nothing in this world every happens by chance, nor do the works of man, who, of himself, can do nothing. Everything is ordained and disposed by the infinite wisdom of God, Which ***reaches therefore from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly*** [Ws 8:1].



Compendium
of the Life
of
Fr. GASPAR BERTONI

Chapter 1
His Boyhood

[11] That venerable man, who by Divine Providence, was destined to be our Father, Master and Model in learning and in virtue, Gaspar Bertoni, was born on the 9th of October 1777. At that time, the 'most serene Republic of St. Mark' governed the region, the Doge then being John Mocenigo, Louis IV. The fortunate parents of the child were Francis and Brunora [Ravelli]. The Bertoni family was an old, and almost patrician family, and well endowed with the goods of fortune. They were highly regarded because of the offices held by their forebears, but more because of their own faith and piety.

On that very same day [?], the child received holy Baptism in the parish Church of St. Paul's in *Campo Marzo*, and was given the name, Gaspar. He was the first and only [?] fruit of this worthy marriage.

In caring for his physical needs, his Mother nurtured him as well in tender piety. With the passing of time, this increased, and was wisely developed. He responded by greatly consoling her maternal heart, and gave her the highest hopes. He was richly endowed with natural talent, but even more with a high moral ideal. He [12] never showed any inclination for amusements or diversions, but contented himself with little things, as an altar he constructed as a young boy. He never asked for much from his parents, but was content with whatever they gave him.

During these years, he manifested a conduct that was extraordinary. He would never ask for bread, nor fruit, nor cake – nor even for a drink of water. Put under the care of a governess, he behaved similarly with her. She used to call him 'a little saint' [*santino*], or the *angelic* Gaspar. Whoever came to know him, soon admired his candor, his innocence and his manners. They came to ask for the clothes that he had worn as a baby, hoping thereby to obtain special graces and blessings for their own children. Often enough, their hopes were realized. The words of Tobias could well apply to young Gaspar, when **he was younger than any other... yet, he did no childish thing...** [Tb 1:4].

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Chapter 2 EARLY YEARS

When he was about eight years old, his father noted that he had an acute and quick mind, and that he was most anxious to study. Here, therefore, sent the boy to the municipal school at St. Sebastian's. At this period, the school was well known for its faculty, and among the teachers were Fr. Avesani and Fr. Fortis. From the outset, the young boy gave a clear indication that his was a most unusual memory, which he used with much diligence. His lessons were always meticulously prepared, and he was gifted with a very clear diction. Even more noticeable, though, were his modesty, his affability with his companions, his obedience and respect for his teachers, and most especially, his piety.

After he had received his First Holy Communion, he received it every Sunday with visible fervor. He never neglected to save some of his time for meditation, spiritual reading and the examen of conscience. He manifested a most tender piety toward Mary, and he often invoked her as his Mother, and as the Seat of Wisdom, for help in his studies.

[13] There can be no wonder, then, that his progress in both his piety and study was marvelous. In him it was clearly evident that ***the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord...*** [Ps 110:11].

This, then, is a summary of his early years.

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Chapter 3 AS A YOUNG MAN

When he had completed the four years of Grammar, with utmost praise, he then undertook the study of letters, and then philosophy, in accord with the division of studies in that era. By now, Gaspar was 14 years of age. He seemed to have a natural talent for literature. Before long, he was ranked in the upper level of the class, and received both the plaudits, as well as the prizes in the public competitions and the *accademias* that used to be held with much solemnity.

At the age of 17, he was enrolled in the class of Philosophy that was taught by Fr. Fortis. The penetrating mind of the young student found a haven in this study. It was this subject, more than all the others, that implanted in his spirit the principles of thought of which the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, was the author and father. Being imbued with these principles, as a priest, he was able to combat the most astute of errors which then afflicted the Church, which were called 'Jansenism.'

His piety and virtue, instead of lessening, all this while were becoming stronger. In imitation of the Gospel anecdote, he put his hand to the plow and never looked backward. He carried out his work with ever greater alacrity and ardor.

To keep his passions in check, he began the practice of mortification. He was most frugal in his eating habits, and slept but briefly. This latter, was tormented with little stones, or chips of wood, or bits of iron, that he had placed with much care, between the sheets of his bed.

He always avoided being the center of attraction, and denied himself even the slightest satisfactions. One day, at *Campo Fiore*, a balloonist was giving an exhibition, the first of its kind ever presented in Verona. The novelty of it had attracted a huge throng of spectators to the large field [14]. The Bertoniho0me opened out onto this field, and Gaspar could have enjoyed the spectacle by this favored position, and merely going out on his balcony. The balloon rose high into the sky, taking with it the courageous airman which brought the applause and cheers from the crowd, for his excellent take-off. Gaspar, however, did not make a move to witness it, but rather knelt in prayer for the one who had submitted himself to so bold [especially for that time] and so dangerous an attempt.

I will add that he was most plain in his manner of dress. As for money, whatever he had, he used to give away to the needy. Because of this austerity and voluntary poverty, his friends used to call him 'the Capuchin' - not so much out of derision, as out of admiration. Of his charity, I will say only that it was outstanding. Even in those times, he manifested a special concern for the spiritual well-being of his friends. He used every possible means to move them to frequent the sacraments, to attend Church and the Christian Doctrine classes. He had a very kind manner in offering corrections. Of his obedience, I will repeat only what his Mother said, expressing her genuine satisfaction concerning him: 'If all mothers had sons with a fraction of the obedience that mine has, they would indeed be most happy and fortunate!'

It should not be concluded from all this that he was not a sociable person, or that he was inaccessible, or melancholic. On the contrary, his virtuous life was permeated with a most wonderful temperament. He was cheerful and pleasant, and he was well liked by everyone – **he was beloved of God and of men** [Ecclesiasticus 45:1].

This, then, is how he was as a young man.

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Chapter 4 AS A SEMINARIAN

'Why do you delay so long in giving your name to the service of the Lord?' – this was the greeting of his zealous Pastor of St. Paul's, Fr. Francis Girardi. For some time, all the signs of a priestly vocation had seemed most evident in him. However, the boy still wanted more time. He prayed, asked for guidance – then, after a spiritual retreat, he was vested by this same Fr. Girardi in clerical garb. It was the 28th of December 1796, and Gaspar was 19 years of age.

There was supreme joy in the entire Bertoni family. His parents were quite different from those of other young men, and they considered themselves blessed to give him, although their only child, to the Lord. Once vested in the sacred habit, his was a way of life that well served as a model for others similarly called. The hours of day were divided between his scholastic requirements in the Diocesan Seminary, and those of his Parish Church. The hours of the night were consecrated to prayer and study, and very few of them were reserved for sleep. The days free from school were spent entirely at the services of the Church. His fellow students testified many years later that they had never seen a more diligent, more zealous and a more devoted seminarian than was young Bertoni. They felt he was convinced that **to serve God, was to reign!**

He made a special study of the sacred ceremonies and Gregorian chant, which he then taught to his companions. His special interest on the holy days was the youth. He would lead the young boys to Church, teach them Catechism and watched over them attentively. He directed them to wholesome recreations, so that it seemed that this phase of the apostolate was his own special vocation. Bertoni, then, was a model of a genuine seminarian.

One day, during the annual retreat, when the retreat master was speaking of the true clerical life, and the one that should be lived by all, he named Bertoni as the model for those who were present. Because of his modesty, he was completely embarrassed, as was most evident by his reaction, and seemed to withdraw into himself.

Nevertheless, this statement could not have been more true, nor more eloquent nor more effective. As for his theological studies, suffice it to say that understanding how necessary knowledge is for a priest, he applied himself to them with ardor, that reaped abundant fruit. His earlier studies served as a marvelous preparation for them [16] with such diligence. He was greatly assisted by the dedicated Professors that he had, as, for example, the Abbot Trevisani, who was the Prefect and Director of Studies, and also Fr. Galvani. This latter was soon impressed with the virtue and the ability of young Bertoni, and fostered for him a particular affection, such as a father would have for a beloved son. The young student, on his part, had a similar affection for his moral Professor.

In addition to the class hours, he dedicated another nine or ten hours to theological studies. From this time, he acquired a deep love for the *Summa* of St. Thomas. Before completing his years at the Diocesan seminary, he had read the *Summa* from beginning to end. He had also reflected on it once, twice, or possibly three times, with much profit. Hence, in the doubts, or questions that were presented, he would respond with this work in hand. His grasp of it amazed his teachers.

This, then, was Gaspar Bertoni during his seminary years, both at the Seminary and outside it. He can rightly be placed among those who are **commended for the gift of disciple**. [Ws 7:14].

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Chapter 5 AS A PRIEST

Prepared in this spirit, and with the extraordinary goodness of his life, as well as with the profound knowledge that he had acquired, he received the priesthood on September 20, 1800. This was only five months after his ordination to the Diaconate, and he had not yet completed his 23rd year. He received, therefore, a dispensation for the thirteen months that he lacked, by means of a Pontifical Brief.

It is difficult to describe his zeal in carrying out the serious obligations of the priesthood. Realizing that he was a mediator between God and man, and the dispenser of the Divine Mysteries, he resolved to increase ever more in virtue and holiness, by walking in the presence of God, to reach perfection.

He made the Breviary and his daily Mass, his delight. The former, he truly recited *worthily, attentively and devoutly*, observing the following resolutions he had formulated for himself: 1. Look at the *Ordo*; 2. Put the ribbons in order, also those for the Psalms; 3. have composure in your sentiments, and in your posture; 4. recite it standing, or kneeling, or, when necessary, sitting, without leaning back, or being restless; 5. recite it with sufficient pause; 6. pronounce the words carefully, noting, too, when the words are not to be accented; 7. read with such attention that it will not be necessary to repeat a single word; 8. do not stop to grasp the meaning, as this can be looked up with then recitation is over.

He also celebrated the divine sacrifice with such faith, piety and recollection that he seemed to be entirely absorbed in God during it. As it narrated about some Saint, those who had the good fortune of assisting at his Masses, stated that they could not see him as so recollected, without their being moved to compunction, and tenderness of heart.

It was his piety and love for God that led him to the altar. It was beautiful to watch him arguing with a man who wanted to offer him a sum of money, which he always refused, for the celebration of a Mass. Fr. Bertoni just would not accept it. Finally, however, he gave in, but only on condition that the sum received would be used to help the poor.

Because of all this, it came to be said that the new priest, Fr. Bertoni, was, in the words of Malachy: ***the Angel of the Lord***.

Those who heard him preach the Word of God, even as a young priest, had a similar impression. Although he was endowed with a certain facility for speaking, and was equipped with sound doctrine, he never excused himself from study and effort. He prayed and meditated the more, and he came to preach ***not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit of power***. [cf. 1 Co 2:4]. He had a way of touching hearts deeply, and it was said of him - ***he speaks as an angel: because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts***. [cf. Mt 2:7].

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Chapter 6

Fr. GASPAR, AS A MISSIONARY OF YOUTH

One day, Fr. Gaspar was praying and meditating in the Choir of St. Paul's Church, and his venerable Pastor, Fr. Girardi, came up to him. The young priest, in his surplice, with the stole over his arm, seemed to be waiting there for any task. the pastor stated; 'Oh, Fr. Gaspar, to me, you seem to be a **missionary**.' 'I hope so', he responded. 'However,' the Pastor added: 'understand me well; you are to be a **Missionary of the Youth**.' Fr. Gaspar answered that he would be just that, as this was the wish of his Pastor. 'All right, then,' concluded Fr. Girardi, 'I entrust to you these children, because I want them ready for Holy Communion by the next Holy Day. You will be their **Missionary**. From now on, consider them as your responsibility.' He accepted this **Mission** and carried it out successfully.

When the happy day of the First Holy Communion for the children arrived, Fr. Bertoni brought them all over to the Rectory, and opened it up to them. His idea was that the holy resolutions that they made that day, might be carried through. From that day onward, they gathered there with him on all the Feast Days, and they had devotions in honor of the Blessed Virgin, He always manifested toward them a great love and solicitude. The children responded to this invitation in ever increasing numbers, and with an unusual enthusiasm.

After a while, the Oratory moved from the rectory to the Church of the Sisters of St. Francis de Paola. There, they were better organized, and the Congregation of youth, that came to be known as the Marian Oratory, was begun. From this one, other Oratories that have done so much for the youth, took their norms and organizational plan. All those that sprang up throughout Verona, were soon flocked with eager members. It is to Fr. Bertoni that the credit is due for having instituted them, and their marvelous expansion

It would suffice to cite just one instance to have some idea of the good that was derived through these Oratories. There was a certain boy [19] who made fun of those who attended the Marian Oratory. He spoke of them in the worst possible way. One time, partly out of curiosity, and partly because of an invitation extended to him by one of his friends, he, too attended. His thought was that he could find fault with the program and ridicule it. However, the very opposite occurred. He was so impressed with the piety of the other boys, with Fr. Bertoni's pleasant way and the singing, that he, too knelt at Fr. Gaspar's feet. He asked him to hear his Confession, and then to receive him as a new member of the Oratory. This conversion was not only extraordinary, but it was equally sincere and persevering.

Fr. Bertoni manifested an assiduous and paternal care for his Oratory. He wanted the young boys with him throughout the day and on holidays, when there was no school. He then invited them to his own home, where they passed the time in a pleasant atmosphere. His interest in them also covered the other days of the week – he helped them in their studies, and visited them where they worked.

The rules he had laid down he wanted observed by each member. In a short time, the boys gave such example that they won the admiration of the city as well as the parish. In an excellent manner, he fulfilled his role as the **Missionary of the Youth**.

As time went on, other Oratories began – in St. Stephen's, in St. Lawrence's, at St. Firmus' Major and gradually in all the parishes of the city. Each one of these was established either with his direct intervention, or with his advice. In truth, Gaspar Bertoni understood well the words of the Divine Master: ***Let the little children come to Me!*** [Mk 10:14].

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Chapter 7

Fr. GASPAR AS A MISSIONARY OF THE PEOPLE, THE CLERGY AND SISTERS

The zeal that inflamed the heart of Fr. Bertoni for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, made of him a great **Missionary** – not only of the **Youth**, but also to the **People, the Clergy and the Virgins of the Lord**. After he had been imbued with the spirit of the admirable book, ***The Spiritual Exercises*** of St. Ignatius [20], he dedicated himself to **preaching** them with such art and ardor that soon he reaped through them most abundant results. The many courses of them that he preached in the Church of St. Ignatius to large audiences, both of students and the general laity, are memorable.

The **Parish Mission** at which he assisted the Missionary Apostolic, Monsignor Louis Pacetti, is especially worthy of particular mention. During it, there were numberless and sincere conversions, which divine grace wrought during this Mission. This won the admiration of the entire city which profited by these, and the memory of this Mission is still retained. As a result, many years later, Fr. Bertoni established that his sons, in perpetual appreciation and gratitude to the Lord, were to recite every evening after the ***De Profundis*** for the deceased, two ***Gloria's*** in honor of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus, the protectors of that Church and the **Parish Mission** conducted in it.

We know that he saw on that occasion the marvelous good that **Missions** could produce among the laity, in the reformation of their ways. From this, the thought came to him of that Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries which he was called by God to found.

Even as a very young priest, he was called to be the **Missionary to the Clergy**. The efficacy of his zeal and his preaching were soon felt. Monsignor Pacetti had come to know Fr. Bertoni's spirit and learning, and so, called upon him many times for assistance. The **Retreat** that they both gave to the **Clergy of Mantua** was long remembered. So successful was this Retreat, that the old priests from there, even up until recent times, used to look back on it with joy and wonder. Monsignor Pacetti later went to Rome and arranged it so that by Decree of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, dated December 20, 1817, Fr. Bertoni was declared a Missionary Apostolic.

He also was assigned by his Superiors as a **Missionary to Religious Sisters**. This did not entail just preaching the Spiritual exercises to them, but it also involved **spiritual direction**. In this period, Venerable Marchese di Canossa instituted her Daughters of Charity. Fr. Gaspar was chosen for this assignment by the [21] Pastor of the Diocese, first as her Confessor, and then as Spiritual Director. The holy Foundress and her Daughters recognized that in great part they were indebted to him for the development of their holy and providential Institute. In their behalf, their zealous Spiritual Director did not spare himself any fatigue, study or prayer, so that these Daughters of Charity would become worthy of their name. In compiling their most judicious rules, there is no way of knowing just how much the Venerable di Canossa was assisted by his direction and counsel. As a testimony of their perennial gratitude, the Sisters wanted his portrait for their Mother House, and under it was the following simple, but eloquent inscription:

Fr. Bertoni, first Confessor of the Daughters of Charity.

Therefore, he carried out in an excellent manner the role of **Missionary to the People, the Clergy and the Sisters**. He was a man of God, who made himself all things to all men, to gain all for Jesus Christ.

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Chapter 8 Fr. GASPAR AT THE STIMATE

The year 1816 was more disastrous than any other, because of the famine and the wide-spread need that desolated our beautiful country. It was then that Fr. Galvani, whom we have seen as the Lector of Moral Theology, asked Fr. Bertoni to assume, with some companions, the task of teaching at a tuition-free school. There were elementary classes, as well as those of high school level, including Latin courses. Up until this time, Fr. Galvani had supported them at the Stimmate. He had come into possession of the House and Church there.

Fr. Bertoni was most ready and willing to accept this offer that had been made to him. With one priest, his most faithful friend, Fr. John Mary Marani, and with the pious young Brother, Paul Zanolì, he took over the Stimmate, where he would live the remainder of his life. It was the feast of St Charles, November 4th of that year, 1816. [22] This was the beginning and foundation of our small Congregation, whose history is related just prior to this sketch of the life of our Venerable Father and Founder.

Very shortly thereafter other excellent priests mentioned above came to join him. These were Fr. Gaetano Gramego, Fr. Farinati and Fr. Brugnoli, as well as some good men, who like Zanolì, were called by the name of 'Brother.' All of these mentioned here entered during the year 1817.

We will relate here briefly what their life in those times was like, and the occupations our first Fathers undertook. They did not in those days have a stable body of rules according to which they lived. The teaching and the example, however,

of Fr. Bertoni, and the compliance to his every wish and counsel served as their law, and their inviolable and sure rule. The order maintained was perfect, as was their regular observance. They were so observant of the evangelical counsels, it was as if they had already made a profession of them. As for the religious virtues, mortification and abstinence, these served as principles for them. They emulated communities of the strictest observance. Suffice it to say, that for many years, they never ate rice, but only beans and vegetables, and these were served in oil. They had not been commanded to these austerities, but merely followed the example of Fr. Bertoni.

Their love for poverty was shown not only by their meager diet, but also by their ordinary and plain clothing, and their austere living quarters. This was so even though every one of them had come from comfortable homes. In their observance, though, they were even more worthy of admiration and praise. They were ready at any indication of their Superior to **go anywhere** for the ministry, even when this was unexpectedly assigned by him. They seemed to lack personal preferences and desires. Their duties between such assignments were always with an eye to the **service of God**, and the ministry went on without respite.

Teaching school was the fundamental duty, as **it was for this purpose primarily** that they had come together. The rest of their time was employed in **the preaching of the Word of God, through Catechism classes, and in the Spiritual Exercises**. They also gave long hours to the **Tribunal of Penance**. They helped out in **prisons** and assisted the **sick**. They considered the time remaining after these occupations that they gave to **prayer** and their **severe program of studies**, as their relaxation and rest. What was even more edifying in them was to see them in the exercise of this **varied program**, always happy and jovial, much like the valiant Maccabees, when they were fighting the battles of the Lord: **they fought with cheerfulness the battle of Israel** [1 M 3:2]. According to the masters of the spiritual life, this is a sign of perfect virtue. There is no way of expressing the joy of Fr. Bertoni's heart in giving him sons who were so judicious. However, his profound humility would not permit him to reflect that the greater glory for all this was due him.

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Chapter 9

Fr. BERTONI AS TEACHER AND EDUCATOR

Among all the difficulties of life, perhaps the most arduous is to give a good education to the youth. However, this is all the more advantageous, not only to the individuals and their families, but to the Church and to society. For this endeavor, the greatest of men have given their love and dedicated their study. One such a man was Fr. Gaspar. Just as **the principal reason for which he came to the Stimate was to conduct a school**, so he dedicated himself to it whole heartedly and to make it a success.

God blessed his endeavor. The student body grew in number with the passing of time. It became necessary to add classes and new grades, both of the elementary and high school levels. The building that they were using was both too small and inadequate, and so Fr. Bertoni set about a new construction. First of all, however, he

renovated the Church, which had deteriorated and in some sections, was falling down. He restored it to the condition in which we see it today. Then he began the building which was to serve the double purpose of a school and a religious house. This was begun in the year 1823. His enthusiasm, and that of his companions, and they all assisted when they could in the actual construction of it. This project, which was not small, nor without considerable cost, was soon brought to a conclusion, and the end result admirably suited its [24] purpose.

The Founder was dedicated with single purpose to school and to the education of youth. The curriculum of studies included the entire Elementary and High School courses, Grammar and Rhetoric, as has already been said. Fr. Bertoni was the teacher of literature, prefect and director of studies, and also the instructor of the teachers of the other classes. In the entire program, the same method and form of instruction was one and the same.

It was his wish that the boys studying grammar would receive the fundamentals in the Italian and Latin languages. In Rhetoric, his standards were met perfectly that Fr. Trevisani, the most learned among the learned, many times gave him the approbation and praise as a most excellent instructor. The school progressed to the complete satisfaction of everyone, who applied to Fr. Bertoni those words said of the Divine Master: ***He has done all things well!***

The principal concern of Fr. Gaspar, however, was to train the boys in Christian piety, which is useful in every walk of life. ***Piety is useful for all things*** - and it is the foundation of all the virtues. He wanted it practiced in school, in Church, at home, along the street and everywhere.

Let us come now to certain particulars. Holy Mass was celebrated before school: there were short prayers before and after the classes. The Marian Oratory was in operation, confessions were heard every two weeks and every year there was a brief course of the Spiritual Exercises. There was also a special observance every May, the month of the Blessed Virgin. He most often instilled devotion to her in their young hearts. In addition to all this, he maintained an assiduous and paternal supervision over the conduct of the students. He was both strong and kind in correcting them, as the need would arise, pointing out to them the dangers, and encouraged them on to virtue. In brief, this school was, so to speak, an instruction of morals, and a seminary of holy maxims and of virtue. In the last analysis, this is the only means to make a school educational [25] in the full meaning of that word. With any other ideal, school is both unworthy of its name, and it is destructive. Such are the modern, or 'lay' schools, or whatever other name they may have. From its fruits, a tree is known. The effects of Fr. Bertoni's School were not long in making themselves felt. They were both abundant and most encouraging. Both the parents and the students themselves attest to this in unanimity. The oldest of the alumni from his school still refer to it with sentiments of the most grateful appreciation.

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Chapter 10

Fr. GASPAR AND HIS SEMINARIANS

This holy endeavor of teaching school progressed and their work multiplied. The Lord sent new reinforcements to his servant. There was Fr. Francis Cartolari, of noble birth, who entered in 1822. Shortly afterwards, Fr. Modesto Cainer came, as did a few additional Brothers. A little later, in 1826, Fr. Louis Bragato entered, then Fr. Francis Benciolini in 1829. Fr. Innocent Venturini entered in 1830 and all of these sought admission as ordained priests.

The religious family was not to be lacking its young seminarians. The first ones to enter were graduates of Fr. Bertoni's little school. Charles Fedelini, Louis Biadego, John Baptist Lenotti and Louis Ferrari are to be mentioned here. As they represented the future hopes of Fr. Bertoni, he instructed them with all his love, striving to imbue them with the true ecclesiastical and religious spirit. For the classes in philosophy and theology, he sent them to the Diocesan Seminary, and then assisted and guided them at home, perfecting and developing the instruction they received in their classes. How helpful he was to them was soon noted by their teachers and fellow students, as they always were in the upper brackets of the class. It was his will that they should not neglect any of the ecclesiastical studies, but that they should be well instructed in all of them. He did, however, assign them particular branches of study, that they might become more proficient in them, according to the varying attitudes of each one.

As for teaching them the science of the saints, he was a supreme master. He trained them in the fundamentals, such as [26] breaking their own wills, even when they had been ordained priests. Whenever he found anyone out of breath for having hurried with too much anxiety in the ministry, he would stop the offender right on the spot. He would have him kneel down, and remain there for as long as it took to catch his breath, and then allow him to get up. In this way, souls are formed in many virtues.

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Chapter 11

Fr. GASPAR AS DEFINITOR AND PRO-SYNODAL EXAMINER

The undeniable proof of holiness and learning that our Venerable Founder gave of himself could only acquire for him the veneration and confidence of the Bishops of the Diocese of Verona. As a result, the most urgent matters came to be entrusted to him, and among these was the appointment as **Definitor Theologian and Pro-Synodal Examiner**. He was chosen for these posts first by Bishop Liruti, and then afterwards confirmed in them by Bishop Grassier. Seeing how well he fulfilled these positions, he was then appointed to the most delicate office of the examiner of Vocations. It was not possible for the humility of the servant of God toward off these honors that came to him, nor did his claim of infirmity, his other duties or his own ineptitude have any effect. He simply had to obey. The confidence placed in him by the sacred Pastors never diminished. The definitions that he handed down proved that he was a most diligent student of St. Thomas Aquinas, and that he was well-versed in all of the Saint's writings. Everyone who conversed with him, departed totally satisfied.

The same is to be said of his judgments and opinions that he gave as Pre-Synodal examiner. There was a Fr. Octavian Rossi, who had given up his chair of

Sacred Eloquence in the Diocesan Seminary, to accept a parish in Sirmione. One of his students, who is still living, went to him, hoping to persuade him into not accepting the parish, as he would be thereby depriving the city, and the entire Diocese from a greater good, as was derived from his teaching that he imparted to the young hopefuls of the sanctuary. Fr. Rossi answered: 'Calm now, now - to do what I have done, I have had the encouragement and the counsel of Fr. Bertoni!'

[27] Another time, , a newly appointed Pastor came one day to see Fr. Bertoni, and to get his advice if he should still have contact with those of his people who regarded him as a stranger. He was somewhat inclined to abandon them to their own wishes. Fr. Bertoni interrupted him, saying: 'There is always hope in the Mother of Hope, Mary...' Fr. Bertoni then counseled him to be first and foremost, the Pastor of the children. He suggested that he establish the Marian Oratory to invite and attract the youth, and that he should bestow on the children his love and affection, and told him that he would see the results. The new Pastor took this advice, and in a short time, he attracted the hearts, not only of the children, but also of their parents and his entire parish.

As **Examiner of Vocations to the Priesthood**, he was firm in denying his assent to those whom he had judged as not called to the serviced of Christ. Even though there were times that complaints were leveled at him, it was not rare that some of these young men, who had been excluded, returned to express their thanks to him.

On the other hand, he was most affectionate and encouraging toward those whom he had judged that they had a genuine vocation. He would inspire these young men, citing such passages, as: ***I have run the way of Your commandments, since You have encouraged my heart!*** To accept this way of life, there were two principle practices that he would inculcate to the aspirants to the Priesthood: 'Obedience and Meditation.' He used to say: '...these are what are most perfect in the spiritual life of all clerics, and the most edifying in the House of God...

To bring this Chapter to a close, I will add that Fr. Gaspar was not only enlightened and sure in judging vocations to the Priesthood, but he had the same qualities in **discerning vocations to the religious state** as well. We will cite here the testimony of the celebrated Jesuit, Fr. Viscardini, as the typical view of his contemporaries. For forty years, Fr. Viscardini was the Master of Novices of the Company of Jesus. In this time, he had over 200 Novices, and from time to time, he would send various ones to Fr. Bertoni, if he was unsure of them himself. Fr. Viscardini was most confident in Fr. Bertoni's judgment.

The Lord, therefore, had filled His servant with wisdom and intelligence: ***And the Lord, with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, filled him.*** [28]

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Chapter 12

THE EMINENT VIRTUES OF Fr. GASPAR

Let us consider here the holiness of the life of our Venerable Founder, a little more closely. The life of the just is said to be the life of the Holy Spirit. It is as the light of the day that increases gradually into the brilliance of afternoon. Such was the life of Fr. Bertoni. Those eminent virtues, which were already manifest in him in his earliest childhood, increased more and more with the passing of time. We will make a few remarks only concerning his more outstanding virtues, before bringing this brief biography of his to a close.

His Faith was very much alive. From his vivid sense of the presence of God, he used to walk without a hat, both in the dead of winter, as well as under the summer sun. Every day, he would pray for the grace of martyrdom. His heroic faith was evident in his face, as he celebrated Holy Mass. He was ready and able to defend the faith against anyone who might attack its truths.

There is the episode of Fr. Bertoni walking through Piazza Bra', and he was passing directly in front of a café'. A certain high spirited man came out and stopped him, to question him in a derisive manner of a dogma of the faith that was already contained in the Creed.

'Do you know the Creed, sir?', Fr. Bertoni asked him. This unexpected question took him by surprise. Fr. Bertoni pressed the point and finally the man began to recite it. When he reached the mention of the dogma in question, Fr. Bertoni asked again: 'Now, do you believe that?'

The man answered that he did. Fr. Bertoni replied that this was but the duty of every Christian. Then he explained the solid arguments for the credibility, what the theologians say about the manner, and left the man both astonished and instructed.

The Founder also had an exalted Hope, and he knew well how to inspire this virtue into the hearts of others. In the grave tribulations to which his beloved Congregation was subject, it can very well be said [29] of him that **he hoped against hope**. He used to say: 'Courage, my dear sons. Let us entrust ourselves to God. Let us leave it all up to Him, Who can do all things!'

There is an incident at the time that Fr. Louis Biadego was dying. The holy old man, Fr. Bertoni, came in to visit him: 'Have courage, Fr. Louis, **for if we live, we live unto the Lord; or if we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's...!** [Rm 14:8]. The sick man took these words to heart, and he repeated them many times in the course of his illness. When he expired, it seemed that there was a smile on his face, that he had died full of hope.

His Charity, both toward God as well as for his neighbor, was most ardent. He used to say: 'To love God, it is required that one's hearty be full of God, and empty of all that which is not God, or is less than God.' In truth, this is a description of the heart of Fr. Bertoni's own heart. All those great and tireless endeavors which he accomplished for the glory of God, and the good of souls, were motivated from the principle of love.

A man had been condemned to death by the Italic Regime. He was by habit and profession, a Religious, but he had lived a godless and impious life. Many priests had tried to persuade him to do penance, but the man was adamant in rejecting their every suggestion. The case came to the attention of the Vicar of the Diocese, and he asked Fr. Bertoni to visit the unfortunate on the following day. Fr. Bertoni spent the great part of the night in prayer. Early in the morning, he offered the Host of Propitiation for the wretched man. Then, he went to him with a heart full of love. The unfortunate man who up until that time, had rejected everyone else, on seeing Fr. Bertoni, exclaimed: 'Oh! this is the one, he is that blessed man whom God sends to me for my salvation!'. Exultant with joy, he was reconciled with God. The poor man asked pardon of everyone, and he died as a true penitent. This is but one of the many triumphs of the charity of Fr. Bertoni.

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Chapter 13 INDICATIONS OF HIS VIRTUES

In his soul, all the cardinal and moral virtues made a luminous and beautiful crown for his theological virtues. However, as we are writing only briefly about his life, we will just mention them in passing.

From the time that he was a young man, his Prudence was of a rare quality. When he was thirty years of age, as we have seen, he was appointed Confessor and the Spiritual Director of the Daughters of Charity, as his Prudence was so well known to his superiors. If he ever noted any defect against this virtue in any of his sons, he would apply an effective remedy for it. He often used to say to them: 'My sons, be cautious in your speech. Do not trust solely in your own opinion.'

On one occasion, Fr. Bertoni had come in contact with a certain woman, who was pious enough in her own way, but was totally dependent on her own changing whims. She sought his counsel on the reading of spiritual books. 'My dear Lady', he interjected, 'you only have to read the instructions for Philothea, in St. Francis de Sales. Read it, reread it and then read it again! It will be sufficient for you!' With this, their interview ended.

In the matter of Justice, he was so delicate that he would not put off payment of even a small bill. One of the Brothers had bought some merchandise on credit, for a very small sum. When Fr. Gaspar came to know of it, he sent the Brother right back to pay the bill, even though to do this, the Brother had to go to the far end of the city.

Of his Temperance, it would suffice to recall the austerity of life that was lived at the Stimmatum from their first coming to live there. He found an excellent opportunity to practice this austerity in accepting his infirmities. One time, when he was gravely ill, the Brother brought him a special meal. Fr. Bertoni, however, refused it, thanking the Brother, and then told him his reason: 'For me, the common food is better.'

[31] Whenever others asked him why he treated his body so cruelly, he would answer: he would say that he loved with an ardent love that beautiful virtue, which on so many occasions had him compared with St. Bernard, St. Aloysius, or some holy priest, and most often, with the angels.

His great Fortitude of soul was evident in his endurance of his great fatigue and sustained efforts in the apostolate. It was certainly apparent in the agonizing sufferings of his many illnesses, as well as in the hateful insults of which he was sometimes the target. One day, he encountered someone who was very hostile toward him, and who hated him with a vengeance. This man could not tolerate in peace the great good that Fr. Gaspar was doing in the Oratories. Overflowing with his despicable venom, he hurled all of its fury against the meek priest. Fr. Bertoni struggled to overcome his own anger, and being completely overcome, he fell to the ground. Although his body had faltered, his spirit was victorious.

Another similar conquest is related about him, when a most rabid follower of Jansenism, who would not accept the war that Fr. Bertoni had declared against this proud sect, rushed up to him, near the Church of St. Firmus. This man unleashed the most villainous and disgusting invectives against him. Notwithstanding the fierce struggle that he felt inside of him, Fr. Bertoni remained silent, endured it all and in the end, conquered the man's shouts with his own silence.

If Fortitude is *to encounter what is arduous, and to support what is difficult*, this virtue was indeed eminent in our Venerable Father. This virtue bore that involuntary poverty – out of love for which the Founder suffered willingly so many discomforts. It was this virtue that was also the mother of that Obedience by which he submitted himself in mind and heart to Fr. Marani, whom he had chosen as his Spiritual Director. Even more, it was the mother of that Humility that inspired his frequent challenge to his sons: *Lowly, lowly, if we wish God to raise us up!*

These, then, were the principal virtues that shone out the more in Fr. Bertoni as the end of his days drew closer. [32]

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Chapter 14 HIS LAST YEARS

His advanced age, and even more his fatigue and severe studies, as well as his frequent illnesses, had already placed a drain on his strength. He was able to leave his room but rarely, and then either by supporting himself, or by being carried in the arms of others. His spirit through it all, remained strong. In the confines of his room, he lived a life that was at one and the same time, both holy and productive. In the morning, he would always wake himself on time, from his already brief and interrupted sleep, and would give the first hour of his day to a profound meditation. Then, when his strength permitted, he would go to celebrate the august Sacrifice with angelic fervor. When he could no longer do this, he had one of his Priests celebrate it in the Oratory that adjoined his room. Totally absorbed in God, he would assist at these Masses from his bed, where he also received the Holy Eucharist every day. The Holy Mass with Communion was his only comfort that he had in these last years. He made a remark to this effect one day to one of his sons, who had asked him to permit that Mass be celebrated every holy day, down in the Church. He exclaimed: 'Do not deprive me, I beg of you, of this single consolation!'

After the Mass, he used to recite either alone, or with some of his companions, the Canonical Hours. Then, he dedicated himself to an active apostolate. When he

could no longer go down for school, he used to call the young students into his room. There, seated near the table, or lying in pain on his bed, he would enthusiastically teach his class of Rhetoric.

He continued this, as long as the school was opened, that is, until 1844. At various intervals, he still preached from his bed to the more advanced and chosen members of the Oratory. Eye-witnesses tell us that it was beautiful to see him during these discourses so enthusiastic and so moving with his inspired words and animated look.

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In that room, and from that bed, he frequently **heard the Confessions** of the penitents that came to him. He also preached the **Spiritual Exercises to those Priests** who had sought him out as the guide of their souls. If one wanted to list the names of all those who came to **confer with him about their matters of conscience, it would be necessary to compile a volume that would be most edifying.** Our Venerable Father made himself all things to all men. It seemed as if he had no other purpose for living, except to do good to others: ***He was all things to all men!***

Sometimes, his humble room was honored by the visits of highly regarded personages who came in great numbers to have the opportunity to see and hear him. It should be recorded here that in the year 1831, on the solemn occasion of the commemoration of the finding of the body of Saint Zeno, Patron of the City and the Diocese of Verona, Fr. Gaspar was invited to give one of the three panegyrics. Although at this time, he was for the most part confined to his room, he did accept the invitation. He was carried up to the pulpit and there praised the sainted Bishop to the admiration of those who heard him. On the next day, the **Patriarch of Venice, and the Bishops of Vicenza, Padua and Mantua, with their Vicars and Secretaries**, came to see him. The venerable old man was again confined to bed because of his chronic infirmity. These illustrious visitors stayed with him for a number of hours, **discussing various theological matters, in dogma, moral, canon law**, asking for his views. When they left, each and everyone were full of admiration for him, and most edified.

From his sermon to be printed later, the Bishop had to intervene, to overcome his unwillingness. When the order came to him in writing from the Bishop's Secretary, Fr. Peter Vignola, who is at present our beloved Superior General, Fr. Bertoni broke down into tears.

While Fr. Bertoni occupied himself with such zeal for the good of others, he also gave much thought concerning what he should do for his own beloved Congregation. Thanks to God, he had seen this [34] grow and become stronger. He always directed it, both as regards its personnel, and its material endowments. He had made many provisions for it, and all with a tender love and singular prudence. Order, peace, virtue and the Spirit of the Lord had always reigned in it, and the good order of Christ was evident throughout its members and its apostolate.

The Venerable Founder from his room and bed of pain, at the request of his sons, compiled a body of most wise Constitutions. These were the fruit of long prayer, much study and his varied experiences.

This, then, was the life, and these were the occupations of Fr. Gaspar during his last years. We can very well say that if his flesh was indeed weak, his spirit was still willing and vigorous, and it remained so until the end.

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Chapter 15 HIS LAST ILLNESS

Gold is proven in fire, the wise man has said, ***and the just man on the crucible of tribulation***. Fr. Bertoni was proven time and time again, principally through his many and varied illnesses, during which his patience was truly exemplary.

During the year 1813, his health was severely damaged by an illness that brought him close to death and he received the Last Sacraments for the first time. It seems that he had contracted the disease because of his extraordinary work, as well as the discomforts he endured going from Cantarene to St. Joseph's Convent to assist the Canossian Sisters. He gave very little time, either day or night, to rest, whenever his services were needed. The many prayers that were said for him at this time were heard, and he recovered. It was not, however, a complete victory, as he continued to feel discomfort throughout his body, and most especially in his right leg.

After he had been at the Stimate for four or five years, the infection had become so serious that his life was feared for more than it had been previously. His leg swelled and a tumor appeared on his shin. It was ugly in appearance, and resisted every remedy, and continued to spread. After consultation, the services of a renowned surgeon were judged necessary.

It is not easy to describe the painful operations that he endured during this period. It is only the truth to state that he underwent more than 200 of them, and that each one was extremely painful. There was one in particular, when the doctors lanced his leg above the heel. Following this, setons were inserted. Then, there were continuous probing, and also lancing that were necessary. These were followed by the application of medication that burned his sensitive flesh, and these two were without number. The patience of the Founder led him to be compared to Job. He gave no indication of the pain that he endured. He was never ill-humored, nor did he ever complain. He manifested only a serenity, and even a joviality, that he was considered to be a saint.

Despite all this, instead of disappearing, his leg became worse; at the end of 1842, all hope was again given up for his cure. Public and private prayers were offered, especially to the *Madonna del Popolo*. On the first day of the new year, he seemed much better and in a short time, he recovered almost perfectly the use of his leg. I said 'almost perfectly' because his weakness was such that he could not get about except on crutches, or with a cane. There was still pain, more or less acute, that bothered him from time to time. So, God willed it that he might be to everyone in the House and outside it, a continual example of patience. He would often be heard to say; 'Pray, please pray, that the Lord might grant me patience, as I feel a great need of it!'

He would often say the word: ***Fiat!*** - and this seemed to come from the very depths of his heart. Sometimes he said: 'Bear down with your hand, O Lord, as you

have every reason to do so!' to those who came to visit him, he would say: 'Well, here I am, a lazy man – a real loafer!' Through it all, he gave much edification.

This was his life from 1842 until 1850. In this latter year, such was his exhaustion, that he was no longer able to get out of his bed. For more than 30 months, he had to lie completely still on his left side. Whenever the others came to move him, even a little, this [36] always caused him excruciating pain. On these occasions, his patience was no less evident, and the only words that he uttered once in a while, were the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, as a most pitiable lament. Those of his sons who came especially during the night to administer to him, or to see if he needed anything, would only hear: 'Sleep, my dear sons, go back to sleep!' If he did need anything, it would always be prefaced with such expressions as: 'Could you do me this favor? ... Would you please...? I am sorry to trouble you...!

His discomfort defies description when, he had to remain motionless in the same spot, his back was lacerated by an ulcerous and bloody bed sore. Were it not for the fact that the Brother Infirmarian noticed it, and told the doctor about it, no one would have ever known of this manifestation of the heroic patience of the Servant of God.

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Chapter 16 HIS HOLY DEATH

God had tried his Servant and was pleased with him – He, therefore, had to crown him. It was during the last days of May in 1853 – Fr. Gaspar was very low, but still neglected none of his usual practices of piety. He was much like a wayfarer, who quickens his place as he sees his home-land in the distance. He manifested for his true native-land an increased fervor. He prayed and meditated day and night, and he invoked Jesus and Marty much more frequently. He had the rosary in his hands almost continuously.

During those days, he confided to an assisting Brother how the Meditation on the *Hail Mary* was enough to keep him occupied for hours on end, and even for the entire night. It is believed that this tender Mother comforted with some form of a vision, because every once in a while he would ask the Brother who had heard him awake: 'Did you hear anything? Did you see anything? When the Brother answered that he had not, Fr. Gaspar would say: 'it's all right, then, go back to sleep!'

The 12th of June arrived, which was to be the last day of his precious life. As usual, he wanted to receive Holy Communion, and no one thought the time had come for him to receive It as Viaticum. He wanted to receive It out of devotion, and as was his custom [37], he was still fasting. Very soon, however, ominous signs appeared. His breathing became labored, and he seemed to be sleeping. Right after noon, he seemed to enter into a coma. With the use of smelling salts, however, he was revived somewhat, but it was now clear that the end was near. While he still had the use of his faculties, he confessed his sins one more time. He was then asked if he was most willing and happy to be anointed. At this most welcome suggestion, he offered his hands and feet for the Sacrament.

After It had been administered, he went into his last agony. He was comforted by the Indulgence and Papal Blessing, ***in the instant [articolo] of death***. His Spiritual Father, Fr. Marani, recited the prayers for the dying. Suddenly, with tears in his eyes, he turned to his Confrere, Fr. Brugnoli, and exclaimed: 'See – our Fr. Gaspar is no more!' His blessed soul had so quietly taken flight to its eternal repose, without giving any indication even to the Priest praying over him, or to the others in the room.

It was 3:30 in the afternoon of that 12th day of June, 1853. Fr. Gaspar was 75 years, 8 months and three days old. At this hour in the afternoon, four of his priests were **preaching the Word of God in the schools of Christian Doctrine**. It seemed that God wanted to show by this how pleased he was with the work undertaken by the Venerable Fr. Bertoni, by calling him precisely at the hour of these classes, to his reward in heaven.

His death, then, was precious in the sight of the Lord, as is the death of the saints: ***Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!***

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Chapter 17 LAST TRIBUTE, AND THE CONCEPT OF HIS HOLINESS

Humility precedes glory. And ***he whom humbles himself shall be exalted***. This divine statement was singularly verified in our Founder [38] immediately following his death. At the sad announcement, of his passing, there was universal sorrow throughout the city. There was one statement on the lips of all: 'A Saint has died!' There was on that day, and on the day following, a general outpouring of people from all walks of life, flocking to the Stimate, to see and to kiss the body. Many also wanted to take something away with them that had belonged to him, as a beloved remembrance or relic. Arrangements were made to meet these requests. Among the mourners, was Fr. Viscardini, who took a few of Fr. Bertoni's hairs. There was a request that a portrait be made of him, and so a death mask was taken. This petition had been made many times during his life-time, but the humble Fr. Bertoni would not sit for any portrait.

The veneration in which he was held was even more manifest in the tribute paid to him at his funeral. It was held on June 13th, a day dedicated to the wonder-worker, St. Anthony of Padua, for whom there was great devotion in Verona. The funeral took place in the late afternoon, following the solemn procession in honor of the Saint, It is no exaggeration to state the two processions compared very favorably to one another in both size and devotion.

For the funeral procession, there was a spontaneous outpouring of Priests, Seminarians, the College of Acolytes, the Confraternities and the Marian Oratories. A number of well-to-do families sent their servants with torches. The throng of people formed two lines from the Parish Church to that of the Stimate. It was not curiosity that moved them, but the sincere grief over their loss, and their profound veneration for the deceased, which were evident in every face. Tears and prayers were the tribute for him, as though he were a saint.

When the services came to a close, the learned and pious Arch-Priest, Pastor of the most Holy Trinity, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, delivered a moving and elegant

eulogy, testifying to his affection for Fr. Bertoni. In concluding, he exclaimed: 'Hail, blessed soul of my beloved Father! Hail! Pray for me, pray for all these, your beloved sons [here he referred to Fr. Bertoni's Congregation], pray for us all, that there might be alive in our souls that love for those virtues, of which in your life, you gave all of us so brilliant an example and instruction.'

It was the thought and desire of all that his venerated body would not be buried in the common area of the local cemetery. What would be [39] more just and fitting was that even in death, he should remain in that place where he had given such wonderful example, namely, there in his Church, in the midst of his sons? Therefore, a petition was sent to the proper authorities, but before permission was obtained, more than a year had passed.

Finally, on July 30, 1854, the venerated body was taken from the place where it had been laid in the Parish Church. It was transported back to the Stimate, and there, after the usual services were celebrated, and his burial place had been blessed, he was laid to rest in the center of the Church.

On this occasion, too, the above-mentioned Arch-Priest delivered a magnificent eulogy in his honor. It began with the words of Psalm 40, ***O Lord, the hymn shall please You in Sion, and the promise shall be rendered to You in Jerusalem.*** Fr. Giacobbe continued: 'Pour out on this eloquent stone not tears, nor laments, nor flowers – but, the affections of holy joy. Can I not hope that God, Who wishes to be glorified in His saints, might deign to derive therefrom, the waters of salvation?'

Throughout his eulogy, Fr. Giacobbe recalled the words, the virtues and the holiness of Fr. Bertoni. He concluded: 'Hail, one more time, o great and holy soul of my, and your Fr. Gaspar! Ask in our behalf, and fill my spirit with yours – obtain it for the clergy of Verona. You will be blessed, Verona, if your priesthood is animated with the love of the divine sciences, with the practice of the virtues that may be learned from this holy and learned example!' These words should have special meaning to us, the sons of such a Father.

During the following November, other honors and solemn suffrages were celebrated by our Fathers. The ceremony was attended by a large number of Veronese clergy and laity. Fr. Cesar Camillus Bresciani delivered an inspiring eulogy on this occasion. After referring to Fr. Bertoni as his beloved Guide, his dear friend, and his most thoughtful fellow citizen, he concluded with these words: 'Who can ever give expression to the gratitude and love that I still feel for you? My hope leads me to look out over this assembly [40], and throughout our Province, and say confidently: Oh! My God! Thrice blessed, grant that this oration of mine may be at least one stone on that altar that I hope Verona will one day see rising in honor of my holy fellow citizen!' ¹³



¹³ This entire *Compendium* is based on the elegant *Biography* of Fr. Gaspar written by the above-mentioned Arch-Priest, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe.

PART TWO
Necrologies
of the
Members of the Early Community

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Compendium
of the Life of the
Coadjutor Brother
ANGELO CASELLA

[41]

He was the good and pious son of Joseph Casella and Antonia Monedgon, of Monfumo, in the Diocese of Treviso. At the age of 29, he entered the Stimmate to serve God in the simplicity of his heart. He was to spend there only eighteen months, and then passed on to the other life, on the 3rd of April, 1835. He had been sick only a few days and had received the Last Sacraments. He had an extraordinary piety and religious spirit. As is recorded in the writings of Fr. Gramego and Fr. Cainer, he was truly an 'angel', nor only in name, but also in fact. He was the first of our Congregation who was called to heaven.

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Compendium
Of the Life of
Fr. LOUIS BIADEGO

'On the 12th day of February 1841', writes Fr. Gramego in his brief Chronicles, 'my most beloved Fr. Louis Biadego died in the embrace of the Lord, saying the holy names of Jesus and Mary with his last breath. He was only 34 years of age, but he was full of days, whose memory is held in benediction. He left us all edified with his holy life, as well as with his equally holy death.'

He was the son of Cajean Biadego and Matilda Ruzzenenti of Verona, who were most upright parents. They brought **[42]** him up in piety and the fear of the Lord. As a young boy, he felt the call to the priesthood, and to leave the world behind. He felt drawn to live in the poor retreat at the Stimmate, by the good odor of the virtues of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni and his companions.

When his studies had been completed, and he had been ordained a Priest, he attended only to loving the Lord and having Him loved by others. He taught the elementary classes, and being serious by nature, he kept his students docile and attentive. While he was reading or explaining his classes, he would take every occasion to instill into their young hearts the Fear of God, affection for virtue, and most especially, devotion toward St. Joseph, to whom he was most dedicated. During the

early days of February, he used to begin to remind them: 'My dear students, let us prepare ourselves for the beautiful month of St. Joseph! 'When March arrived, it is impossible to relate how original he was in having this good Saint honored by the young boys. He would suggest to them aspirations and ejaculations, and would tell stories about the Saint.

He was also very devoted to the Mother of God, and he would often be seen around the House with the Rosary in his hand. His love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was most tender. He visited Him as often as he could, and whenever he had to go from one part of the House to the other, he always took the way that went by the Choir of the Church. This afforded him the occasion to greet Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Before the altar where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved, he would make a slow and profound genuflection, with such sincerity that he seemed truly like a young man in love.

In the afternoon, when school was over, he used to go to the Church to spend that time with the Lord. When he was surrounded by the young students, he would recite the Rosary with them. This would then be repeated when other groups were with him.

What more can we say? He used to make a Novena to all the Saints of the calendar. On being asked how he managed this, he replied that he would say a *Gloria* in honor of each of them. To his prayer, he added mortification. Not even considering the fact that the table in those times was already so poor and austere, as to emulate that of the Certosini and the Trappists. Fr. Louis abhorred any comfort.

While he was assisting Fr. Bertoni during his long illnesses, Fr. Louis used to make his meditation in the morning kneeling in his room, without any support. We do not know if there were any stoves, or fire-places in use during the winter at that time at the Stimmat. Fr. Biadego would pass long hours, almost motionless in that very cold room, near his Father and Founder, whom he revered.

One winter, the wardrobe keeper had forgotten to give him a woolen blanket. Fr. Biadego never asked for one, and supported this as a privation. Later, when the oversight was discovered, he was asked how he had been able to endure the cold. His reply was such that it seemed that he had hardly noticed it.

In the matter of obedience, he was all that our rule demands. He truly emulated the Angels; *rivaling on earth the heavenly spirits...* On hearing the Venerable Founder say: 'Please do me this favor...', he would immediately set himself to the task. Sometimes Fr. Bertoni would have to stop him, saying: 'Wait a minute! Wait till I tell you what I want!'

Fr. Biadego perfectly fits the description that St. Bernard gives of obedience: 'He prepares his feet for the journey, his ears for hearing, his hands for work, and he keeps his whole being in readiness that he might carry out the will of the one commanding.'

We will recall this incident: in Cittadella, before the present theater was built, there was another one that was open during the day, and also every night. This was a cause of concern to Fr. Louis. He prayed to St. Alphonsus that the Lord might intervene for the destruction of that theater. His hopes did not go unrewarded, and finally the theater was torn down. He rejoiced over the fact, and thanked God for it

Other characteristics of this good Servant of God should be recalled. However, may this little that has been said about him be a proper tribute, merited by a just man after his death. May these few words also encourage those who come afterwards to imitate his example.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the
Cleric, Louis Ferrari**

On July 24, 1834, as a young boy who had not yet reached his fourteenth birthday, Louis Ferrari, was accepted at the Stimate by the Venerable Father Gaspar Bertoni. The Founder had known this boy, and had for him a great affection, because of his fine intelligence, and his singular innocence.

‘What will become of this little dove?’- Fr. Gramego wrote in his Chronicle shortly after Ferrari’s entrance. Indeed, he was a boy of delicate health, who in the flower of his youth had embraced a manner of life that was equally as austere as that of our first Confreres. He did cause some wonder, but showed that his courage for virtue was not ordinary.

He remained in his secular garb for only six months. On the 18th day of December ((should this be January???) 1835, the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, he was vested by the Pro-Vicar of the Diocese, Monsignor Louis Castori. The ceremony took place in the Church of the Stimate at 4:30 p.m. The Church was filled with people, and especially with students.

He completed his grammar course, and that of Rhetoric at the Stimate with much profit, showing promise in Latin. He was able to produce elegant compositions in this language. For Philosophy and Theology, he was sent to the Diocesan Seminary, because at this time, the faculty to teach the entire course of studies at the Stimate had not been granted. This faculty was given at a later date by the Illustrious and Most Reverend Bishop Benedict DeRiccabona.

‘Don Luigetto’, as they used to call him, attended class with his companion, John Baptist Lenotti. This latter lived among us as a **Missionary** endowed with a great religious spirit, and was the second Superior General ¹⁴.

¹⁴ He had received the clerical habit the year before, on May 8, 1834, 15 days after his entrance. The first student to be accepted at the Stimate was Charles Fedelini, who entered on October 4, 1826. The Vicar of the Diocese, Msgr. Dionisi, vested him that same year

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In the Seminary class rooms, our students stood out to such a degree that they were often proposed by their professors as models for the other students. On very rare exceptions, they were even dispensed from examinations. They never went off to school alone, but were always accompanied by some of their Confreres, as the Venerable Founder wished. Furthermore, before they left for school, they would have to recite their lessons at home, and many times, Fr. Bertoni himself would hear them. Every day they were expected to pre-read whatever tract the Professor was to expose and explain on the following day.

In addition to these assigned studies, they had to apply themselves to other subjects with utmost diligence. These were matters that Fr. Bertoni assigned to them for that time that would remain free after completing their regular work. Every day, they were expected to give a quarter of an hour to Greek – there was another period of 15 minutes to be devoted to French and Hebrew. Then they had to give an equal length of time to Latin, and the Tuscan classics, according to the method of Cesari ¹⁵.

This curriculum lasted for the entire course of their Philosophy. When Don Ferrari and Don Lenotti began their theological studies, there were additional assignments to the exegesis that they studied at the Seminary. They had to read sacred Scripture and give their explanations of the passages read to Fr. Bertoni. In the early times, it was just the text itself, but later, they also were expected to know the views of the various commentators.

For the study of the sacred canons, they used Devoti's Commentary at home. For outside reading in theology, they studied Antoine, Petavius and St. Alphonsus Liguori. Fr. Bertoni wanted his students well versed in letters, but even more so in all the sacred sciences, because to him, knowledge is the secret weapon of the Priest. Don Luigi, whose brief memoirs we wish to bring to a close, always obeyed Fr. Bertoni with good will. His ardor for study did not diminish, despite the *scrofula* that soon developed in his blood stream.

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Deep incisions were soon made, especially on his shoulders. There were times that the surgeon had to cut right down to the bone. Through all this, young Ferrari remained patient, and never complained. Medicated and bandaged, he went off to school as usual. With all the suffering that he endured, he was nonetheless always joyful. With his innocent witticisms, he was the life of the community.

Fr. Bertoni, who loved this young man a great deal, did everything possible to restore his health, without sparing any cost, but it was all to no avail. The stubborn illness finally overcame his waning struggle, and he died at the age of 22.

¹⁵ The method of Fr. Anthony Cesari consisted in this: read a few lines of Tullius, or from Passavanti, or from some other authors of that century, and consider them attentively. Then, having closed the book, write all that can be remembered. Then, compare what has been written to the text, and note all the differences and mistakes. Impress their beautiful expressions and the most pure gold of their language and style, on your mind. This type of exercise was a favorite with Fr. Bertoni. If he had to dispense with any other assignment, he would never neglect this one.

Even during his last illness, 'Don Luigetto' retained his angelic modesty and his ever present smile never disappeared from his face. 'One night', the Brother who assisted him related, 'I brought him something which I thought would be some comfort to him. He looked at me smiling, and said; 'Why do you bother about these things? I am not thinking of this world any more, but I am thinking of paradise.'

When Fr. Bertoni used to visit him, he would comfort the young man with words such as these: 'Courage, Don Luigetto! ***If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die in the Lord. Therefore, whether we live, or die, we are the Lord's!***

Young Ferrari showed a great desire to die, to be united with God. As Fr. Biadego was in the next room and was also seriously ill, they used to joke back and forth. They would ask one another who would be the first to die. Fr. Biadego did die first, bringing to a close his holy and religious life. A few days later, young Ferrari followed him. He passed away on the 6th of March, 1842. All were consoled in his holy death¹⁶.

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**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. MODESTO CAINER**

He was born to Peter Cainer and Mary Mistrorgio, very pious parents, who lived in Pescheria, between Sottoriva and Via Storione. The Cainer family was of civil station. He entered the Stimmate on July 12, 1824, to lead a mortified and humble life with our Venerable Founder. Fr. Cainer, at this time, was 25 years of age, and he had already been ordained a Priest. He was not a man of extensive learning, but one of great humility. He showed dependence on Fr. Bertoni in all things, with his simplicity of a child. He enjoyed being employed in the most ordinary duties.

It was because of this low esteem of himself, and not to avoid fatigue, that he never wanted to accept the office of Teacher, nor Confessor. The Founder, therefore, did not ask these of him, but would have him substitute for a teacher who might be impeded from teaching school on any given day. He was a man who showed himself always disposed to accept any inconvenience, no matter what the cost would be to himself personally.

Fr. Michael Angelo Gramego described him thus in his Chronicles: 'Under the direction of the Servant of God, Reverend Father Gaspar Bertoni, Fr. Cainer trudged to libraries, book stores and dealers, he wrote to, and he also searched through, distant cities. His was the merit of assembling a very good and valuable **library** at the Stimmate. He was a very patient, charitable, loving and diligent man in assisting all the sick of the House, especially the young Cleric, Don Ferrari, to whom he rendered

¹⁶ On July 30, 1853, his remains, together with those of the others of our deceased who did not have noble burial, were transported from the public cemetery to the Sepulcher of the Congregation which had been purchased by Fr. John Mary Marani, the first Superior General after the Founder [who had died the month before, on the 12th of June of that same year, 1853].

an assistance which I will call heroic, throughout his very long and most dreaded infirmity.'

He held the office of Sacristan and he discharged it with much devotion. He often did the work of the Brother Sacristan, and would sweep the Church and trim the lamps. He was convinced that no duty in the House of God is lowly, but all are very honorable.

To serve the Masses, he chose only those boys who knew the ceremonies exactly, and who would pronounce [48] the words distinctly. He himself would instruct them with his patient goodness.

He also had the duty of supervising the students on their leaving the House. Then, when school was over for the day, he would appear on the street with his cloak and hat, putting on his glasses, and watch for the boys streaming out of the exits, leading to the street. They then would walk along in order, and well behaved.

He did all that he could to make himself useful to the young community, for which he felt a most sincere affection. Before the Lord called him to Himself, He tried his servant 'with four long and painful illnesses, which he supported with great patience.' He died with all the Sacraments, praying continually until his last breath. He passed away on January 12, 1844, when he was 45 years of age.

Fr. Francis **Ravelli**¹⁷, SJ, wrote from Rome to a cousin of his, on April 27, 1844, concerning the death of Fr. Modesto: 'I heard about the happy death of Fr. Cainer. What a beautiful and holy soul he was! He was really an angel. *Being consumed in a short time, he fulfilled a long life.* Only with difficulty have I said a **De Profundis** for him, and this seemed to me to be out of order. Many times, however, and with fervor, have I recommended myself to him, who is now blessed in heaven.'

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¹⁷ Translator's Note: This is the maiden name of Fr. Bertoni's Mother: Brunora [RAVELLI].

**Compendium
Of the Life of
Fr. FRANCIS CARTOLARI**

At his death, Fr. Francis Cartolari left behind an odor of virtue and holiness that there would be required – as Fr. Gramego wrote – ‘a volume to describe them.’ However, the little that has come down to us concerning him suffices, I believe, to justify the sublime idea that those who have gone before us felt for Fr. Cartolari.

[49]

Francis Cartolari was born of a very noble family of Verona¹⁸. His father was Sir Paul Cartolari, a man of long-standing faith, of an irreproachable way of life and unusual modesty. Francis’s mother was the noble Frances Borghetti, the last of that illustrious lineage. She was a woman endowed with an unusual mind, of strong soul and extraordinary piety and charity. These gifts she also bequeathed to our Fr. Francis, and most especially, his deep sense of religion. This was so strong in him, that he had a veritable horror of the slightest fault.

When his studies were completed, and he had been ordained a Priest, he entered the Stimmate in the year 1822. At that time, he was 28 years of age. Soon he gave evidence at the Stimmate of how well he had grasped the words of Jesus Christ: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*** [Mt 5:3]. Humility and poverty formed his genuine delight. For him, the greatest humiliations and those contrary to his self-love, seemed to him as nourishment. He sought them, as men of the world seek honor. If anyone reprimanded him, or even in passing had referred to some defect of his, this he seemed to accept happily and contentedly. He would be the first to undertake the most ordinary and lowly tasks, especially in serving the sick, for whom **[50]** he showed a most affectionate care. He would never let anyone interfere with his serving them. While the building was in progress, he was often seen carrying stones, or transporting the needed mortar in a wheel-barrow.

¹⁸ His family descended from the Aliprandini’s of Milan, a branch of the Fanzago family. They all moved to Clusone, then to Bergamo, and finally to Verona. The family became established in Verona and received the Decree of Citizenship on April 23, 1445. In 1468, the Family took the name of Cartolari, which was then inscribed in its Coat of Arms. This came about through the heredity of the Canon and Palatine Count, Bartholomew Cartolari, the last of his clan, and the uncle of Anthony – who was the son of the late Andrew Fanzago. This Anthony is buried in the Cathedral before the altar of Sts. Stephen and Lawrence, which is now dedicated to the Assumption.

The above-mentioned Canon was the Vicar General of several Bishops of Verona. He founded and adorned the Chapels of St. Michael, the Arch-Angel, and the one of Sts. Lawrence and Stephen in the Cathedral. The Cartolari Family was inscribed in the Noble Council in 1524. Its descendants were exemplary Churchmen, learned juris-consultors, and valiant knights. They held the most honorable positions within the country, as well as outside of it.

Among the outstanding, was Bartholomew Cartolari, a distinguished jurist, Vicar of Cardinal Augustine Valerio, Co-councilor of Rancussion, the Farnesian Duke of Parma and Piacenza, etc., and the Bishop of Chioggia. Paul Cartolari, his brother, was a professed Knight of the Order of St. Stephen, and no less a fervent Christian, as he was a courageous warrior. After having fought with great praise in many lands especially Flanders, he went to Hungary for the war against the Turk, and he died in the battle at Giavarino [Raab?], defending a bulwark to which he had been assigned by John DeMedici, on August 28, 1594.

One duty he reserved for himself was that of instructing the most needy people and children. 'This', he used to say, 'is my bread and butter!'

He was always content with the most common and ordinary food. I will say that this in him gave much edification. At dinner, or at supper, while eating the little that had been placed before it, he seemed to enjoy it with relish. Often, he would humbly and sincerely thank Fr. Bertoni for what had been provided. He used to say: 'If he did not provide me with these things, I would have been without anything to eat!'

Out of love for Christ, he had no concern whatever for the nobility and riches of his family. He was deeply rooted in religious humility. To make him feel at ease, or to make him blush, all that was necessary was to recall that in the world he had been a Count and a very rich man. It is impossible to describe how much he loved to be corrected in private, or even in public. He would thank superiors for it, as if a present had been given to him.

He nourished a tender love for poverty as well. He would not touch, or dispose of anything, without having first obtained permission, which he would ask, even for the most inconsequential needs. He would set aside for himself those things that were the most worn, and the most patched. It would be a most difficult matter for him to accept new things. It was evident that this man was endowed with every virtue – he was the perfect religious. He died full of merits, leaving his substantial holdings in his will to Fr. Bertoni. The Founder, over-coming his love for his son, by an act of heroic denial, renounced all of it in favor of a brother of the deceased¹⁹.

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¹⁹ Count Anthony Cartolari wished to leave for posterity a perpetual memorial of this heroic detachment of Fr. Bertoni and his sons. He had a slab erected in his country Oratory of Berthachina, which records this fact. It was to this Oratory that Fr. Francis Cartolari, all his priestly life, used to go to hear Confessions, and on Sundays, he would celebrate Mass there, and give a short sermon. The inscription was composed by the celebrated epigraphist, Fr. J. Baptist Santi. It would seem useful to quote here the inscription in its entirety:

IN THE SANCTUARY OF BERTACHINA, GASPAR BERTONI, MEICHAEL ANGELO GRAMEGO, CAJETAN BRUGNOLI AND FRANCIS BENCIOLETTI, PRIESTS, BY THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT WRITTEN ON THE 13TH OF MAY, 1845, BY FRANCIS CARTOLARI, A MOST PIOUS PRIEST, ON THE 5TH OF JULY, IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS DEATH, MOVED BY THEIR MAGNANIMITY OF SOUL, WILLED THAT THE ENTIRE SUBSTANCE OF THIS ESTATE SHOULD PERTAIN TO HIS BROTHER, ANTHONY CARTOLARI. HE, ADMIRING SUCH VIRTUE, WILLED THAT THE MEMORY OF THIS.

SINGULAR EXAMPLE, WITH GRATEFUL SOUL, BE CONSIGNED TO POSTERITY. IN THE YEAR 1847.

Compendium of the Life of Fr. MICHAEL ANGELO GRAMEGO

We do know that Fr. Gramego was a gentle soul, and that he was the 'delight' of the nascent Congregation. However, it is a pity that all too few of the reminiscences concerning him have come down to us.

He was born in Verona in the year 1783. He was the son of Sebastian Gramego, and Florina Solesina – 'a simple, pure and holy woman', as he described her. She died at the age of 82.

Three qualities of his Mother were also revealed in the temperament and training of her son, who was to become a Priest. He was a man full of faith, humility and that serene joyfulness. More and more, with the passing of time, such characteristics, together with an active faith, are disappearing.

[52]

A month after Fr. Bertoni entered the Stimmate, with Fr. Marani, Fr. Gramego offered himself as the second Priest companion. He always professed for Fr. Bertoni the most profound veneration, and a most sincere filial attachment. He loved the little Congregation with a passion, and he did not draw a single breath except in its service. It would not be enough to reach the Chronicle that he wrote, and which was continued up until the year 1847, to be convinced of this²⁰.

With his tender charity, and with that good sense of humor of his, he was a consolation to those of the House, as well as to those outside it. His serenity of soul never was ruffled. If some tribulation or humiliation come to him, after he had complied with the Will of God, he would turn to his companions and say: 'This does not bother me; there is not one Gramego in the world!'

At table in those times, the whole main course, after a little soup seasoned with fat, there would frequently be a pieced of cheese, about the size and the shape of dice. Fr. Gramego used to shake it in the hollow of his hand, as if he were playing

²⁰ I believe it would be useful to note here some of the entries from his Chronicle:

1818. Note well, and I mean well, and indeed, very well! Around the first of April, a contract was drawn up for the construction of the main altar. What a happy day!

1822: Note this, even more than well. O Holy Spouses, Joseph and Mary! The blessed and desired hour has come. Today, October 3rd, at 3:00 p.m., the main Church was opened for public worship. I, a miserable sinner, was the first to celebrate on the new main altar, dedicated to the Holy Spouses. ... Watch out, Gramego, if you do not do well!

'Today I have I have come [says Jesus Christ] to dwell night and day with you.' Watch out, if ...!

1833. The 3rd of October. A note, one of the beautiful notes, indeed the most beautiful. At First Vespers [i.e., at 3:00 p.m.] of St. Francis of Assisi, we rang for the first time the excellent concert of 6 bells, in the tone of 'Alafa', composed of the finest metals – resettled copper, all with soldini's of San Marco, and purified before my very eyes, and cast likewise in my presence, without my ever leaving the furnace room, although this firing lasted about 11 hours. Viva! Jesus and Mary! The cost of the three metals, the timber for the belfry, and their mounting and iron fittings, construction, etc. was 1050 tallari [5,250 Lira]. *For him who fears God, there is nothing to fear.*

dice, and roll it across the table, saying: '... two... six...! He would thereby sprinkle that poor table with the condiment of his own, innocent good humor.

He returned one day from our Villa in Sezano, and Fr. Bertoni asked [53] him if he and his companions had tasted any wine. He answered: 'We drank well through a double key ... when we arrived at the fountain, we drank water through this gadget...' In saying this, he showed to Fr. Bertoni what he had in his hand. This was only an example of the mortification that he practiced. Even more, it indicates his heroic self-denial that he practiced with a smile.

For many years, he taught the elementary classes, and won the reputation of being a 'good master.'

Penitents flocked to his **Confessional**, and especially the poor, for whom he felt a genuine paternal pity. For many of them, he obtained considerable alms from persons who were well off financially. It was not rare that he provided bedding for them, to better provide for the morality of their young. Many times, after remaining in his Confessional for the entire morning, it happened that just as he had taken his place at table for a mouthful of food, the Brother would come and say: 'Father, there are some more who are asking for you.' He would then return to his Confessional.

There were times when this seemed to disturb him, he would say: 'What? At this hour?' He would then take back what he had said, and would add: 'All right, all right – I am coming right away', and he would get up from table. The others would say that he left the table not to bury the dead, as had Tobias, but to impart that Sacrament that raises souls up to a divine life.

Although there was a large field opened up to him in the Confessional, he could do little, or nothing in the pulpit.

His dread of public speaking seemed to take even his breath away. Almost every time that the Founder had sent him to teach Catechism in the parish of the Most Holy Trinity, as he went along the street, his excessive anxiety even caused him to vomit, or faint. Fr. Bertoni was satisfied with his willingness to obey, so did not impose so difficult a trial on him any more.

Fr. Gramego's life, therefore, revolved around his Confessional and class room. His was a life, totally dedicated and was one of sacrifice. He lived 70 years, 37 of which were in our Congregation.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother,
JOHN BAPTIST BANDORIA**

Your life is hidden with Christ in God - St. Paul says to the Colossians [3:3]. If these words of the Apostle apply to all genuine Christians, they were truly verified in the life of John Baptist Bandoria. He was born in Verona, the son of Paul Bandoria and Cecilia Cerasola. In the short time that he lived, he knew little of the world, and nothing of that pleased him. Overwhelmed by domestic tribulations, his heart was opened only for the love of God and his own Mother. He assisted her with most affectionate care, throughout her long illness. He worked hard at his trade of tailoring, to support her and to procure for her every possible comfort. He accompanied her to Mass, leading her on his arm and home again from Church. He was always nearby, rendering her every service that he could. His filial piety was so evident that it deeply loved those who came to know of it. It drew down on him the blessing of the Lord, Who set aside this beautiful soul to make it all His own.

For a long time, John Bandoria had desired to come to the Stimate. After his mother's death, he was the only surviving child in the family and he finally realized his wish on March 18, 1846. At the Stimate, he continued to ply his trade while serving our old Fathers, and also offering himself for any other service that was asked of him in obedience. He had a calm nature, and loved silence, prayer and work. He had a great desire to hear the Word of God.

Seven years after his entrance, he was judged ready for heaven and departed this life on July 3, 1853 ((September 6th??)).

[55]

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Professed Student,
FELICE FORTUNATO MARINI**

In Voltino, on the Lago di Garda, the Diocese of Brescia, Felice Fortunato Marini was born. He was the son of Anthony Marini and Ursula Pasquetti. On December 13, 1856 at the age of 19, he was accepted at the Stimate. For a number of years, he had been in the well-known Congregation, founded by Fr. Mazza, but was rejected because of ill health. Fr. Marani also later rejected him for the same reason, but was finally accepted on the receipt of the favorable judgment of four doctors. It is evident that his malady instead of disappearing, had merely abated.

Hence, before the end of his Novitiate, it was clear that his end was near. He received Holy Communion as Viaticum, and was granted permission to pronounce his Holy Vows, into the hands of Fr. Francis Benciolini, who had been delegated for this by the Superior. He made his Profession with such devoted candor, that he edified all that witnessed it. With the same presence of mind, he received the Last Sacraments. Then, he laid back to pray and from time, he could be heard expressing the wish that he would soon go to heaven. He expired on October 18, 1858.

He was a Youngman with much intelligence, and who applied much diligence to his studies. He wrote Latin in the style of Cornelius, and could speak the French language very well. He was most exact in the observance of every rule, and was devoted, humble, mortified and obedient. He gave great hopes to the Congregation that in him it was to have a good and worthy worker – instead, it was to have one more intercessor in heaven!

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[56]

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. CAJETAN BRUGNOLI**

He was born in Verona of an honorable family, in the year 1790. His Father, Charles, was a Notary by profession, and his Mother was Rose Cassari. By temperament, he was full of life and zeal. Under Napoleon, he served as a Captain in the Corps of Engineers.

He was tall in stature, and of noble appearance, and served for a time in the Noble Guard of Napoleon. While his Corps left for Milan, he obtained permission to go to Modena, where he took further studies in the school of military engineering. In accord with the will of God, Who wanted him for His service, a short time later, he found himself in poor health. He applied for, and received a discharge from military service. He then returned to Verona, and entered the Seminary. When he had completed his theological studies, he dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the good of souls. He worked very hard to establish and to direct the Oratory in St. Anastasia's Parish.

Because of his desire to serve the Lord better, one year after our Venerable Founder had entered the Stimmate, Fr. Brugnoli also entered. He manifested such submission, obedience and apostolic fervor that these qualities were unsurpassed. He thus became the fourth member of the new Congregation.

He became a tireless and assiduous **Confessor**. He **preached** with such zeal and ardor, that he would break out in a sweat, even in the dead of winter. As he had a very strong voice, that served his zeal well, while he was preaching in St. Anastasia's, he could be heard in the adjoining square. He **taught high school** with such clarity and method that his students were traditionally the most attentive. He had for them a sincere affection [57], and he was deeply loved by them in return. Although he had known the world and the life of the barracks, in his manner and speech, he had such a simplicity that he was compared to a dove of peace. Even in his latter years, he was so humble that if he had ever committed any defect, even involuntarily, he was ever ready to kneel down to ask pardon for it. He would ask for penances, not only in private, but also in public.

He really seemed to love to mortify his palate. One time, he and another Priest, had returned to Sezano after a long journey. He and his companions went into the House to rest themselves, and the attendant there, whose name was Placidus,

seeing them tired and sweating, offered them two eggs and a glass of wine. When each of them had eaten the eggs, with bread, Fr. Brugnoli said to his companion: 'Now that we are sufficiently refreshed, can we make of this wine a little offering to the Blessed Mother? What do you think?' The other said that he was willing, so they directed the steward to bring the wine back from whence it came.

Fr. Brugnoli had a fine mind and worked always to perfect the art he had learned in school. In architecture, he was very competent. He played a major role in all of our construction programs, both in the city, as well as those in the country. He had a marked ability for the management of our country estate, and worked out there for many years with distinction. He was also asked by the Jesuit Fathers to assist them in their construction and he designed and supervised the building of the new wing of their Novitiate in Verona dedicated to St. Anthony.

He had a great esteem for the Company of Jesus, and for all religious orders. In his affection, however, he preferred no other group to his own beloved little Congregation, as both right reason and filial piety demand. We all remember the sincere joy he would experience whenever anyone entered our Congregation. Even as an old man, and in failing health, he would bang his cane on the ground, saying: 'Let them come in battalions, and work for the glory of God!'

He himself never stopped working. During his last years, his mental faculties diminished due to illness. He would have to be [58] carried out to his Confessional, where long lines of men awaited him. As a consolation, he would celebrate Mass every day with a piety, and most exact observance of the rubrics, that were truly admirable. He spent much of his day in prayer. How moving it was to see this venerable, old man, slowly making his way along the corridors, leaning on his cane, bowing to the holy images as he passed.

His last illness was quite protracted, but he never manifested any sign of impatience. Whenever he was asked how he felt, he would always answer: 'Oh, just fine!.' He did, however, suffer a great deal, but despite it, he still wanted more to offer up out of love for the Lord. When he was near death, someone said to him: 'Father, it is not yet time to die.' He answered: 'that's good – I can still suffer some more!'²¹

He received the Last Sacraments with much tranquility and devotion. With the names of Jesus and Mary on his lips, he breathed his last on Friday, November 18, 1858. His funeral was well attended by the laity, and also the boys of the Oratory of the Stimmate, for whom he had done so much; now he enjoys, as he will forever, the reward of his many labors for the Congregation, for his fellow man, and all for the glory of God. May the hope of a similar reward animate all of us along the same path, and may we all attain the same glory.²²

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²¹ The Countess Fietta [as well as her husband, the Count, a very learned man, and the author of the work: *Nicholas Boccasino*, were very devoted to our Congregation], wished to have these words embroidered in silk over two bands of velvet: 'I can still suffer!' – in the sense in which these were said, they were truly sublime.

²² He was one of the three Confreres, who, with the Father Founder, renounced the huge Cartolari inheritance.

**Compendium
of the Life of the Novice Cleric,
LOUIS SALVI**

He was born in Verona of an upright and well-to-do family in 1841. As a student in the first year of theology, he entered the Stimate in 1859. After only four months of Novitiate, in which he felt himself to be most blessed, and most happy, Louis Salvi died. So many times this good confrere thanked God for the benefit of having been called to the religious life. He breathed forth his blessed soul into the embrace of the Lord, after an illness of only eight days. He was strengthened by all the comforts of religion, and exchanged this life for that of heaven, at the age of 18. May his angelic soul intercede for us.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Professed Cleric,
FRANCIS MADINELLI**

He was born in Verona in St. Stephen's Parish in the year 1840. His parents were Agosto Madinelli and Rose Marani²³. From the time he was a child, he manifested a genuine piety. When he was 15 years of age, he entered the Stimate, where he showed a generous spirit of devotion and obedience.

After his Profession, he received Minor Orders. Shortly thereafter, he contracted miliary fever, that later developed into tuberculosis. His illness was long and painful, but his patience remained constant. Without ever complaining about his sufferings, he passed his time praying to God, and expressed the desire of being united with him in heaven. During his last weeks, he received Holy Viaticum [60] many times. The morning of his death, which occurred October 26, 1859, he earnestly desired to receive Holy Communion. Shortly after receiving his Lord, he entered his last agony and quietly passed away.

He was 19 years of age.

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²³ Translator's Note: a revered Stigmatine family name!

Reminiscences
concerning
The Fathers
and
the Brothers
of the
**Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries
for the Assistance of Bishops**

Volume II

**Additional Early Necrologies of the
Stigmatine Community
[1860 -1872]**

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Dedication

To the
Very Reverend Peter Vignola, Superior General
on the
Occasion of his Golden Priestly Jubilee,
September 24, 1886

Very Reverend Father,

The friendship of many years, with which you honor me, that kind of kinship that unites us, and above all that great benefit that I alone know and profess to have received from you, for a long time now, have made me feel the need of paying tribute to you, with a public attestation of sincere affection.

It is because I have agreed wholeheartedly with the thought of presenting to you, on the most happy occurrence of your Priestly Jubilee, these brief *Reminiscences* of those Father and Brothers of the Congregation, over which you preside with such wisdom. These men have already returned to the bosom of God, to reap the reward of their virtues. These *Reminiscences* were given to me by some of your sons. To them, it seemed only just that these early products might extend their influence even beyond that cloister where they lived. In this way, there would be enhanced the cherished hope that the example of these men, whom the Congregation was called upon to bring to spiritual maturity, might have an even greater effect.

Accept, then, Very Reverend Father, these precious *Reminiscences*, as a sign of my gratitude, and of the ardent best wishes, that on this happy day, I offer up to the Lord for you, and for all of your beloved sons, in whose jubilation, with all my heart, I consider myself fortunate to be associated.

So, then, Very Reverend Father, if I might hope – and I do hope - that I may not be forgotten in your prayers before the Lord on this day. I would thus believe that I would then be compensated, with interest, for the little that I have been able to do on so happy an occasion.

Permit me, lastly, with all respect, to kiss your hand – in this act, I profess that I am filled with a holy joy!

Verona, September 24, 1886

Your most devoted and affectionate servant,
Fr. Ferdinand Colombari

Preface

If the death of the just is precious before the Lord – *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints...* [Ps 115:15] – then, so, too, are their virtuous acts. It is from these that their lives may be understood, and what it was that rendered them worthy of the Crown of Heaven. To gather *Recollections* about them, is a duty of piety toward the deceased, and it offers a useful service to those still living. What a beautiful inheritance has been left to us by the words and examples of the Reverend fathers and Brothers who have preceded us! The sweet odor of virtue, especially of some of them, still remains fragrant in our midst, and in our city and throughout the Diocese. However, since time destroys everything, it has already robbed us of a good part of so many pious memories, it was the earnest wish of all that these *Reminiscences* should be written.

The thought of ever having them printed did not dawn on us until a short time ago. As the celebration of the Priestly Jubilee of our Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola approached, this thought came to us. Therefore, there was much haste in compiling, as best we could, the information contained herein. We present here the results of our efforts, in the short time that was available to us. Hence, there are not a few defects, but may the reader pardon us, considering rather the good intention we had of satisfying the desires of all, and of adding one more tribute to the anniversary being celebrated by our most beloved Superior and Father.

Verona, from the Stimate, September 1, 1886.

The Priests of the Stimate

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BRIEF REMARKS

THE CONGREGATION OF APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES: FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BISHOPS

Its Origin – Difficulties – Nature and Scope

During the year 1810²⁴, all religious orders were suppressed. A man of God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a gem of the Veronese Clergy, was transferred by Bishop Liruti to the Parish of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. As a Curate for ten years in his home parish of St. Paul's in *Campo Marzo*, he had accomplished much good. However, it was in this next parish where he went to live that the Lord was waiting to communicate to him His special designs. A most successful Parish Mission was conducted at Saints Firmus and Rusticus by the celebrated Missionary Apostolic, Monsignor Louis Pacetti. With his ardent zeal, Fr. Gaspar took an active part in this Parish Mission. During it, he felt within himself ever more clearly, the inspiration from heaven to dedicate himself to this type of life. He manifested this idea of his to a group of priest friends of his, who had long considered him as their Father and Master. They gave their word that they were ready to follow him.

Therefore, on November 4, 1816, he, with his former pupil of the old Oratory of St. Paul's in Campo Marzo, Fr. John Mary Marani [2] and his beloved Paul Zanolì, first withdrew from the world. They took up residence as poor men, in a little house next to the Church of the Stigmata²⁵. The property included all the area of our present House, as well as that of the Convent of St. Teresa²⁶. The Church and the gardens had been offered to him by the Very Reverend Father Galvani²⁷.

In addition to these, there was another piece of property, including a garden, at the *Dereletti*, situated near the Parish Church of St. Stephen's – and still another building near the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity²⁸.

From the outset, they were occupied in teaching school to young boys. Somewhat later, other priests joined them: Fr. Gramego, Fr. Farinati, Fr. Bragato, Fr. Brugnoli and Fr. Cartolari. They were able to offer a complete high school

²⁴ Translator's Note: in the course of this translation, the page numbers of the original Italian edition of this work will be added in square parenthesis, as follows: [].

²⁵ This was an old Oratory under the care of the *Confreres of the Stigmata of St. Francis*, which had been disbanded by the law of Napoleon's suppression.

²⁶ This was an old Monastery of Discalced Carmelites.

²⁷ Fr. Galvani was a priest of great talent, vast knowledge and exemplary virtue. He was 'Lector' of Theology in our Diocesan Seminary, and Arch-Priest of St. John's in Foro. From the time he had Fr. Bertoni as his student, he came to love and esteem him for his virtues. When he learned of the great good he was doing and had planned for the Church, Fr. Galvani asked him to accept all those places he had purchased by himself from the Government. He wished only that Fr. Bertoni would assume the gratuitous duty of giving a liberal arts education to the young boys, then being taught there by two priests, whom Fr. Galvani was supporting in the little House next to the Stimate.

²⁸ This was part of a very ancient Convent and Abbey, founded in the 12th century, together with the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, by the Vallambrosian Monks.

curriculum, and some elementary classes. The place certainly did not provide any comfort. The Church, although architecturally it did have some merit, had served previously as a black-smith shop, and was badly in need of renovation. On one side, there was a little Oratory, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is still standing today. Next to the Church and this little Oratory, five little rooms had been added on to the eastern and northerly sides. These were in a sad state of disarray, and could not have been improved without undertaking costly renovations. The entire complex, then, was in very poor condition. In order to maintain the School, our Fathers had to transport the furniture in and out of these rooms every day, and return it all in the evening. This was required because at night these rooms would serve as bed rooms, and then in the morning, they would be converted into class rooms. After serving as sleeping quarters for two, or more of the Fathers, in the morning they would have to provide these same rooms with all the necessary implements for school²⁹.

[3] However, these few rooms did not suffice. The choir stall, the sacristy and the body of the Church were also used as class rooms. Once the Church was renovated and suitably decorated, thought was given to improve their own living quarters. Fr. Gaspar, therefore, took back from the Convent of St. Teresa a small piece of land, so that a suitable building might be built, that would require this additional extension. His idea was to construct a comfortable dwelling for his sons, and also provide the much needed space for the eight classes which the school soon included.

For this reason, in the year 1823, a well-planned and pleasant building was begun. It was to be a solid structure, and even elegant, that was of uncommon practicality. In addition to its advantages of style, it was well ventilated by means of a court-yard, which covered the entire interior of the plan. On the north side, it was closed off by a wall, that separated it from St. Teresa's Convent.

The new house was then provided with a copious library. Fr. Bertoni had set aside the two largest rooms in the center of the building for this purpose, and filled them with more than a thousand volumes of the rarest and most accredited editions. This library was so well planned that its books sufficed to serve magnificently for any group of studious men³⁰, especially of the sacred sciences. We should point out here that our early confreres assisted in the construction of this building.

How wonderful and edifying it was to see them, right after they had left their class rooms, put down their books and pens, to take their place at the side of the workmen. They assisted them in carrying the lime and bricks, and joined them in their fatigue. May their labors, on this holy ground protect it, sanctify it, and make it fructify!

At last, the building was furnished, the Church was opened and new Oratories were built, and the old ones were renovated. The thought behind it all was that an

²⁹ cf. The Biography of Fr. Bertoni written by Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe.

³⁰ cf. Fr. Giacobbe's Biography of Fr. Bertoni.

education in school was not considered [4] more important than was the moral and religious training of the boys. Our Fathers consecrated themselves with renewed vigor and fervor to the well-being of the youth, by means of teaching school. The Very Reverend Father Bertoni was the Prefect, or the Director of all the classes.

However, this was not the only work that our early confreres undertook. **They preached the Word of God, either through catechism classes, or the Spiritual Exercises.** They sat for long hours in the **Tribune of Penance**. They assisted the **imprisoned** and the **sick**, and they dedicated themselves to long **study** and **prayer**. For them, this activity was their daily bread. As for their virtue and perfection, this is still on the lips of everyone who knew them. The odor of their holy lives still is diffused strongly and sweetly.

The example of the Founder, and the observance of his every word and example, was for them the only Rule and Constitution. Thus they lived without the title, as men bound to regular observance. The world, which is ever most curious, and capable of spying on such souls and finding defects in them, could only say of them that in mortification, they were excessive beyond measure. This was particularly noted in that they ate and drank as poor men.

Who would believe that in this discomfort and voluntary poverty, they were also so happy and content that it was a pleasure just to see them, or to listen to them. They were ready to bear any burden or fatigue, as if these things were nothing, or not difficult for them. They would accept the most arduous and displeasing assignments, as well as those that were distasteful to them. They acquiesced to all that their Superior asked of them ³¹.

They continued in this life until 1844. During that year, the Jesuits opened a high school at St. Sebastian's. Because of the great esteem he had for those priests, Fr. Gaspar felt that they would provide better for the literary and religious formation of the youth. Furthermore, he was also short handed, so he closed the school at the Stimate.

[5] Then began a period of trial for the holy man. A number of his priests had died, others had left, and practically no one had the courage to give his name to this Congregation. The reason, it was said, was that the penance of Fr. Bertoni was fearful! Some priests of the Oratory of St. Philip, who were very close to him, had told him many times in jest that if he wished his Congregation to grow, he ought to place over the door this inscription in large letters: *Here you can eat, drink and sleep!* However, it is hardly likely that Anyone one would have believed it.

His answer to this comment would be: 'In the early days of a foundation, what will be mitigated of itself, with changing times and changing needs, could never be considered excessive.' However, several years before his death, he made it known that everyone was to have proper nourishment. They were to keep a just balance between abundance and need, and this was written into his Constitutions.

³¹ ib.

Nevertheless, his beloved family, rather than growing, was becoming smaller right before his eyes, as the years passed.

Now it seems incredible, but Fr. Bertoni did not lessen in the least his efforts to increase and improve this family. He tirelessly gathered books from every source that he could, he organized the library, he dictated the rules and discipline and governed the house as though the Congregation was flourishing more than it ever had; So great were his hopes that success would crown this endeavor, which God Himself had inspired, that he would say that if he knew for certain that on the morrow the world was to end, he still would have gone on in his work. To inspire his afflicted sons with this same confidence, he used to say: 'Have courage! – Let us trust in God, and let us leave to Him the future, as He can do all things!'

When anyone would leave, he would turn to the others and say: 'And do you, too, wish to go? I will stay here alone, with the help of God, until my death.' In brief, then, it can be said of him that **he hoped against hope!**

Then, the year 1848 came, the period that was so disturbed because of the insurrection among the people. The Servant of God rules [6] over his sons with such prudence that they did not suffer too much in those troubled times. There was, however, one exception. Two of the priests were falsely accused of trying to bribe some soldiers. It was said that while the soldiers were going to Confession, the priests offered them some money to desert. They were put in prison, and they faced the danger of even worse treatment, even the death penalty. A number of important citizens intervened for them, and finally, their innocence was established, and they were set free³².

Between the years 1849 and 1850, many soldiers were camped in Verona, in an effort to stamp out the rebellion. Since our House was large and spacious, and almost entirely uninhabited, it was taken over and used as a barracks for soldiers. This provided a new field for the zeal of our Fathers and Brothers, and they managed to win many souls back to the sacraments and to the practice of Religion. The soldiers remained until 1854, but, the year before, our Venerable Founder was called to heaven to receive the reward of his heroic mortification and constancy. He named Fr. Benciolini as the heir of all his ownings.

Fr. Marani succeeded the Venerable Founder. In the year 1854, he was in Rome, at the feet of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Pius IX. The Pope blessed him and the little Congregation, and he expressed the desire that this **Little Flock** [these are the very words of the Pontiff] **might grow [Crescat Pusillus Grex!]** – and be diffused **for the glory of the Lord, for the good of souls and for the assistance of Bishops!**

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars examined the spirit of this new Congregation, the End to which it tends and the laws by which it is governed. On the 16th day of April 1855, it published a Decree in which was stated that His

³² cf. The Life of Fr. Innocent Venturini, an early member of the Congregation, further ahead in this volume.

Holiness has ordered that this Congregation, and its Scope, by this present Decree, is to be commended and accorded the most ample praise [Decretum Laudis - the Decree of Praise].

On the 30th of September of that same year, in the Church of the Stimmate, the Solemn Canonical Erection of our Institute was held with special ceremonies. The day was all the more sacred due to the presence of His excellence, Bishop Benedict Riccabona. To him, Fr. Marani, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, made his Profession of Vows. The others, then, one by one, kneeling before him, for the first time, they pronounced the Formula of Vows of perpetual Poverty, Chastity and Obedience³³.

The blessing of Pius IX, and his expressed wish – ***that the Little Flock might grow!*** - soon began to reap fruit. ‘Outstanding priests’ of Verona, and of other places, as well as many young men and boys of varying ages, began to seek admission³⁴.

The Convent of the Most Blessed Trinity, mentioned above, was renovated, and done over in a most suitable manner. There, the young members were trained, and they lived there peacefully until 1866. When the political storms of that era broke, a period that was so threatening for the Church and Religious Orders, Fr. Marani sought for our men another place to live. For his Success, we will profess eternal gratitude to His Highness, the Prince-Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona, for his most cordial hospitality. The storm then unleashed in all its fury, and it struck us most forcefully. On August 27, 1867, there began a time of most harsh trial for our religious family, that was almost totally destroyed.

Our House and meager funds were confiscated by the government. The Convent of St. Teresa, and a great part of the House of the Stimmate were taken over, and used as schools. A few of our confreres were treated as tolerated guests in their own beloved home, so that they could care for the services in the Church. Fr. Marani, with extreme regret, retired with a few others, to a rented house. This was the Massalongo home, facing the Giusti Gardens, in the Parish of *Sancta Maria in Organis*. He died there in near oblivion in 1871.

This sad state of affairs lasted for six years, during which time it appeared clearly [8] what esteem the citizens of Verona had for the Congregation. These people were the heirs of the faith and the piety of their grand-parents who had been students at the Stimmate. They brought material comfort to the agony of an Institute that had always given of itself, without asking for any material retribution. Other

³³ These priests were: Cajetan Brugnoli, Francis Benciolini [who is still living], Innocent Venturini and John Baptist Lenotti. The Coadjutor Brothers were: Paul Zanoli, Louis Ferrari [who is still living], Francis Stevanoni. Many periodicals in Germany, and some papers in Italy, as well as the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* [Series II, Vol. XII, p. 702] had articles concerning our Congregation.

³⁴ The practice of accepting and training young boys for the Congregation was begun by Fr. Bertoni. He himself accepted Louis Ferrari, aged 14, Charles Fedelini, who was 16. John Baptist Lenotti and Louis Biadego were also very young. This conforms to our Rule that determines the minimum age for acceptance to the 14 years.

benefactors also were not lacking. They were prompted to come to our assistance by that Father, Who from heaven, watched over His afflicted sons.

In Him, we have placed all our trust, and in the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, the Patrons of our Congregation and we were not deluded The legal justice of our case that was most evident, finally forced the government to propose a compromise that was accepted: whatever pertained to the substance of the property would be restored, but not the expenses incurred in the long course of the litigation. Complete justice is not to be hoped for on this earth.

By this time, the Superior General was **Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, who was an heir of the genuine spirit of Fr. Bertoni, by whom he had been trained.** He completed the negotiations begun by Fr. Marani, to have a House of our own, in the vicinity of the city of Trent. Shortly afterwards, he recalled the students to Verona, and lodged them in St. Teresa's Convent. Fr. Lenotti died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1875, and he was succeeded by our present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. He established at St. Theresa's the Novitiate. Before 1866, this was conducted at the House of the Most Holy Trinity, which in 1877, was sold to the Salesian Sisters.

In this same year, a House was opened at Bassano, with **a youth program** and a **high school**. In the meantime, this has been converted into a high school. In 1876, **a House was established at Parma, where our Fathers, in addition to teaching elementary school, also conduct the Oratories, teach Catechism, preaching the Spiritual Exercises, and perform all ministries to which they are called.** On the 4th of November last year, the Congregation also went to Pavia, where the Fathers conduct a **night school** during the winter; for the remainder of the year, they have practically continuous **preaching assignments** in every part of that diocese.

Among all the Houses of the Congregation, however, because of its antiquity, and the good done there, ***Santa Maria del Giglio, or the Dereletti*** ³⁵, mentioned earlier in this historical sketch, merits a place of honor. In 1836, when Fr. Marani and Brother Zanolì were sent there by the Founder to take up residence, there was only a squalid dwelling. Even at that time, it was already old; there was also the dark and decaying Church. Concerning this Church, Fr. Marani had begun the construction of a new one, but the work was interrupted by the happenings of 1866. It was then completed by Fr. Lenotti in 1874. The House was most recently rebuilt and renovated for the use of the community, by the present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. The Fathers conduct there an **Oratory** on holy days, for boys. There is a **religious instruction** every night, and the priests are frequently called to **preach** in the parish church of St. Stephen's. **More than anything else, they hear confessions**, especially on the Vigils of the solemnities until about mid-night. They start right in again the next morning for about four more hours. In this work, after Fr. Marani others have been assigned, and have labored with great zeal, but Fr. Francis Benciolini merits a special mention.

³⁵ This was formerly a place for accepting abandoned orphans.

Turning now to the Mother House, that is the Stimate, we will note that in the last decade, the number of workers has grown, so that **the elementary school** was reopened in 1878. Gradually, there was also added the **high school** course, and all the teachers have received the required diploma. The other members render an assiduous contribution to **the sacred and apostolic ministry**.

From what has been said up until now, **the nature and the purpose of the Congregation can be seen**. It is entitled: ***Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops***. Our Founder did not limit himself to this, or that ministry, nor to a few determined cases and matters. The Congregation was intended to **assume every good work in the service of God and souls**, so that all those who have embraced this manner of life, **must be prepared and ready for this**. However, it is **proper** for this Congregation, **in addition to occupying itself in giving the Holy Missions [10]**, to **teach** every branch of literature and the sciences, to hear **Confessions**, to give the Spiritual exercises to every class of souls, to explain the **Catechism** in the schools of Christian Doctrine, to establish the **Marian Congregations** in the Churches of the Congregation. These should be promoted where it is possible. The members of the Congregation are to assist the sick and the dying, they instruct and assist those in prisons, they substitute for, and accept permanently **Chairs of Philosophy and Theology**, and **lend whatever assistance the Bishop may have need of**, even unexpectedly.

The manner in which **the** Institute fulfills its end is, as our rule states: ***to serve, or to assist the Bishop, in those things in which, due to different times and circumstances, he may have need***. The Bishop, then, asks the Superior of the Congregation, for one or more, **to perform some office, or duty, in conformity with the spirit of this Congregation, and according to its rules**. There must be in this Congregation, individuals who are qualified in the judgment of this same Superior.

This Institute is placed under the protection of Mary most holy, and of St. Joseph, whose examples are proposed for our imitation, with divine help. This is required of anyone who desires to serve His Divine Majesty in this Congregation.

This, then, is the simple and very brief history of the beginning and the development of this very small **Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries**. This is the **nature and spirit** that pervades it. It also makes clear that this union of priests, which was brought together by the fortunate decision of Fr. Bertoni, was not a work of chance. Nothing in this world every happens by chance, nor do the works of man, who, of himself, can do nothing. Everything is ordained and disposed by the infinite wisdom of God, Which **reaches therefore from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly** [Ws 8:1].



**Compendium
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother,
FRANCIS STEVANONI**

One day, three good friends of Lugazzano, each one about 27 years of age, were discussing among themselves the vanity of the world, and the death that puts an end to all things in it. The more they talked along these lines, the more they were resolved with zeal for their own eternal salvation. All three of them resolved to turn their backs on the world, and to give their lives entirely to the service of God. One of them became a Capuchin; the other two entered the Stimmate to live under Fr. Bertoni. This was on the 18th day of June 1839. These two were Louis Ferrari, who is still living, and Francis Stevanoni, who was the son of Felice Stevanoni and Maria **Zampieri**³⁶. We will present here a few memoirs of his latter.

He would serve as Porter for many years, edifying all with his cheerful modesty and unchanging calmness, with which he readily gave assistance to everyone. His schedule was a busy one, especially when classes were in session, as he was also the sacristan. He had a very pleasant way with those who came to the Stimmate for Confession. If the Fathers were impeded from coming immediately to the Confessional, while the penitents were waiting, Brother Stevanoni would speak with them on pious matters. He would then seek again for one of the Fathers who would not be occupied at that time.

If the penitents were young boys, he would instruct them briefly and inspire them to make a good confession. He would pray the *Hail, Mary* with them, or some other devotion to the Mother [61] of God, to whom he was quite devoted. He used to make rosaries, and often use them himself.

Whatever time he had free, he would spend in prayer before Mary Immaculate. He sought to instill this devotion into others, especially children. He had a special knack of instructing well. He was very clever in putting into their minds the thought of the Mother of God and the Child Jesus, and would develop reflections on this subject without being obnoxious to those who heard him. This talent of his was especially evident in the time that he spent at the House of *Santa Maria del Giglio*.

He was most assiduous in his care of the Church, and he seemed to delight in keeping it as neat and clean as a mirror. He handled with great reverence the sacred vessels and furnishings, both in setting them out for use, as well as putting them away after the services.

In carrying out his tasks as Sacristan, he had to pass very often in front of the Blessed Sacrament. He would never omit the genuflection, and would always make it with dignity and gravity. These are little things, it is true, but who is there who does not know that holiness consists not so much in clamorous practices, but in the faithful fulfillment of one's own duties in the state of life to which each has been called by the will of God? Bro. Stevanoni fulfilled his duties in his state of life until the year **1860**. He ended his days in a holy manner on the 28th of February, in the 48th year of his life.

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³⁶ Translator's Note: the same family name as the Mother of Fr. Innocent Venturini – [cf. ahead].

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. CHARLES FEDELINI**

He was born in Verona of God-fearing parents, Louis Fedelini and Mary Bonapace. From the time that he was a young boy, he attended school at the Stimmate. When he was 16 years old he manifested the desire to place himself under the discipline of Fr. Bertoni who had a great affection for him. He entered on the 21st of October 1826.

On entrance, he was vested by the Vicar of the Diocese, Monsignor Dionisi. Fr. Bertoni set himself [62] to the task of training him and making the most of the inquisitive and quick mind with which the boy was endowed. He drew much fruit from these lessons, and became particularly proficient in moral theology. He was to teach this matter without salary for several decades.

During the years of his professorship, he set for himself two very noble ends. The testimony of not a few priests, who had the advantage of attending his courses assure us that he did fulfill both his aims. Fr. Fedelini always kept in mind that he was preparing priests who would not be found wanting in the duties of that great office of the care for souls. He also took it upon himself to defend the system of St. Alphonsus Liguori against its powerful opponents. His opponents claimed that they were only trying to restrict him within more just limits, but in truth, they wanted to restrict him entirely.

Fr. Fedelini felt that the best means of defending the Saint's system was to have it better known. With this in mind, he published a dissertation of his own that was entitled: ***St. Alphonsus vindicates Himself*** [Verona. Frizzeri 1851]. In this work, with the very words of the Holy Doctor, he not only showed the absolute worth of the system, but clarified more than ever in the face of all the objections made against the system had already been refuted by the Saint himself - he showed that the Saint's overall work merited the attestation of those who truly love this science.

This dissertation won for Fr. Fedelini the praise of his Bishop and of the majority of those versed in the writings of the Saint. There was admired in his few pages a vast and rare knowledge. However, this work did occasion the opposition of the followers of another system which could claim a great name in its ranks. Fr. Fedelini, however, was able to defend himself with dignity and vigor in a work that was published in Venice, by the F. A. Perini Press in 1852.

In addition to these published works, we also possess many of his manuscripts of moral theology. In these, his love for the Holy Doctor is even more evident. The vastness of his learning, and his extreme diligence in fulfilling the sublime office entrusted to him by his Bishop are most apparent.

[63] These were times in which the students of theology would converse together concerning the matter that was covered in class. However, frequently their conversation turned toward the health of their teacher – often it was rumored that he would not be in class on a given day, as some had heard that blood had been drawn

on him the day before. Often during these conversations, they see him coming along the corridor, so they would then go to their places to await him.

His reputation for learning had spread far and wide. Bishops and theologians sought counsel from him by letter, and often in person. On such occasions they would always leave marveling at his erudition.

Whether it was because of his austere way of life, or because of excessive study, or because of his poor constitution, or maybe because of all three reasons – in August of 1847, his health had failed considerably. His stamina had been so reduced that he left the Congregation, even though he was still much attached to it³⁷.

His departure, however, was only physical - he remained in his heart with the Congregation. When he came to see that his health did not noticeably improve after his departure, and his desire to return to the Congregation that had been his home for so many years did not diminish, shortly after the death of Fr. Bertoni, Fr. Fedelini sent another series of requests to Fr. Marani to be re-admitted. Fr. Marani had succeeded in the government of the Community, and he allowed Fr. Fedelini to be re-accepted on September 16, 1855. He put on again the habit of the Congregation, and after one year of Novitiate, he made his Profession, being dispensed from the second year of Novitiate.

By nature, he was a very active man. Without taking away anything from his duties at the **Seminary**, he also busied himself in **teaching catechism, in preaching the Spiritual Exercises**, in working for the **Marian Oratories** - for this latter apostolate, he manifested an unusual ability. He was able to reach the hearts of the young boys, that they would be most docile in all that he asked of them for the glory of God.

[64] He was always most assiduous in the confessional. And had many regular penitents, especially young people. He used to preach with such spirit and zeal that his sermons had much force and life. When he would come home from such assignments, he was usually exhausted, and would throw himself across his bed, and would apply ice, or some other element to his chest. This restored his strength somewhat. Despite his physical handicaps, he was never discouraged.

He had a deep devotion to the Mother of God, and inspired it into the hearts of his Oratorians as well. He used to say that he had seen those who had been devoted to Mary in the hour of death, and that they approached it unafraid. A few days before his own death, he jotted the following verses:

**O SWEET MOTHER, O MOTHER OF MINE,
IF FROM THIS EXILE OF BITTERNESS
I DEPART AS YOUR SON IN WORTHINESS
AMONG THE BLESSED IN HEAVEN, WILL I BE.**

³⁷ It is clear that he had not made his Vows since the First Profession was held on September 30, 1855, with the Solemn Canonical Erection of our Congregation.

**AS YOUR SON, I WISH TO DIE
AND CRY OUT IN MY AGONY
TO LOVE YOU, A MOTHER TO ME
AND THROUGH ALL ETERNITY, WILL I LOVE THEE³⁸.**

He died on Saturday, the 30th of June 1860. He was buried on the Feast of the Visitation of Mary. In his hand, were the two little verses noted above, enclosed in a folder, as he desired. He was mourned by his Confreres, by the young members of the Oratory and by the Seminarians. They all asked for a role in the funeral procession to the cemetery.

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³⁸ These verses were printed by the Seminarians and by the Aggregates of the Oratory of the Stimmate, and then put to music by Fr. Louis Gagliardi, which was quite moving.

The Confreres of the Oratory were also present for the solemn month's mind Mass, and the pastor, Fr. Giacobbe, delivered the eulogy.

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. INNOCENT VENTURINI**

On the 26th of February 1864, at 9:00 a.m., the bells of the Stimate solemnly tolled the passing of Rev. Fr. Innocent Venturini. Even though this announcement had not been unexpected, it was nonetheless sorrowful. All those who had profited from him, keenly felt the void that his death caused. His humility, his charity, his ardent zeal were ever active and untiring for the salvation of souls. The esteem that he acquired, especially through his **sermons** and **catechetical instructions**, that were always so clear, during his long years of conducting them had brought countless souls avidly desiring to hear them.

He was born on July 25, 1803, the son of Andrew Venturini and Catherine **Zampieri**³⁹. They were poor parents, as regards the goods of this world, but rich in Christian virtues. After he had grown somewhat, as was proper, he was trained in the trade of his Father, which was that of a waver of cloth and tapestries. However, this was not to be his calling in life. He seemed far more inclined to piety and study, to which he dedicated the hours that were free to him after his work for the day was finished.

His Confessor believed that he had been called by God to the Priesthood. It is impossible to record here how fully Innocent responded to this judgment with promptness and fidelity. He showed no concern that he lacked the necessary means to provide an education for himself due to the difficult financial status of the family. He put all his trust in Him who had called him **[66]**, and began the regular studies most enthusiastically. He studied first under a private tutor, and then entered the Diocesan Seminary. So intense was the ardor with which he applied himself that he always came out as one of the fist among his fellow students. In 1825, he was vested in clerical garb, in St. Luke's Church. From this day onward, he carried out his duties with even greater diligence that those who saw him later testified that no seminarian was more observant than he was, nor more devout, nor more fervent. There was no one who worked more assiduously for the décor of the House of God, nor anyone who burned with greater zeal for the salvation of his neighbor, and especially for the poor and abandoned youth.

He delighted in gathering around himself a group of young boys, and would tell them some story, always with a wit and a charm, that they seemed to be waiting for his next word. At times, at the little altar in his home, he would have them pray together, make Novenas, or celebrate some Feast of the Blessed Mother. In this way, he managed to draw many of them to frequenting the Sacraments, and always did his best to keep them away from dangerous companions and recreations.

It would be impossible to estimate the many blessings received by those Mothers whose sons had been made more docile and obedient by his exhortations. He did all those while carrying the heavy load of his prescribed studies at the

³⁹ Translator's Note: the same family name for the Mother of Bro. Francis Stevanoni.

Seminary. He lived a life of strictest poverty, and endured so many privations and needs to evoke compassion and wonder. It was pitiable to see so worthy a student and so diligent a Seminarian leading a life that was so harsh. It evoked wonder when he was always so jovial and happy, even though he was going through so much. He gave the impression that he was the happiest man in the world.

A day finally dawned that was to crown and reward his many virtues – that of his First Mass, in September 1829. It would be too difficult to record his exultation, his devotion, his purity and fervor, with which he celebrated for the first time. These can only be imagined, listening to those who knew him before his Ordination, or who assisted him at his First Mass.

It was not, however, a completely happy day, as his Mother had died [67] that same year, just three months before his First Mass. Throughout his life, Fr. Venturini often spoke of the debt of gratitude that he owed his mother. His affection for her was most evident. He blessed her memory for the great patience and charity that she had showered upon him. He would thank God for her reprimanding him, and for protecting him from wayward tendencies. He often spoke of his gratefulness for the care and vigilance that she lovingly and solicitously showed toward this 'mischievous one, among her children', as he often referred to himself.

Throughout his illness, he was frequently at her bed-side, and he was there when she died. He accompanied her body to the cemetery, and saw it laid in the family grave. Even on the happy day of his First Mass, he keenly felt her absence. To fill this emptiness, he offered his First Mass in Suffrage for her soul.

As a Priest, he now dedicated himself with even greater alacrity and fervor to the fulfillment of his duties in the ministry. The parishioners of the Most Holy Trinity Parish where he was assigned, as it was his home Parish, can well vouch for the care and love with which he fulfilled his duties in the salvation of souls. However, they were only to have the services of this zealous priest for a very short time. He felt that he was being called to the life of the Cloister. His closeness, and his frequent conversations with the Priests of the Stimmatine attracted him to their way of life, and he entered during September of 1830.

When he came under the direction of our Venerable Founder, there was noted in him that he had a knack for simple and clear preaching. All his training, thereafter, was channeled in that direction. Very soon, Fr. Venturini became much in demand. His reputation spread throughout the city, and people flocked from every part of it to the Church where he was teaching the so-called **Fourth Class**.

His classes were very clear, spontaneous and sincere. He enlivened them with his own similitudes and comparisons, and made frequent use of well known proverbs and sayings. All those who attended his classes always went away refreshed and inspired. [68] The lessons he taught remained imprinted on their minds and hearts. It was even edifying to hear the sermons of Fr. Venturini faithfully repeated in the humble homes and shops of the City.

It was not only the ordinary people who went out of their way to hear him, but other people from every section of the city, and often through inclement and uncomfortable weather. The learned and the cultured also wanted to hear him speak. Even priests were among his audiences. There is a record of the fact that a well known school official never visited Verona, without asking where Fr. Venturini was teaching his class.

He indeed merited the praise that was heaped on him. He worked continuously to make his preaching more interesting and clear. He would profit by every experience that he had. He used to ask artists their names, and the fine points of their trade. He would inquire about the tools they used and all that was needed in their work. When he had this all down, he would later use the information he had learned in his instructions.

He was once speaking on Meditation in the Cathedral, and his theme was to refute the arguments of those who claimed they could not meditate. He used as his example the work and toil of a common cobbler. His point was to show that in every trade that art of consideration was necessary. This was his similitude to explain the various steps of meditation. He graphically described the pains the cobbler would take to fit the heel onto a shoe. His comparison was so easily understood, that all were convinced of his message, and at the same time, marveled at his originality. Many remarked that it was a delight to hear him and to listen to his vivid explanations. Their enjoyment gave way to conviction of the truths he preached. He made these truths so clear, that it seemed that they were within the grasp of all.

He always studied to achieve an ever greater clarity of expression. He used to say: 'How necessary it is that the good people understand me. Once this is accomplished, I have the highest hopes that they will profit from their own reflections. It makes me unhappy if I hear that they do not understand, and when they have to ask what it is that I am driving at, or what does this, or that word mean. If I should find out that even the most common words were not understood by them, then I would look for others words that they could grasp.'

Although he always used much diligence and industry in preparing himself for these instructions, he nonetheless did not trust in his own judgment. After he had written them, he would give them to Fr. Bertoni, who often had them read in the Refectory, giving to all the permission to offer any observations that might make them even more effective.

In this, Fr. Venturini also gave testimony to the virtue with which he was endowed. It was really his edifying life that had much to do with making his preaching so effective. He was equally well known because of his humility, charity, devotion and zeal for the salvation of souls.

He manifested his humility in the low idea that he had of himself. This was evident from his continual searching to find a means to humble himself even in his sermons. He often paid tribute to his Mother in his preaching. He used to say that if his Mother had been different, his entire life might also have been different. When he heard any words of criticism, or even contempt, he always took it in good stead. We

all remember his habit of laughing and rubbing his hands, and often he would retell some of the criticisms that had been leveled at him.

More than any other trait, however, he is remembered for the sincere love that he had for the poor. He knew so many of them, and would always refer to them as 'brother', or 'friend.' There were many of these who flocked to him, and who would make known to him the anxieties and needs of their consciences. The more shabbily dressed they were [70], the darer they seemed to be to him. He felt that working with him was 'his bread and butter.'

He also manifested a very high degree of charity and zeal for all of his fellow men. His many **penitents** of every age and condition give inspiring testimony of this. They used to come in great numbers to his confessional, and it was a moving sight to see them gathered around it. He would listen to them all with patience, and an admirable charity. So many of the **sick**, too, were high in their praise of him. He was often called into the homes of the sick, because he was truly an angel of comfort and peace. He often visited **prisons** with words of comfort and reform. There were also countless times that he gave what help he could to those who had been condemned to death. He often visited '**death row**' in the prisons, to comfort those awaiting their execution. His charitable manner usually overcame their resistance, and he managed to reconcile a number of them to God. There were those he also accompanied right up to the moment of their deaths, urging them to trust in God. What a torment it was for him and his gentle nature to see them fall dead at his feet while he was recommending their souls to God.

There are two facts in his life that give testimony to his ever active charity. The year 1848 was a critical and wicked time. Minds that were drunk with liberty, hated every semblance of authority, and the revolt was imminent. In such times of public upheaval, there is needed a great deal of prudence. Fr. Bertoni was abundantly endowed with this virtue and by it he ruled his Community. In their zeal, they made no distinction between the quiet times, and those that were disturbed, whenever it was a question of the good of souls. His Rule was that they were to carry on with their priestly duties.

It so happened that many soldiers, before they went out to the raging battlefield, wanted to be reconciled with God. They used to gather at the Church of St. Nicholas. Fr. Bertoni was asked [71] for two of his priests, and he sent Fr. Benciolini and Fr. Innocent Venturini. Rumors began to spread throughout the city that a number of those priests, instead of hearing Confessions, were using the Confessional to bribe the soldiers, trying to induce them to abandon the flag that had flown over their Province for centuries.

The rumor was acted upon with force, and the police immediately pounced on their prey. Our two priests, along with several others, were made prisoners. In the center of an armed detachment, cloaked with military hats and capes, they were marched off to the prisons of St. Thomas. Unfortunately, it seems that Fr. Benciolini was found with money in silver, that Fr. Bertoni had given him to purchase provisions for himself and for the group that were living at the *Dereletti*.

This money seemed to give substance to the suspicion. Our two priests were accused of being enemies of the Austrians, and bribers of the soldiers. They received harsh treatment. They were separated from one another, and they were deprived of every comfort and hope except for that they kept in God. As the city was in a state of siege, they felt that their condemnation was just a matter of time.

However, news of the arrest spread rapidly. Many persons in high positions and with much influence, who had long known and esteemed our Fathers, did all they could to establish the fact that the accusation against them was calumnious. At long last, the Priests were set at liberty. Throughout their harsh confinement, Fr. Venturini retained his calm and serene manner. Sometimes he made jokes about his name 'Innocent' which always managed to bring a laugh from the others imprisoned with him. He said on that occasion: 'This time they have made a mistake, as they have locked up an 'Innocent.'!'

His spirit of abnegation and his heroic charity were particularly evident during the frightful plague of cholera. At the time it was threatening, he wrote:

O my Lord, Jesus Christ, if you wish to punish us with cholera, I offer myself as ready to die, that I might assist my fellow man. O Holy Spouses, I present my offering through Your hands; obtain for me the favor, if this prayer be heard.

The zeal and charity came to him from his prayer life, and from the protection of the Holy Spouses, to whom he had dedicated himself. It would suffice to read what he had jotted down on the back of a card that was found among his papers:

On the 30th day of July, my Father in the flesh, passed away. St. Joseph, you know that for nine years, I have been devoted to you as a son. For the past six years, since my entrance into this Paradise on earth of your House at the Stimmate, I have given myself even more to you. From now on, I want to give myself in such a way that nothing more would be possible to me - Mary, most holy, for about seven years, I have been without my earthly Mother, and you have been a Mother to me. Therefore, Mary and Joseph, here is a poor orphan, who has been protected and defended by you. Make me devoted to you, assist me in life and visit me in death.

It was most natural for him to call the Blessed Mother his Mother. He always seemed happy when others would speak of her, and so often injected her name, or virtue, into conversations. In one way or another, in his sermons, he always recommended and promoted devotion to her. In his life time, he was often compared to St. Alphonsus.

His life long devotion to Mary was always joined to that of St. Joseph. When he began prematurely to show signs of ageing because of his fatigue in the ministry, he used to be seen with his long cane, directing his tottering steps. The sight of him often evoked comments of admiration. As he aged, many said that he seemed to them much like St. Joseph must have been

We could not even give a compendium of all the things that were said in tribute to him. In his last years especially, his devotion to this Saint was more

fervent. His purpose in his devotion was to enlist the powerful aid of this Saint, the Patron of a Good Death. He used to say that to him a good death was what food meant to the epicure.

It was evident that he enjoyed great peace of mind as the end drew near. It seemed that his soul was permeated with his love for God. There was no doubt that he was soon to be crowned for his long and meritorious life in the apostolate.

The strength of his body was visibly lessening, and the faculties of his mind waned. How sorrowful were they who would not see him taking his customary place in choir, knowing that he had to give up all his active ministry under obedience. His memory and other mental faculties were no longer sufficient for him to be entrusted with that most serious ministry.

However, he was still able to offer his Mass. He would be seen slowly making his way up the altar steps to read the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin. After a while, though, even this comfort was denied him, but, he would still receive Holy Communion. As long as he had sufficient strength, he received the sacrament every day, with evident consolation. As his weakness progressed, he was no longer able to leave the House. During the long months of his trial through his painful, internal illness, he seemed to accept it in a spirit of prayer, with resignation and tranquility. Every once in a while, he would speak of the times he used to have those **Religious Instruction Classes**. Even in his deteriorated state of mind, he could still remember occasionally the various means he had used to win souls for God. He seemed to be bothered by the fact that he was now unable to work for souls and for their spiritual advantage.

Such was the life of this man of God, full of merits and a virtuous apostolate. He died at the age of 61, after having lived with us for 34 years.

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**Compendium
of the Life
of the Coadjutor Brother,
HORACE NEGRO**

He was an upright farmer from Chiampo, in the Diocese of Vicenza. In the year 1858, he offered his life in the service of the Congregation. His outstanding characteristics were humility, wisdom and obedience. He had an unwavering [74] sense of devotion, that he felt to the depths of his being. This was evident in all his actions, and permeated them with a superior dedication. He cared for nothing of this world, and even when he heard them spoken about, he seemed to experience distress. He was only at ease in discussing the things of God, of Religion or virtue, and he would take part in such conversations in his serene manner. He died after suffering for a long time from tuberculosis, which he endured with a tenacity of spirit. Throughout his long confinement, he never gave up the exercise of the religious virtues. His illness lasted three years.

He lived in our Community for six years and eight months, and passed away on June 16, 1865. Fr. Lenotti wrote of him that his good example would always be a stimulus to us, and that his memory would be held among us in lasting benediction.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother
PAUL ZANOLI**

**Chapter 1
His Birth, Childhood and Religious Vocation**

Paul Zanoli was the first Coadjutor Brother of our Congregation. He came to live at the Stimate on the very same day as our Venerable Founder, that is, November 4, 1816. Throughout his life, he emulated our Founder in this state of life in his austerity and in his holiness.

This good Brother was born in Verona of very pious parents. [He was the son of Felice Zanoli]. He was born towards the end of the last century [on July 11th], in 1793. From the time he was a child, he attended the Church of St. Firmus Major. He seemed attracted to the good Franciscan Fathers, who at that time, cared for the Parish.

[75] These were his boyhood friends. He learned the trade of turner, and his parents and employers were very satisfied with his diligence and skill, as well as with the respect and submission that he always manifested. He increased in devotion with the passing of the years, and was no longer content with the ordinary practices of piety. He seemed to show a concern for his fellow man, and practiced a boundless charity. Among his favorite acts of charity was that of going on every holy day after the services in Church, to visit the hospital. There were also a number of times that he spent the entire night at the side of the sick.

During the Napoleonic Wars, he was drafted into the military service. He came to see just how distant was the life of the barracks from his own pious and devoted way of life. While he was waiting to be put on the active list, he felt an inspiration to make a vow. He promised God that if he were saved from this militia, he would consecrate himself in the service of God for his entire life in some religious house. To show his gratitude to the Divine Majesty, he offered himself as a companion to the Venerable Founder, who was going to enter the Stimate with Fr. John Marani. He was this third foundation stone on which the Congregation was built.

During his early years, he was the only Brother. He was kept busy from morning until night in the ordinary domestic services of that busy Community. He spared himself no fatigue, nor travail. He endured vigils and sufferings, carrying for many years unaided the weight of the entire house and the burden of the heat of the

day. He was a man endowed with singular judgment, and had an outstanding ability in domestic affairs. He was soon an expert in caring for the needs of the House. Over the years, he served as Porter, Sacristan, Wardrobe keeper – but, in all his varied career, he was an outstanding Infirmarian. Fr. Gramego noted in those early years that Bro. Paul ‘did everything without knowing too much about anything!’ However, good will, aided by judgment and the understanding and patient direction of Superiors worked wonders.



Chapter 2

His Charity toward his Companions, especially the Sick

His charity was outstanding in assisting his brothers in religion, especially the sick ones. He watched over them with such solicitude and tenderness that all whoever experienced it, and who are still among us, said he acted much like a loving Mother. He lived to that which Lupo has written in his Rule for Monks. These words were later cited by our Venerable Founder in his Constitutions – that a sick member should be so tenderly assisted by the elderly Religious that he would desire neither the comfort of the city, nor the affection of his own mother. The citation reads:

If anyone falls ill, he is to be moved into a larger room, and cared for only by the ministry of the elders, so that he might seek neither the delights of the city, nor the affection of his mother [Constitutions, Part X, Section 2, Chapter v].

The long experience that he had acquired from his boyhood days in caring for the sick made him most capable and practical in detecting illnesses, and suggesting remedies. There were a number of occasions when someone was unexpectedly afflicted with some illness. The Brother would be there, assisting him, and doing all that he could to alleviate his discomfort. When the case seemed to demand it, he would advise the Superiors that the doctor should be summoned. Often enough, on his arrival, he would only confirm the remedy that Bro. Paul had already suggested.

He carried for our Venerable Founder for a long time in his lengthy and painful periods of sickness. What merit did he not acquire for himself in this work! He was a generous and long-suffering man. He was most attentive both day and night, and never spared himself. He seemed to disregard entirely his own hunger, need for sleep and exhaustion.

No matter how much work faced him, he never seemed to lose heart. He was endowed with an unusual memory and he was able to recall where he had placed some utensil, or tool, that he had not used [77] for several years. He was always able to put his hand on the tool whenever it was needed. Oftentimes, these things were found in the deepest recesses of infrequently used cupboards.

As time passed, he was sent to assist at the Novitiate at the *Santissima Trinita*. He became to the many young boys who studied there a true Father and a loving Guardian. He was a help to them when they were both sick and well, and

provided for their needs as best he could. He kept track of the things that were necessary for them, as well as those that were not so important – they would always come to him for a ball for their games. He was tireless and entirely forgetful of himself and had great love for others for the glory of God. They used to hear him say as he went along about his business: 'Poor old Paul – he eats, sleeps and shops and that's all!'



Chapter 3

His Spirit of Mortification and Prayer

Bro. Paul showed himself to be most desirous of both the external mortification of the flesh, as well as that internal mortification of his self-love and his own will. He had learned these examples from Fr. Bertoni. He practiced some daily act of abstinence as regards food and drink. It can be said that whenever got up from the table without having mortified his palate in some way. This as so, even though the meals were already quite frugal and austere. He hardly ever even took a sip of wine. For super, he usually had only a little soup and bread. His bed as hard and coarse. He slept little and frequently interrupted it to assist his brothers, or to look after the needs of the House. There was not task that was too vile, or repugnant for him. Hew accepted everything willingly. In every assignment, he carried out his tasks according to the directions that he had received from his Superiors. He was humble and gentle in his dealing with others. He had an easy-going nature, although he was inclined to be serious. He had a simplicity that was devoid of affectation. He was absolutely without pretensions of any kind, and cared nothing for human respect. He was in this very similar to Fr. Bertoni. He had little regard for the judgments of men, unless these were also pleasing to God.

[78] He showed an indifference toward those things that were distributed for his own use. He seemed to prefer the older things, and the clothes that were worn out and shabby. He felt that these things were an exterior help to his spirit of self-abnegation. One time, the Brother who served the Community as tailor, noticed how worn out and shabby Bro. Paul's habit was. After receiving permission, he offered to make him a new one. Bro. Paul thanked him, and answered: Thank you anyway, but this one that I have serves much better.'

The Brother realized that Bro. Paul would never ask for this permission for himself, so he asked for it. The Superior readily gave permission and said that the new habit should be made. Bro. Paul received the new habit when it was made, but then stored it carefully in the wardrobe and did not wear it for six months. He perhaps still would not have worn it, but the Superior directed him to do so.

As he was so mortified in his daily life, there is no wonder that he had such a deep spirit of prayer and devotion. As the mortifications of the senses and of the will detaches us from this earth, and elevates us to heaven, it thereby introduces into our hearts the practice of dealing familiarly with God. Bro. Paul would use every single spare minute for prayer. He would get down on his knees, and was totally absorbed

in God. Even as an old man, he would recollect himself in this way, either in his room, or in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. He always, however, preferred acts of charity to the consolations that he derived from prayer. If anyone called him during the time for prayer, for help in some domestic matter, or if he felt on his own that others might need his assistance, he would leave his prayer and get right down to work with them, with rejuvenated vigor.

His favorite devotion was making the Way of the Cross. It was both beautiful and moving to see him, as an old man, in the cold of winter, and even during the coldest hours of the day, making the way of the Cross, kneeling on the bare floor without using any support. He would continue this way until the Stations were completed.

[79] One of his talents may well have been the fruit of his prayer life. He had an extraordinary ability to judge the character of men. With just a glance, I might almost say, he would be able to make a judgment that most often was most just and correct. He was gifted with such prudence, and in the difficulties that would arise, he would often suggest very practical ways of dealing with them. He was a living example of St. Paul's words that piety is useful for all things: ***Godliness is profitable in all respects.*** [cf. 1 TM 5:8]

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Chapter 4 His Zeal for the Salvation of Souls

The spirit of our vocation requires that in addition to attending to our own sanctification, that we must also promote the spiritual well-being of our neighbor, in so far as our ability and circumstances allow. Hence, the 49th rule of the Common Rules states that not only the Priests but also the Students and Novices and Brother Collaborators, must give of themselves according to the occasions that arise to inspire their fellow man to the love of virtue through **private conversations**.

In this, Bro. Paul as a simple Lay Brother, could not have done more. With his prayers and good works, he always did his utmost to inspire others to good. He would comfort the discouraged, console the afflicted and recall the principles of the Christian way of life and would encourage the frequent reception of the sacraments. He succeeded in drawing a number of souls back to Confession who had indeed no little need of it.

In 1849, when the soldiers had taken over the majority of the rooms at the Stimate, which once had served as class rooms, they remained in the building for over three years. Throughout all this time, Bro. Paul in his gentle way, was able to persuade a number of them to think of the good of their eternal souls. He was clever in inspiring them toward a better life. Every Saturday, he would lead six or eight of them into the Choir of the Stimate, so that they could go to Confession. The following [80] Sunday morning, they would always be an edifying spectacle at the first Mass of the day. The poor men of arms, would come to the communion rail and devoutly receive the Sacrament. This was always the result of the zeal of Bro. Paul.

All through the years that school was in session [i.e., up until 1844], he also had the apostolate among the young students. Through his attentive supervision of the boys, he would inspire them to piety. Through his private conversations with them, he developed in those who gave the usual signs, the seeds of a religious, or priestly vocation. So many of these later did dedicate their lives to God. So much of this was due to his contribution. Years later, when many of these students, as grown men, would recall their school days, they would express their gratitude to Bro. Paul. Whenever they came across him, they would be most expressive in their signs of affection and gratitude.

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Chapter 5

His Last Illness and Death

For fifty years, Bro. Paul lived this penitential and austere life of continual self-abnegation. He shared all the events both happy and sad, of our Congregation from the very day that God chose to lay its foundations. He helped in all its endeavors, its building program, its schools, its Oratories, and in every domestic activity. He gave all that he had to this Congregation. The merits and rewards that he won, were evident to all.

The time was approaching for him to move on and to receive his eternal reward. His recollection and extraordinary fervor, his even more frequent prayer, were interpreted as signs that he was preparing for death. In the early days of the month of June 1866, he suffered some gastric disturbance which at first was not considered as dangerous. However, because of his advanced years and hard labors, very soon he lost all resistance, and his remaining strength disappeared. Despite all that was done for him, nothing was of any avail. His condition worsened rapidly. During those days, he remained most patient and was resigned to all that was happening. Whenever complained and showed himself most grateful for [81] the least service that was done for him. He received the Last Sacraments with sentiments of the utmost devotion. He remained in possession of his faculties until his last moment. He looked as though he were at peace, and was entirely recollected in prayer. The Superior asked him how he was, and he answered; 'At peace.'

A few minutes before he expired, the Brother assisting him encouraged him to have confidence. Bro. Paul answered that he was not afraid. Thus, consoled by our Fathers and Brothers, he peacefully expired at sunset on the 11th of June 1866.

Fr. Lenotti commented: 'In losing him, we have lost a great deal – but, we have gained a good intercessor in heaven⁴⁰.'

⁴⁰ He died at the Novitiate of the *Santissima Trinita* which was then abandoned by our young students who took refuge in Trent with some of the Priests in 1866. A new Italian Government had been formed to take over from the Austrian Government and suppressed Religious Houses.

The members of the Oratory at the Stimmate had this well deserved tribute printed on the reverse side of a holy card:

PAUL ZANOLI

PROFESSED BROTHER OF THE REVEREND FATHER, APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES, A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN AND RELIGIOUS VIRTUE. HE WAS BELOVED AND REVERED BY ALL, AND ESPECIALLY BY THAT VENERABLE MAN OF GOD, FATHER AND FOUNDER, REV. FR. GASPAR BERTONI. HOWSOEVER THIS MAN MAY HAVE BEEN LACKING IN HUMAN LETTERS, HE WAS MOST ADVANCED IN THE SCIENCE AND THE WISDOM OF THE SAINTS. IN HIS SPEECH AND IN HIS WORK, HE WAS SIMPLE, GENUINE AND MODEST. HE WAS ALSO RESERVED AND DISCREET, AND HIS ADVICE WAS CONSIDERED AS THE MATURE JUDGMENT OF A MOST WISE AND PRUDENT MAN. EVEN MORE THAN FROM ILLNESS, IT WAS DUE TO HIS ACTIVE AND MORTIFIED LIFE THAT HE EXPIRED INTO THE EMBRACE OF GOD, THE 11TH DAY OF JUNE 1866, AT THE AGE OF 72 YEARS AND 11 MONTHS.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Novice Student,
ANTHONY CAUCIGH**

**Chapter 1
Birth – Entrance into Religion – Vestition**

In the little town of *Prepotichis*, near *San Pietro degli Schiavi*, about 15 miles from Cividale, in Friuli, Anthony Caucigh was born on July 7, 1850. In the secrete designs of Divine Providence, God had destined him to our Congregation. His parents were Anthony and Maria Caucigh.

When he reached the proper age, he was sent to school in Cividale. He then later was enrolled in the Seminary at Udine, through the care of a Monsignor Orlandi, Canon and Librarian of Cividale. This Prelate had a great esteem for the young boy, because of his piety and devotion which he discovered in him. He often came across the boy raying in a little Church not far from his own town, called the *Madonna del Monte*.

Young Anthony remained in Udine only for one year. During this time, he followed most docilely the counsels and admonitions of those to whom he had been entrusted. Even though he was of a very lively temperament, he would often stay by himself, and would divert himself in the adjoining garden. At the end of this first school year, he was presented and recommended to two of our Fathers who had come there to preach the annual retreat to the Seminarians.

The high recommendations given to the two Priests in behalf of the young boy were unanimous instating his many accomplishments. They made the arrangements for him [83] to be accepted to live among the aspirants of their Congregation. After he had come to live among us, he found that our customs were a delight to him. He became attached to the Congregation by a particular affection, that seemed to increase with each passing day. Although he had only a mediocre intelligence, through his diligence and assiduity, he was able to keep himself on a par with his fellow students.

His temperament did manifest the fiery and rough nature of his people. This was apparent in some of his impetuous acts, and even angry words. This only served to prove how much grace can achieve over nature, and the good training on young boys. He was able to conquer himself so that in less than four years that he lived in the Congregation, he became so docile that it was a delight to see and converse with him.

He had to exert much violence on himself to control and conquer his nature. This would flare up from time to time whenever his haughty attitude was opposed. It was equally evident when he was denied permission to give vent to his own gratification, or when his reasons were considered without foundation, and when he was denied the satisfaction of fulfilling his own whims.

He soon had made such headway, that he was approved for Vestition as a Novice. He received the habit of the Congregation on the Feast of the Epiphany ion the year 1865. By this time, he had been a student with us for two years and four months, and he was only 14 and one half years old. Soon after his reception into the Novitiate, he dedicated himself with greater purpose that he might correspond to the wishes of his Superiors. They noted in him that the traces of the 'old man' were disappearing, while the characteristics of the 'new man' were becoming more evident. He was most prompt in obedience, recollected in the practices of piety, modest as regards his eyes, voice and gestures. He took everything well, and remained balance, and seemed always content.

At the first sound of the bell in the morning, he would jump to his feet, and take care of the chores about his room. He would stay in his room for a few moments to offer his own private devotions [84] before going down for Meditation. When he would be asked by his Companions how he had accustomed himself to being so prompt, he stated that he had obtained it from his Guardian Angel. He had a special devotion to his Guardian Angel, and prayed to him every evening. So often he would not hear other sounds that were made but at the first sound of the bell, he would always be awakened.

During the time of Meditation, as well as during Mass, and the other common exercises of piety, he had a most edifying demeanor. He would remain motionless, and would not support himself with his arms, or lean against his kneeler. He knelt straight up unsupported, and his feet would not touch the ground. All of his weight was borne by his knees.

In school, he was always attentive and observant, and especially careful about silence. His teachers do not ever remember having heard him say any word that was unnecessary. In the Refectory, he was always most recollected, and whenever sat down before the others had been seated. Usually he contented himself with only a part of that which was placed before him. He did not drink wine, and would leave his fruit at breakfast on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. While eating, he observed such composure that often one of our priests who had observed him, used to say that Caucigh 'ate with devotion.'

During recreation, his conversation was always about edifying things. It was beautiful to see him and to hear him speak with his companions and with the Brothers, about the Blessed Virgin, and the lives of the Saints, to encourage them to observe the Rules of the Congregation. This was usually the subject of his conversation during the common walks.

In this way, from the very first days of his Novitiate, he had already acquired the esteem and veneration of all. However, such a drastic change, and rapid advancement in virtue could not be obtained without a special effort on his part to acquire perfection. No one, except those who directed him, knew what this transformation had cost him [85]. It became known, however, after his death, when various papers of his were found on which he had noted his resolutions. Then, it was

most apparent how much and how intensely he had thought of becoming a saint. There was nothing, no matter how insignificant, that anyone noticed in him, that he had not included among his resolutions. He collected and wrote down passages that had been inspiring to him. He had come across them either in books that he had read, or in sermons that he had heard. He would then make of them the rule of his actions. It would be too considerable an effort to repeat here all that he had written down, because there were very few sermons, both from the days of his recollection, as well as from his Retreats from which he did not jot down some inspiration or resolution. Here are some of them for example:

...The sole reason that we have come to religion is to seek perfection. What does it mean that you are doing so little to acquire it?...

...The sole means to make oneself a saint is to have a great hunger and thirst for justice. Because this cannot be had so easily, pray often to Mary most holy, and to St. Joseph, and to your Patrons...

... Paradise is won by surrendering...

From these inspirations, from his resolutions and from his edifying conduct as narrated thus far, his great desire for perfection can be seen. It is also clear that his companions were not wrong when they would talk among themselves, and say; 'Caucigh is a saint!'



Chapter 2

His Spirit of Devotion and Prayer

To understand his perfection better, I want now to say something more in particular. First of all, I will treat of his spirit of prayer and devotion. In his holy resolutions, he had designated [86] that all his prayers were to be recited at set times. He had some that were to be said as soon as he got up, those for Mass, those before eating and at the striking of every hour. Each of his Companions gave testimony that he had observed all of these resolutions. When the *Hail Mary* had been recited, he would continue on praying for sometime by himself. In his occupations, in going through the House, he always would be reciting some prayer. If there was every any interruption in school, as when it would be necessary to find some book to verify a citation, he would remain with his eyes down-cast, in recollection with his prayers. This was also true in recreation time, after the conclusion of a conversation.

This practice had been written among his resolutions, and he fulfilled it without effort. He seemed to give the most effort in making his Meditation well. This is a point for which he had drawn up the most minute rules, and had resolved to employ every possible diligence. He had prescribed his first half hour of the morning from the time after he awoke. He had also resolved to utilize that time until the bell would sound to call him to Chapel, where he was to make his meditation. This seems to be why he succeeded so well in it.

This also would explain why he was seen always to be so recollected, and motionless, as we have stated. It was a most edifying thing, and a stimulus to devotion to see him now and then with the look of peace in his eyes. This manifested the contentment of his beautiful soul, who delighted in conversing with his God. His devotion to Christ was profound, as well as that to the Blessed Mother and to the saints. He would frequently recommend himself to them, as well as the resolutions that he had made. He was in the habit of asking his Prefect, or Spiritual Father for permission to spend his time for recreation in Chapel, in prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament. This permission was often granted, but there were also times in which it was refused.

During days free from school, he would always help out the Sacristan in sweeping and cleaning the Chapel. This work was a delight to him, and while he was busy with his duties, he was heard to give utterance to his sincere love for Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. While he was bus sweeping, he would never turn his back on the Blessed Sacrament. He also never covered his head with the little cap that was customary in those times. When his work was done, he would thank the Brother, telling him that he had not really done a favor, but that he had received one.

He was fully delighted in receiving Holy Communion. He genuinely considered this to be the greatest grace that could be bestowed. It is recalled how the night before he fell sick, he was walking in the garden. The Novice Master told him that he was to receive Communion on the following day, and that he was to pray for the needs of the Church. At this unexpected news, he was beside himself with joy, and extolled the praises of the Blessed Sacrament. He mentioned this in his conversation during the remainder of that recreation period.

No one can say the thoughts and aspirations he experienced in the very act of receiving Holy Communion. It can only be stated that he seemed beside himself with joy. He spent the night before, reflecting on the Blessed Sacrament. At the time he went up to the Communion rail, it was noted that there was an evident change in the color of his face. His usual pale complexion seemed to be almost flushed. On his return from the altar, he would bury his face in his hands. He would remain thus for some time. On leaving the Chapel, it was evident that his thanksgiving was being continued.

Another object of his special devotion was Mary, the Immaculate Virgin. He truly loved her as a Mother. He often would have recourse to her with devout ejaculations. What affection and confidence he had in her, can be seen from the prayers that he composed. In these, he opens his heart and mind to her. It seems as far as we are able to judge, that he wrote [88] these prayers in the time in which the rumors of war were rampant.

To this tender devotion to Mary, he coupled his most special confidence and reverence to the other saints whom he considered to be his Patrons and Protectors. In their honor, he resolved to practice special acts of virtue on fixed days of the week. For Monday, he would stress modesty in honor of St. Aloysius; humility on Tuesday,

in honor of St. Anthony; obedience on Wednesdays, in honor of St. Joseph – and so on through the week.

Among all the saints, however, whom he had chosen as his Advocates, he placed a special devotion and effort in imitating the then Blessed John Berchmans. Further, it was observed that at the time of the young Jesuit's Beatification, there was evident in Caucigh an increase of spirit and fervor. He read his life, and did all that he could to copy the young Saint's life in his own. It can be said that he could to copy the young Saint's life in his own. It can be said that throughout his entire life, he tried to model it on that of Blessed John Berchmans. In the eyes of his Companions, he had succeeded to such an extent that while the life of Blessed John was being read in common, they all spontaneously made comparisons between Caucigh's life and the one they were listening to for spiritual reading. They all agreed that there were very few things mentioned in the reading that they had not noted in their companion. This gave rise to the saying that if a living model were needed for a life of John Berchmans, Caucigh would have filled the need.



Chapter 3 **His Other Virtues**

We will now treat briefly of the other virtues of Anthony Caucigh, starting with Humility.

From what can be gathered from the papers that were found after his death, it is evident how hard he tried to practice this virtue. He had resolved never to excuse himself when corrected, even if he was without fault. He also resolved to consider himself inferior to all, by obeying even inferiors, not to take note of the defects of others, but rather their virtues. He also resolved to thank anyone who pointed out his defects to him, and to refer to God all praise that might have been showed on him. He was to consider himself the least of all, to love the humble and [89] lowly offices, and to rejoice whenever he was disdained. These resolutions were then faithfully put into practice. With the passing of time, the desire he had for Humility and his efforts to attain it, seemed ever more intense. He prayed and worked that this virtue would strike every deeper roots in his heart.

Throughout his life, he tried hard never to become an inconvenience to others. He was most respectful to everyone, and would tip his heart even to the Brothers. He never spoke about himself, and if anyone praised him, he was always ready to change the subject. He would accept any duty, and if a Brother had a lowly assignment, he would ask him if he could do it in his stead. These and other examples would indicate how he practiced the virtue of humility.

His love for recollection and silence were no less exemplary. In the times and places for silence, he would not speak if there was not an absolute necessity. He was convinced that silence did not consist in knowing how to be quiet in the prescribed times, but also in knowing how to speak in those times in which it was permitted.

Even here, he had recorded a number of rules for himself, and his life was in full accord with them, as were his conversations.

He was never known to level derision, or witticisms bring laughter at the expense of others, at anyone. He never raised his voice to contradict, but rather was most respectful with everyone, and was always ready to ask pardon if he seemed to be annoying to anyone. When priests were present, he hardly spoke at all, his conversations were for the most part on spiritual subjects. So that he would never be at a loss for words in such conversations, he had jotted down many headings so that later he could discuss them with his fellow Novices. He had really understood the great secret of achieving holiness – that is, to speak little with men and much with God.

If it is true that whoever has custody over his tongue, also has custody over his soul, it is likewise true that he, who exposes it to many dangers, is he who is negligent in the custody of his eyes. Young Caucigh, striving to copy in himself the most exemplary modesty, writes that he had made a pact with his eyes. He resolved never to raise them from the ground, unless necessary [90]. There is nothing as dangerous for losing chastity, as immodesty. E resolved to restrain his eyes from looking at things that aroused his innocent curiosity, such as horses and wagons, or unusual things. He would then impose a penance on himself when he failed. It would often happen, while on walks, the group would pass scenes that caught their attention. When his companions would discuss it, he would be at a loss, as he generally would not have seen it. On the other hand, he did not want to give the impression of being so severe on himself. He carried this modesty through, and it regulated all of his exterior life. He was not known to laugh immoderately, nor would he ever be upset by event that would occur.

His composure and modesty revealed to those around him his beautiful soul. Those new aspirants, who would enter the Congregation, conceived of him, from their first days an esteem for his virtue and perfection. This only grew as each year passed.

He had a very great regard for the practice of Mortification. We have already treated at some length how he mortified his eyes and his feelings. We will now say something concerning his mortification in food and drink. He wrote once:

... Either gluttony, or abstinence will predominate, because it is very difficult to steer a middle course between them...

For this reason, he would leave a part of his breakfast and dinner. He had prescribed and regulated, so to speak, every mouthful at his meals, as well as the bread he would eat. He would never drink wine, except on Sundays, and even then, it was diluted with water.

He took extraordinary measures not to be dominated in this action by his appetite. This was another reason for the prayers that he had determined to offer at set intervals. He would offer his every meal to God, and before eating, he would say

that he partook of it to obey a command of God, so that he would not be swayed by his appetite. During dinner, he was most attentive to the reading, and seemed to want to hear every word. When food was served that he did not like, he would eat it willingly, according to the rules with which he was most familiar. He would remark [91] that Jesus Christ had taken gall out of love for him.

He practiced this mortification on every occasion that was offered to him for suffering. He even actively looked for this form of mortification. He would often assume an uncomfortable position, whether in chapel, or in study, and showed himself as content with whatever had been given to him, without looking for what he might have preferred more.

As for internal mortification, he would keep uppermost in his mind, his own fiery nature which he described as haughty and arrogant. He made such profit that in time it seemed that he had completely changed it. He never made excuses when he was accused of faults, even when he had not committed them, but would merely ask for a penance. His Companions remembered one time that the Superior had asked who had done a particular task. By mistake, he was told that it was Caucigh. The Superior then reprimanded him for the carelessness and the negligence with which the work had been done. Caucigh offered no excuses, but got down on his knees and asked for a penance. His Companions, who knew about the mistake, were edified by his example.

We should also mention here his detachment from all that the world held most dear. No one of his Companions ever knew how many brothers and sisters that he had. No one knew if his parents were dead or alive, as he never mentioned his own family in his conversations. One of his companions, one time said he had scored something of a victory, as he had been able to get out of Caucigh the name of the little town where he had been born.

His detachment from his own will was so admirable that it could be said, without exaggeration, that in him there was no self-will. His Prefect who knew this many times would him to the test, by giving him an obedience. Shortly afterwards, he would change it, and this went on six, or seven times. He would always submit and obey with the same good disposition.

From this following description it can be deduced what facility he had acquired in obedience. The day before his death, a Priest who was at his bed-side, had given him some medicine. Caucigh said: 'Father, this medicine causes a burning sensation in my stomach that is most unpleasant. 'All right', the Priest answered, 'we will wait a little while.' Caucigh [92] then responded: 'No, Father, if this is obedience, I'll take it now.' He did take it, thus sealing the last phase of his life with the practice of obedience.

Many anecdotes could be recalled concerning his observance of the Rule, and his esteem for his vocation. Here I will mention but a few of them. His gratitude and his affection for the Congregation were most sincere. He gave indication of this in that he often mentioned it in his conversations. The last night of his life was a

remarkable example of it. Three or four hours before he passed away, he recalled the grace that the Lord had bestowed upon him by calling him to Religion. He asked the Brother Infirmarian to get his cassock for him. He wanted to get dressed and go up to thank the Superior, and at the same time, to ask his pardon and that of all his Brothers for his lack of correspondence. When the Infirmarian told him that he was in no condition to leave his bed, he begged the Brother if he would go up to the Superior in his place. This profound esteem he had for the Congregation was one ore reason why he tried so hard to obey his rules, even the least important ones.

To cite just one example of this would be his promptness in answering the bell. He would stop his reading and even interrupt a sentence he might have been saying. His conversations were limited to his fellow Novices, as the Rule prescribed. He often spoke of how easy it is to reach holiness by the exact observance of our Rule of Life.



Chapter 4

His Last Illness and Death

It was the afternoon of August 6, 1866, when the young Novice complained of a headache, and was sent to bed. His indisposition did not seem to offer any reason for alarm, but he was convinced that this was the beginning of the end. Tuesday and Wednesday passed, and his illness had not seemed to have worsened. However, it [93] was noted that some of his words did not seem to g fit in too well with what he was saying. The doctor was summoned, and he ordered a bleeding.

Instead of lessening, his fervor now seemed to increase. By Friday, it was decided to administer the Last Sacraments to him. All throughout this week, when he was in possession of his faculties, he spoke always of God. He was frequently heard saying brief aspirations and ejaculations. Especially during the night between Friday and Saturday, which was to be his last, these prayers and invocations were so frequent that the Brother Infirmarian described them as numerous as the breaths he took.

Many times he made the offering of his life to God. He made a Profession of Faith by reciting the Apostles' Creed at times, and at other times, he made an Act of Faith. Even in his delirium he manifested the sentiments that seemed to have inspired his life. At one period, it seemed he felt that he was in the hands of the persecutors of the Church, and he exclaimed: 'That is apostasy! I will never renounce my faith. It is worth more than life itself. Here comes the fatal blow – let us receive it in peace!' He then turned on the bed, as though he actually were expecting the death blow that was to remove his head. Such acts would certainly only be considered by one who has continually exercised a living and ardent faith.

He was not in delirium, however, when he said that he prayed to the Lord to give him life that he might see the triumph of the Church. He added, though, that he was ready to do His will. He delighted in thinking of the beautiful celebration that would be held, but which he would never see.

His total detachment from earthly goods showed itself in the absence of any fear that he had for death. Furthermore, it pleased the Lord to allow His good Servant to be tempted many times by the devil. The help of God, however, was with him in every crisis. There was one time that the Brother saw him struggling, as if to drive away from himself some bothersome thought. All of a sudden, the Brother heard him exclaim in a loud and scornful voice: 'Be gone, Satan!' A Priest who was assisting him asked him if he were suffering from some temptation. He answered that the devil [94] was trying to induce him to indifference, and to believe that God had already abandoned him, but that he had resisted.

He received great strength in these temptations by his frequent calling upon Mary most holy. It seems that Mary herself had placed in his heart a presentiment, if we do not wish to say that she had made him a promise. That Thursday night, when the sickness began to worsen, the Brother who was assisting him heard him exclaim in a loud voice: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.' The Brother came up to him to tell him not to speak so loudly, as he would disturb the others. He answered; 'Yes, Brother, you are right!' But, then, he added: 'Oh! If you had only seen! The Blessed Mother was here, and she told me that she wants to bring me to Paradise.' From that moment onward, he began to speak about his approaching death. He expressed the desire and the hope of being with her in heaven on her Feast Day.

This was not the only time that he said he had seen the Mother of God. During his last night, perhaps one hour before dying, he became quite tranquil. His look was very serene. Extending his hands, as if in supplication, he began to converse in a most affectionate way with Mary. Then, as if responding to an invitation, he said: 'I am coming, Lord!'

From that moment onward, he was most calm. He said over and over again: 'O Sweet Name of Mary, Mary!' These can be said to have been his last words. It was four thirty in the morning, and the dying boy turned over on his side, as if to rest. It was then noted that his eyes were wide open, as though he were staring, and his eyes did not move. The Priest by his bed-side perceived that the end had come, while those in the room were reciting the last prayers. Our Brother passed into the embrace of God, on the 11th day of August 1866. All in the community were grief-stricken. They were like children, about to caress a dove, only to see it fly away from their hands. Without saying a word, they seemed as though they were following its flight with their eyes.

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[95]
Compendium
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother,
AMADIO CARESIA

He was a native of Fornace, in the Deanery of Civezzano, in the Tyrol. He entered the Congregation on November 24, 1863, in the 24th year of his life. His simple way of life in the Congregation can well be summed up in two words: work and prayer. He embraced the most difficult tasks with avidity, and as he was robust and sturdy of build, he could work at them from morning until night, with little respite. While he was busy in the garden, or carrying heavy boards, or loads of bricks, prayers were always on his lips. He continually elevated his mind and heart to God with Whom he maintained an intimate union.

He was truly 'one who loves God', as his name **Amadio** would indicate. In his appearance, there was an unusual modesty. His eyes frequently made their way heavenward, while he would invoke the help of God in his endeavors. His soul was an altar on which the perpetual flame of charity burned. He always did what he could to lighten the burdens of others, by sacrificing himself. In all his work, he brought a cheerfulness, that was evident when he offered his services for others. Whenever anyone would call him by his name, he would answer: 'Yes! We all must love God, and never desist!' He would then set about the task that had been asked of him. Hew was always most willing to help anyone in need.

His desire to work and pray seemed insatiable. One of his favorite prayers was this one:

'O Lord, punish me as You will, and as I deserve; but do not deprive me of your holy love. See that I love You always, and then do with me as You will!'

In the evening, after common prayers, he would go to the dormitory with the others to retire. He would always recite in a loud voice the prayers that were prescribed for that time of day. When all [96] the others had retired, even though he was dead tired, he would kneel by the side of his bed. He would say the Rosary there, or would meditate for a good long while.

For this man whose heart was always in heaven, there can be no surprise that he did not fear death. He awaited it with peace and joy in his heart. He died on January 26, 1868, in the House of *Santa Maria del Giglio*. He had been sent there in 1866, and at the time, it was the most run-down House of the Congregation. He died, as he had lived: absorbed in prayer.

During his last agony, his lips moved constantly in prayer. He expired saying: 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph!' How fortunate he was! He was only 29 years old, 'but, in a short time, he had lived a long life.' May he intercede for us before God.

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**Compendium of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother,
JOSEPH REALI**

A Simple Man, and fearing God, who draws back from evil!

He was a simple soul, and one who was totally dedicated to God. He would have found a welcome place among those lovable Brothers in the *Fioretti* [Little Flowers] of St. Francis of Assisi. He was born the son of John Anthony Reali and Joanna Ceresa, in Corrido, a little village near Como. He entered the Congregation in 1854. From the day of his entrance, his sole thought and love was to serve in our Congregation. He was always in motion, from morning until evening. Many times he did on his own, without waiting for orders, the tasks which he knew the Superiors would want done, and those he felt would be most useful to his confreres. It was not rare that they were assigned to do tasks, only to find that he had already done them, and had done them well.

Whenever he had a little free time, he used to take out his Rosary and pray it. He was a man who loved prayer a great deal, and frequently thought of the Passion of Jesus Christ. One time, while [97] standing by the hearth, a pan of boiling oil overturned on him and horribly burned his hand. The burn was so bad that he lost all the skin on his hand. Whenever anyone would compassionate him for it, he used to say: 'It's nothing - compared to all that Jesus Christy suffered!'

When he was corrected, he never made excuses for himself. It happened one day that he was called to task by the Superior for a fault that he did not commit. He began humbly to justify himself. The Superior, who was Fr. Marani, interrupted him by asking him if he had come to Religion to make excuses for his faults. The good Brother got down on his knees, and with tears in his eyes, said: 'Father, I have made a mistake, and I ask for a penance.'

Somewhat later Fr. Marani said to the students: 'My sons, you study, but Brother Joseph, without any learning, is very far ahead of us in the Science of the Saints. The Spiritual Father who was also present, added: 'Truly his is a soul that is very dear to God.'

Obedience seemed to be like a predominant passion with him – night and day, he abandoned himself to it with an eagerness that he gave the impression that he was a man who had been inspired.

When others would ask him what fruit he proposed to derive from his Meditation, he would also respond: 'Obedience.' There were times when Fr. Marani would hold him up as a model for the others. Once he said to the good Brother: 'Brother Joseph, do you know how to dance?' He answered: 'I don't, Father, but if you command me, I can do it!' Fr. Marani said: 'All right, then, dance!' He took off his skull cap, and held it in his hand so that it would not fall. As he was rather short, and also somewhat fat, he began hopping along somewhat awkwardly. By so doing, he moved the by-standers to laughter, and also to admiration. I would think that he

also delighted the angels at this sight – of a man who had made himself a child out of love for Jesus Christ.⁴¹

The unlearned arise and carry away the kingdom of heaven! He died in the embrace of the Lord on November 15, 1868 at the age of 40.

[98]

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Compendium of the Life of Fr. JOHN MARY MARANI

He was born in Verona in 1790, the son of Celestine Marani, and Ursula Robbi. Being well trained in piety, he willingly followed the Divine Voice that called him to the sanctuary. Soon after being vested, he became closely associated with Fr. Bertoni, whom he considered as a Father. Young Marani set himself to model his own life after the holy life of Fr. Bertoni. He stored up a rich treasury of instructions and example, and it was by these that Fr. Bertoni formed him. Throughout his long life, almost at every event, he would recall those sayings and counsels and the Founder's outlook for our training.

He took part with Fr. Bertoni in the instructions and in the government of the Oratory of St. Paul's in Campo Marzo, and then in the later Oratory at St Firmus Major. He was Fr. Bertoni's frequent companion and soon won his admiration and affection. So, after the Founder's death, Fr. Marani was elected by unanimous vote in 1855 to succeed him in the government of the Congregation.

If the Plan, the Foundation and the Constitutions of the Congregation were the work of Fr. Bertoni, then to Fr. Marani was reserved the task of obtaining from the Holy See the Decree of Praise. Fr. Marani was also to accomplish the work of its early development.

He restored and renovated the old Convent of the *Santissima Trinità*, and established our Novitiate there. He provided our Church with sacred vessels and vestments, and also with a good organ. He purchased our lot in the Cemetery of Verona for our religious family. He initiated the construction of the Church of *Sancta Maria del Giglio*, which was interrupted in an advanced state by the events of 1866. He initiated negotiations with the most Illustrious Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona, to establish in that Diocese of House of our Congregation. In many other ways, Fr. Marani [99] furthered the well being of the Congregation, and was most intrepid in defending its rights. He was always most diligent in preserving in it the spirit of Fr. Bertoni - that is, humility, sacrifice and the hidden way. He wanted in all of his sons, but especially the young students, a most diligent application to study, and a perfect submission to every obedience, no matter how arduous. He would often repeat to them his slogan that synthesized these ideals" ***Be prepared for all!***

⁴¹ It is read about St. Francis that he sometimes ordered his beloved Brother Masseo to whirl around until he almost fell from dizziness.

He demanded of them great accuracy and great reflection in all things. He used to say: 'Analyze not only his ideas and words, but also his actions.' He would say this when he would cite the words and examples of Fr. Bertoni. This was the rule for his own life. He carefully fulfilled with constant solicitude, the office of Superior. He made sure that he was well informed about all things. He would take every occasion to infuse into his sons a love for the Rule and for the religious virtues.

His apostolic zeal was outstanding. He was endowed with a serene and perceptive mind. His will was so strong that he seemed to derive new strength from difficulties. His mind was fed with the substantial nourishment of sound Catholic doctrine, and his will was strengthened by the practice of Christian Perfection. He used both these faculties with good effect for the sanctification of souls and for the greater glory of God.

From the **elementary instruction of young boys, up to the most advanced education of the Clergy**, all came under the sway of his apostolate. He reaped great results, but always at the cost of his won sweat. Enkindled by the charity of Jesus Christ that animated him, he **taught the unlearned** of the City and the country-side, the **rudiments of religion**. He reformed the habits of many souls by the many **Missions** that he preached. He wisely directed **religious houses**, called them back to strict observance from the laxity into which they had fallen. He gave the **Spiritual Exercises to the Clergy** who were edified and amazed by his zeal and charity. In his role as examiner of **Priestly Vocations**, he manifested marvelous discretion and shrewd judgment. When consulted about very serious and involved questions, even by persons in high state, they came to admire him for the wisdom of his counsel.

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In the continuous succession of many travails, he riveted his entire attention and applied all his strength to what had been asked of him. He was always most forgetful of himself. From his intense work, he contracted the first germs of that fatal illness which slowly sapped all of his strength, and would one day claim his life. Even with his illness in an advanced state, the forceful temperament and mature virtue of Fr. Marani, seemed to be getting the upper hand. Although he was confined to bed, he still omitted nothing, and worked tirelessly for the good of souls. His body was deteriorating, but from his bed of pain, he maintained his spirit that just would not accept failure. He brought to a happy conclusion the efforts of his worthy and beloved colleagues.

Even during these last years of trial, the virtue of this elect soul was severely put to the test. In addition to his physical sufferings, which grew more intense with each passing day, it was the Will of God that Fr. Marani would also endure a series of privations, bitterness and the most desolating trials.

This was the year 1866, when the new Piedmontese Government considered him suspect. His religious House was searched, his Religious family became involved in a lengthy litigation with the government. All of this resulted from the general persecution directed against religious Orders. He then sent some of his away

from the Stimate, and, with tears in his eyes, he directed his beloved young students to be taken into a place far from him. He himself became a virtual prisoner in a private home, exiled from the Stimate which for so long had been the center of his thoughts and life. This place had always been the fatherland of his heart.

We will only state here that he suffered much. His many tribulations were supported in his strong soul with heroic Christian resignation. They were for him the occasion of new and precious merits.

The more that these burdens weighed heavily upon him, he showed himself to rise above them. He would nonetheless melt into tears at the sad events that were occurring, the insults leveled against his rightful authority and the denial of the rights of the Roman Pontiff. All his life, Fr. Marani had been a devoted son and valiant champion of the Holy See.

Perhaps the happenings of 1870, that brought shame on that august authority, and against its sacred rights, brought a full measure to his suffering [101], and hastened the end of his long life. Strengthened by the comforts of religion, and amidst the grief of his sons, he fell asleep in the Lord, at the advanced age of 81, on July 1, 1971. Now, he is blessed among those who enjoy the vision, may he intercede for our Congregation, for the Church, and for Priests, heirs of his spirit, and imitators of his virtues.

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**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. RICHARD DaPRATO**

**Chapter 1
His Birth and Childhood**

Taking up the duty to treat briefly of the life and virtue of Fr. Richard DaPrato, it only seems right to mention first a word about his parents. However illustrious they were by their nobility and their blood, they were all the more commendable because of their solid virtue and their sentiments of Christian piety. We stress this fact here at the beginning, because the praise of parents redounds to the glory of their children: ***The glory of sons are their parents.*** Even more than this, though, we wish to pay a just tribute to the affection that Fr. Richard always expressed in a most sincere manner for his loved ones. He would often recall their example with tender veneration.

His parents were Count Angelo DaPrato and the Countess Teresa Vicomercati. Theirs was a union of reciprocal esteem and holy affection. They made of their family circle a center of religious virtues. Angelo DaPrato, soon after the birth of Richard, was made Pretor in San Pietro in Cariano. He was a most upright Magistrate, and a man of ceaseless activity, incorrupt justice and manifested an integrity in every trial. The spirit that pervaded [102] his public life, also permeated

his domestic life. He maintained the same sentiments of honesty, as well as humanity toward his dependents.

A worthy companion of such a man was the Countess Teresa, a most exemplary wife and mother. She was a true Angel of the Family, a woman who lived her religion, and who did all that was in her power to instill it into the hearts of her six children. These children were her delight, and they constantly were the primary object of her loving care.

Of such noble and pious parents, Richard was born on the 128th day of July in 1812. He was the second child, being born about a year after Alphonsus. These two boys gave most beautiful hopes for the future, and they were the delight of their parents. They were fine looking boys, and very well mannered. They were also endowed with fine minds. These gifts were apparent in them at an early age, and by the time they were 4 and 5 years of age respectively, they were able to read well.

Just about this time, i.e., in 1816, or 1817, a terrible tragedy struck the DaPrato home. Alphonsus and Richard were infected with typhoid. The illness came with such suddenness and such force, that it was feared that both boys would die. Then, something happened that was certainly extraordinary, if not miraculous.

Their Mother was exhausted after her long vigils, of perhaps 30 nights spent at the bed side of her sick sons. With swollen heart, one night she leaned back to rest. She was dozing, when all of a sudden, she says, there appeared to her standing in the room, the Pastor of their Parish Church, who had recently died in the odor of sanctity. He said to her: 'Your children are not baptized!' He repeated this once or twice, and the Mother was more than startled. She spoke of it to her husband, and then to the new Pastor, Fr. Bonzanini. He immediately made a careful investigation, to find out if this was really so.

It was revealed that the Countess Mother, at the births of her two sons, Alphonsus and Richard, had been assisted by a specialist. The doctor, after both births, did pour water over the heads of the two infants, but did not say the prescribed formula. Later, the Parish Priest was told that the two boys had been baptized, so that when they were later brought to the Church, he only supplied the ceremonies.

As a result of this investigation, it was established that there was a sufficiently grave doubt as to the validity of the Sacrament. Without delay, the Parish Priest baptized them conditionally, and in secret. Shortly after this, Alphonsus died.

The distraught Mother continued in her care of the grievously sick Richard. She seemed to refuse every comfort offered to her by those who were deeply moved by her sense of duty. In the very moment that her first son was being brought to the family tomb, all hope for saving Richard seemed to have vanished. This genuinely Christian Mother, in that room of sorrow, knelt down beside her son's bed, and offered this prayer:

O LORD, IF IT IS YOUR WISH TO SPARE THIS SON OF MINE, ONLY SPARE HIM IF HE IS TO BE A SAINT. IF NOT, THEN, TAKE THIS ONE, TOO — IF YOU ARE TO LEAVE HIM WITH US, THEN LEAVE HIM AS A SAINT.

It was not long after this that the boy seemed to get better. In a short time, he had recovered his health. However, as a result of the remedies that had been applied, that were needed in powerful doses to halt the illness, seemed to have somewhat of an adverse effect on the promising intelligence of the young boy. His mind now seemed somewhat slow and confused. In its place, there was even more apparent a deep humility which formed, so to speak, his distinctive character. One of his brothers later stated that it seemed to him something of a miracle.

In this way, the prayer of that Christian Mother was heard. While our Venerable Founder was working to establish this humble Congregation, God prepared this child for it. His was a soul that had been extraordinarily regenerated in grace, and he was saved from what was judged to be sure death. During his life, he would return such favors with the splendor of his virtue.

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We should point out here that this fact of his Baptism being received in so admirable a manner, was one of those blessings for which Fr. Richard felt most particularly indebted throughout his life. He used to mention it often, but as though it had happened to someone else. Among his papers, this favor and many others were found noted. He resolved to render continual thanks to God for them.

The dispositions and the principles that guided Richard and their brothers in their formative years, appear from two facts that he himself told us. In their home, there was an old and sick lady who was in the employ of the family. This noble family lavished all that care that Christian charity can suggest. Those beloved children, following the example of their Mother, were assiduous in giving to the sick woman those little services that were within their capability. They would climb up on a chair, so that she could reach what they were offering her to drink, or to accept from them whatever they had brought.

Another fact that he used to recall was a fault that he had once committed. Certainly, it was something due to his youthful nature. One day, he and his brothers, had taken some milk without their Mother's permission. When she became aware of it, she called him to task for it. She reprimanded him, not so much for having taken the milk, but for having tried to hide his fault with a little lie. This bothered him so much that he never again took anything, not even a pinch of snuff!

This Mother had a unique way of correcting her children. She would make her displeasure known to them, and would speak to them in a rather severe manner. When speaking with them, she would use the pronoun, *Voi*. She would make them sit down, whereas they were accustomed to stand in her presence. It is hard to say who should be admired the more, the Mother or the children. It seems that both were indeed fortunate to have one another.

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Chapter 2

His Studies – the University of Padua

As the years passed, Richard was sent to school. Because of the adverse effect of the medicine that was used in his mortal illness, study for him was now a difficult task. He had to work hard to acquire that knowledge that the other students were able to obtain with relative ease. We will recall such an instance.

Richard was studying in the second class of the municipal high school, which at that time was at St. Sebastian's. He was under the tutelage of an excellent priest, by the name of Fr. Dagara. For this priest, Richard maintained a life long esteem. Fr. Dagara noted Richard's slow progress in the class, and he felt that he needed a private tutor to help him in his studies. His excellent Mother, who neglected nothing in the up-bringing of her children, provided him with one. The tutor seemed most qualified for the task, and the drilling began in earnest.

However, the progress of the young boy did not correspond to the hopes of his tutor. As the man evidently was not very understanding, nor very perceptive, he attributed to laziness what was really a defect caused by illness. In the true sense, this problem was an inscrutable design of God. The tutor began to afflict, offend and even torture the young boy.

The Mother began to notice that after every session with his tutor, there was an evident sadness and dejection in her son's face. His ears betrayed a violence that he had endured. However, she never heard a single complaint from that humble and docile boy. His heroic spirit is truly to be admired and to be highly commended. His reaction to it all was totally contrary to what others of his age would usually do, but Richard sought to keep this truth from the suspicions of her maternal heart. However, she now wanted to find out for herself just what was going on. One afternoon, she stood by the doorway, when the tutor had come for another of the dreaded sessions. From her place, she could hear everything, and through the crack in the door, she had heard and seen enough. With her tact and deference, the tutor was admonished and corrected that he would act in the future in accord with reason and charity.

When Richard had finished the high school courses in Verona, he and his family moved to Bressanone, in the Tyrol. After but one year there, and I do not know for what reason, his Father sent him to the College of the Benedictine Fathers in Merano, the German sector. Richard was sent to study Rhetoric there. Up until the end of his life, Fr. Richard always cherished the memory of those days, and the good Fathers he always recalled with thoughts of gratitude. He had a particular sense of gratitude for one Fr. Pio Zingherle.

When he had completed his studies in the Lyceo [high school], he then went on to study Philosophy at the University of Padua for two years. At this time, the entire family also moved there. It is possible that Richard's brothers also had to go to Padua for some reason, and the Father decided that his sons were not to be the

guardians of themselves. He also had no desire to entrust them to people not known to the family. Therefore, the Mother was able to look out for her sons in the big city. Richard always thanked God for this move. I found this fact written among his special favors which he considered as having come to him from the hand of God. He wrote that he had been preserved from the 'corruption of the University of Padua.'

If this favor is first and foremost to be attributed to God, then immediately after Him, the vigilance of the parents, as well as the docility and the submission of Richard are worthy of mention. He knew well that his principal duty was to apply himself to study, and in everything else, he was to conduct himself as he had learned at home, and in the Benedictine College.

We should also point out here that as he applied himself to those sovereign sciences, his intellectual faculties developed in such a way that he achieved much success. This was without doubt, the result of his own fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. This disposed his soul for recollection, and enabled him to get a firm grasp on the truth.

He was fascinated by the study of geometry and physics, and [107] he made extraordinary strides in these matters. The DaPrato family was at that time living in the Gradenigo Palace in Padua. The house soon became a refuge for those students who were desirous of more serious application. They flocked around Richard to be tutored by him, their fellow student. They wanted help in the subjects of mathematics and physics, as his Mother and brothers testified, how proud they were of this fact. They tell us that about twenty young boys used to come to be tutored by her son. Richard's Father began to think that his son's vocation must be that of an engineer.

However, the boy's conduct was such that it greatly distinguished him from the other students at the University. Although down through the years, he always submitted to the family discipline, he felt that this was the manifestation of the tenderness of his Mother's heart. To him, this was all the more tender as her discipline was the more solicitous.

Fr. Richard told us years later that one day there, he had gone off to school, as usual. On arriving at the University, he discovered that day that there were to be no classes. Instead of going home, he went to the Valley Green to hear the music and to see the military parade. In the meantime, one of his companions came to visit his Mother. When she discovered that there was no school that day, she was upset that Richard had not come home. She sent a servant to find out where he was.

He had not, however, gone very far. In a short time, he was found and returned home, and his Mother only said to him: 'For your [*vostra*] sake, I have been worried!' His use of this pronoun was for him a harsh reprimand. Having such a tender love for his Mother, he wept out of compunction.

It should not be deduced from this that in the DaPrato family the atmosphere was not congenial. They did entertain with pleasant parties, and went on enjoyable outings with their friends. Richard [108], however, with one pretext or another, always

arranged it so that he would always be in the company of some old woman. He would always try by some joke or jest to conceal his true intention. Actually, he was merely trying to avoid the company of the younger women. The old woman in whose company he usually managed to be was named Corona Pisa. He stayed close by her, and would say: 'Leave me here with Granny, that I might say, the Rosary [the **Corona**] with her!'

The more he tried to conceal his virtue, he was nonetheless discovered. He was unable to avoid the observations of his friends.

Another time it happened that a man observed that young DaPrato was much different from others his age. One day this man said to him: 'But, why do you not become a priest? It seems to me that you have a vocation.'

At this unexpected statement, Richard answered simply: 'I am not worthy of it.'

That evening, his Father, who had heard about this conversation, called his son to him. In a fatherly way, but also invoking his paternal authority, he said to his son: 'The answer you gave that man was not pleasing to me. You ought to have said quite frankly that your vocation is to follow a civil career.'

The young man answered: 'But, Dad, what I told that man is true – I am not worthy of it, and I feel this quite strongly. Were it not for this feeling, then I would become a priest!'

The Father had no come-back. Richard had been discussing this question with a Fr. Salamoni, who was then in Padua, and stationed at the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. This Priest was young Richard's Confessor. Later, after mature counsel, the father and his son were assured that the Lord was calling him to the Priesthood. The family then decided to move back to Verona, so that Richard might pursue his theological studies in that Diocesan Seminary.

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Chapter 3

His Theological Studies – Ordination - Priestly Life

As his mind was made up, Richard took the first step. In November of 1832, he began to frequent the classes of the 1st Year of Theology in the Seminary of his native Diocese. He attended classes as an extern student. Here, too, he had to endure difficulties and trials. This was because of the type of studies to which he now had to apply himself. The new system proved difficult for him. He applied himself very diligently and stayed up many nights with his books. However, it seemed all in vain. As he lacked the gift of easy communication, he was deeply concerned. He was becoming more fearful that he would not succeed.

In addition to this, wearing his lay clothes, in the midst of all those vested Seminarians, for whom he had the highest respect, was also a humiliation for him. The Pastor, Fr. Zanini, who was then Richard's Confessor spoke about him to the Superiors and the Professors. Shortly afterwards, his situation improved. In the place of anguish, there was encouragement. He was then vested in clerical garb to the great consolation of his soul.

There was no other incident of note to be recorded about the years of his theological studies. We should point out, though, that the life he led as a cleric was one of dedicated preparation for the Priesthood. His first care and delight was to assist at all the functions held in Church [which, by now, was the Parish of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus]. He worked diligently in the School of Christian Doctrine, and also in the Oratory for the boys. He also did help out in functions at the other parishes, whenever he was invited to do so by his companions.

During the course of his studies, he was promoted step by step to Holy orders. He was ordained a Priest by Bishop Grasser on the [110] 24th day of September 1836. After Ordination, he was assigned to the country place of Minerbe, as his family had possessions there. This was not planned so that he would be able to look after their extensive holdings, but it was because he did not feel himself suited for more exalted offices. He hoped that he might more effectively work for the good of simple souls of the country district.

It is right to say that truly this was the field that the Lord has offered to him, and in which he worked most tirelessly, reaping copious fruits of blessing and salvation. This period of his life as a Priest lived at Minerbe covered about six years, and all during this time he worked indefatigably. As his work would suffice to illustrate the reputation of his virtues, as all who knew him testified.

Being a very humble man, he lived not only in the fullest agreement and close relationship with the Arch-Priest there, but he also undertook nothing without his knowledge and consent. There was also no service or request that he refused. Although he had no obligation, nor reimbursement for doing so, he threw himself wholeheartedly into every office. He volunteered and reserved for himself the most tiring and ordinary tasks.

He began by setting up the Oratory for the Youth. In a short time, he had won over and was surrounded by the youth of the village. He conducted their services on the holy days. He gave them suitable instructions, and then would celebrate the Mass for them. There were times that he would go to celebrate Mass in an Oratory that was several miles away. Even when the weather was inclement, he would never postpone this service, which for him was a duty. There were times that he has hardly able to pull his feet up out of the mud on those treacherous paths.

He would hear Confessions for hours on end, and the penitents who flocked to him and who placed their confidence in him were without number. There were many, too, who would send for him in their hours of need, as when death was approaching. To spare the Pastor and his Assistant the inconvenience of going whenever a Priest

was summoned, he would arrange it so that the people would call him. He used to say that he could get there more quickly, as he [111] closer to the people. To be always on the alert, he used to sleep on the floor, where he could easily be summoned by calling through a window. He also wanted to be able to leave the house without disturbing the others who were in it.

In a word, it can be said that Fr. Richard DaPrato was a blessing for the village. This was true also because of the alms he gave generously to those who were in need, and also because of the counsels and comforts of every type that he showered on the sick and the afflicted, as well as because of the ever-increasing effect of his holy life. With all these qualities, he won the love, the veneration and the confidence of all.



Chapter 4

His Life as a Canon, and his Entrance into Religion

While Fr. DaPrato was absorbed in his ministry, he also worked toward his own sanctification, as well as that of his neighbor. He never imagined that there were others who had him on their minds, or that he would receive recognition for his many fine qualities. It is easy, then, to imagine his surprise, and at the same time, his disturbance, at the unexpected proposal that the most illustrious Chapter of Verona wanted him among its members. He did not know how to respond when this honor was offered, and would have refused it had it not been for the authoritative suggestion of his Father. This proved to be the decisive factor.

On the 15th of November 1842, by Capitular Decree, he was named a Canon of the Cathedral. He took his place in the most illustrious Chapter on the 24th of January 1843. If the insignia of the Office of Canon added to him a merited honor, his virtues in their turn, did honor to these insignia.

His life was now more active than ever. In all his activity, his dominant virtue and his characteristic trait was humility.

It would be superfluous to relate here how diligent he was in officiating in his choir duties. That which does merit to be recalled [112] is that he never refused to do what was asked of him. In addition to his regular duties, a number of most difficult tasks were thrust upon him. He found satisfaction in coming to the assistance of others.

On the Vigil of Christmas every year, he was chosen to sing the evening Mass. This necessitated a very long fast, as it was sung at 8:00 in the evening. he used to say that the time passed without his hardly noticing it, as he was kept busy in hearing confessions and in preparing the church for the next day.

In the brief intervals that remained between the various assigned functions, as between Matins and the Conventual Mass, he kept the little room that he had within

the Chapter opened. There he would have conferences, and discussions on Moral Theology with other priests. In the passing of time, other duties were given to him, and he fulfilled them all with prudence and an unequalled energy. He was named Chapter Librarian. To re-organize the library, which was in great need of it, he called on the Olivetan Monk, Fr. Placidus Bresciani. After the suppression of his Monastery, Fr. Placidus came to live in Verona. Fr. DaPrato left to him the supervision of this undertaking. However, as a Canon, he did not feel it was below his dignity to offer his own manual labor, and he performed the most exhausting services.

He was also named to the Vestry Board of the Cathedral. He busied himself in all its administration with ardor and diligence. He worked to re-vindicate its rights, to prevent and correct abuses to hold back expenses, to repair its furnishings and to acquire new ones. In brief, he worked for whatever might prove to be for its advantage, and he did not scorn the humble servitude that his beloved Temple demanded. With his own hand, he swept with true devotion, the Chapel of the *Madonna del Popolo*. He would dust the pulpit, and would prepare the bellows for the practices that were held for approaching solemnities. He did all this with that spirit of humility, by means of which he always willingly gave of himself. He always gave the impression that there was nothing that tired him, or that was below his dignity.

During this same period of time, he was elected Superintendent of the College [113] of Acolytes. This was a school for young men who would serve the functions of the Cathedral. He applied himself most assiduously in their behalf.

In these years that he was a Canon, he also had another task in which he was employed until he entered our Congregation. He was the Ordinary Confessor of the Sisters of the Holy Family, at St. Dominic's. This duty which he fulfilled unaided, took up much of his time. Several times a day, he had to go from the Cathedral to St. Teresa's, making use of whatever time was available to him by going from the Choir stall of the Cathedral to that of St. Dominic's. He had measured well all the streets, alleys and short-cuts, tracing his hurried footsteps along the same familiar route.

His life was thus filled with the exercise of holy works for the glory of God and the good of souls, until the 42nd year of his life.

At this point, Fr. Richard interpreted as Divine Providence in his regard an event such as occurs to human beings. He acted upon what he considered to be an inspiration. When such circumstances are not made profitable, they often prove to be most tormenting. God called to himself his good Mother. As he had loved her with a most tender affection, he mourned deeply over her death. He was able, however, to see in it a benevolent disposition of God, that opened wide the path to consecrate himself entirely to God in his holy House. He felt that he had had this call for some time now.

The sensation that this produced in Verona cannot be exaggerated. I will only say that this example of the humility of Canon DaPrato bewildered the indifferent, consoled the faithful, and it highly edified those with whom the good Prelate would

come to share a poor and sacrificial life, for the good of his own soul and those of his fellow man.

He then entered our Congregation. In the early days, he retained his own cassock. In the insignia of a Canon, he humbled himself serving as a Sacristan, lighting the candles for Mass, and also serving the Mass until the permission of the Bishop arrived. Bishop Riccabona was at this time in Rome. When his permission arrived, the Rev. Fr. Superior deemed that the time was right to open the door of the Novitiate to the Noble Canon, Msgr. DaPrato. He then abandoned everything to take his refuge under the banner of the humble Fr. Bertoni. He received the Religious Habit on the 8th day of December 1854, which was the most solemn and memorable because of the Definition of that day of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. From an expression found in his memoirs, he considered this habit as a most gracious gift. He considered himself unworthy of it, and every day he kissed it before putting it on.

Thus, he began a new life of perfect peace and quiet in the Lord. When he used to look back on this beautiful day, he often said:

... I CAME AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR ... HAD I ONLY COME AS A YOUNG MAN ...
HOWEVER, I CAN ALSO HOPE FOR A WHOLE REWARD ... AS ALL OF YOU, WHO, AS
YOUNG MEN, CAME INTO THE SHADE OF THIS SANCTUARY...

As a Novice, no exceptions were made, and he fulfilled all the acts of mortification and humiliation employed during this period of probation. He would kiss the feet of his Confreres, help the Brothers in the kitchen and would also wait on table. He did all this with an inner joy that was evident in his expression. He always had a certain nobility and dignity of appearance. It appeared from this how sublime were the sentiments of this soul in all that he did.

Finally, after two years, the long awaited day arrived. He was to untie himself more intimately with his God, by perpetually binding himself with the holy Vows of Religion. He had this great joy on the second anniversary of the declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.



Chapter 5

His Religious Life

Fr. DaPrato took up his new state in life with deep feeling. He was to remain in it for 18 years, which were certainly full of merits for him. He was subject to discomforts and illnesses almost continually. These years, although they were long, were too short for us. We found in him the true example of the religious life.

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All the more can it be said, while relating this last period of his life, that was crowned with a death precious in the sight of the Lord, that at this time there appeared even more clearly the most choice acts of virtue. These were resplendent

in his life, both as a simple Religious, Master of Spiritual Things, and Director of the Scholastics, in the House of the Congregation near Trent.

His virtuous acts are still on the lips of all, and we have only to recall them from various examples and insert them here.

Primarily, his Faith and absolute attachment to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff were most singular. He had a most holy horror for any error, or opinion that was even slightly divergent from the teaching of the Church. This is not even taking into consideration the compassion that he would feel because of the unfortunate fall of some person, that gave rise to rumors among the faithful. This was especially the case when these persons were blinded with pride, and were too much inflated with themselves. He felt grief for those who wanted to prefer their own attitudes to those of the Universal Church, and of its Head who had been placed over it by God, as the Teacher and Guide of the People. He would speak spontaneously and fervently about the Catholic Religion, and manifested supreme conviction in the uselessness of the efforts of its enemies. He had an unmistakable conviction that all their efforts would come to naught.

His adherence to the Christian truths was most definite and firm. He was ready at any encounter to support it entirely, and to give his life, if necessary, rather than wander even a little from the doctrine of the Holy Apostolic See. [In his Memoirs, he wrote]:

... I MADE A VOW OF HOLDING, OF PROFESSING, WHENEVER THIS MIGHT BE NEEDED, EVEN AT THE PRICE OF MY OWN BLOOD, THAT DOCTRINE ALREADY MOST COMMON AMONG CATHOLICS, WHICH TEACHES: THAT THE POPE IN DEFINING AUTHORITATIVELY, IN HIS QUALITY AS UNIVERSAL TEACHER [AS IS SAID, *EX CATHEDRA*] THIS IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE MANNER OF FAITH AND MORALS, IS INFALLIBLE, ETC...

When he learned that this Doctrine had become a Dogma of Faith, on July 18, 1870, he [116] rejoiced and sincerely thanked God.

Whoever practiced his faith as he did, would easily have known what hope burned in his soul. For him, heaven was everything. He concluded his every sermon with a thought of heaven. Often he would say: 'Oh, when we are in heaven... when we will kiss the feet of the Mother of God ... that we might all go to heaven!'

This desire of his for heaven had him scorn both the good and the evil of this world. All created things gave him inspiration to look up to heaven. Even songs, or common sounds, would soon have him comparing them with those of Paradise. Even though he did not care too much for music, he did speak often of the melody of heaven. He used to say that he hoped that he would be a Choir Director there, as there would be no necessity to keep time!

Fr. Richard's Charity toward God was most outstanding. He used to experience a profound sorrow in the thought that God had been offended by some act. He was deeply imbued with the maxims of the saints, and he used to say that a failure in observance, by which the Majesty of the Lord could have even been slightly hurt, was a displeasure to him. He would say that it would be better that some

material object would suffer detriment, even though he was always a great defender of Poverty. When he had charge of the young students, he also sought to inspire them with these same sentiments and place in them the greatest horror for any deliberate defect. He did his best that they would never willfully displease God in anyway. At the same time, he would stress the importance of pleasing God in all things, and that they would do everything for the glory of God.

His Charity toward his fellow-man was likewise profound. It can be said that there was never a need, nor any necessity experienced by his Brothers in religion, even those inferior to him, that came to his attention, that he did not do his level best to alleviate. This often involved his own personal sacrifice. If a favor were ever asked of him, he would never deny the request. It seemed that he had nothing else to do than to comply with the request that had been asked of him.

[117]

One evening, a young Aspirant was very sick and restless. Someone was needed to watch over him through the night, and Fr. Richard took the task upon himself. It was beautiful to see how he tried by screens and other means to keep the light from bothering the others who were sleeping in the same room. He remained quietly kneeling in prayer. If he noted that some of the others were having a difficult time falling to sleep, he would go up to their beds, and with almost a maternal charity, he would try to find out what their trouble was. Many mornings at the sound of the bell, he would give the prescribed salutation with such feeling that it made a deep impression. If he was able to do a favor without delay that had been asked of him, he would gladly perform it. If he could not do it, he would say: 'Please wait a minute, and I will be right there.'

His refined Charity was coupled with meekness and kindness. It can be stated that no matter what may have occurred, he would never be angered, nor did he ever harbor any resentment. He was never offended, and felt he could never do enough for others. No matter how many occupations he had, he could set them aside in perfect peace, to help others. If he was already doing a favor for someone, and then another would ask for his help, he would come as soon as he was free.

Of his well proven humility, he wished to attribute to God all that was good in himself, as well as in others. He felt that of himself, he was capable only of evil. This prompted one unusual statement of his: 'If God allowed me to, I would become a Freemason!'

He found it easy to discover defects in his actions, as he always considered them imperfect. He was ever ready to call himself to task, and on his knees, would humbly ask pardon and a penance from his Superior, when he was called to attention for any failing. Fr. Richard always felt that he was in truth culpable.

He was not any less assiduous in carrying out lowly tasks. Hence, he was often [118] seen in the kitchen, sawing and splitting wood, scrubbing pots, unloosening the leggings, and even mending socks.

He had a deep respect for everyone, precisely because he considered everyone as an image of God. Whenever he had to correct anyone for some

transgression of charity, he used to say: 'Why do you wish to sadden a Brother of yours, who is a son of God?' From this reverence and esteem that he had for all, whether big or small, superior or inferior, is most evident from his life. He greeted everyone whom he met, and had greeted him, with great respect. He would also be the first to greet those he knew.

It happened one time that as he was taking his leave from the Bishop of Trent, Bishop Benedict Riccabona, out of respect for the venerable Prelate, took his cap from his head. The Bishop, however, had a soul much like his, and he would not permit him to do so. While asking Fr. Richard to put his hat on, the Bishop was in the process of taking his off. Then, Fr. Richard began to kneel down in front of the Bishop, only to see that he had the same idea. He then put his hat back on, to comply with the request of the Bishop. His respect for the Very Reverend Superior was not any less. He used to read letters from him on his knees in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

He used to have a saying that he often repeated. He would ask himself what he really was, and his usual response was: 'A clown, who is really good for nothing.' He attributed to his own ineptitude and laziness what he really could not do because of his illnesses. Not infrequently, he would go walking with the young students. At first, he would try to keep up with them, even though he was ageing and infirm. However, when he was no longer able to do this, he would say: 'Please forgive me, but this old man tires too quickly.' During the last years of his life, when he could only go out for a walk at an extremely slow pace, he would say to the one accompanying him: 'Do you want to make this sacrifice today? Who would like to offer this sacrifice?'[119]

As we have seen, Fr. Richard was a very humble man. He also practices a most perfect obedience, as this is really nothing more than humility in action. He often remarked that he would never lift a finger against obedience for all the gold in the world. He would glory that he had never done anything that he knew was not in accord with the will of his superior. His obedience had that perfection which we admire in St. Aloysius, and in Blessed John Berchmans. He had the deepest sense of submission and disregard for himself. At the first sound of the community bell, he would break off a conversation, or take his pen from the paper, and eagerly hasten to whatever obedience was calling him.

There was another marvelous trait in him in that he was very indulgent in granting permissions to requests. However, when he saw that what was being asked of him was not in accord with the mind of the Superior, he would then be most unbending. Neither entreaties nor tears would have him give in. From this, it is seen that he had truly made his own the will of his superiors. In matters of less importance, his will would be that of his Brothers, even those inferior to him. This was due to the natural submissiveness of his character and manners. It was said that he had cleaned the mud from his shoes on the iron at the front door of the Stimate before he stepped inside – and, at the same time, and in a similar manner, he had left his own will outside.

Chapter 6

His Precious Death and reputation for Holiness

With the passing of the years, his physical strength had waned appreciably. Due to his repeated attacks of illness, and his continual discomfort, he was visibly going down hill. He developed difficulty in breathing, and it was very tiring for him to get from one place to another. The Very Reverend Superior of that time, Fr. John [120] Baptist Lenotti decided to recall him from Trent. He had been there for nearly four years and the Superior felt it would be better if he would return to Verona.

In the early days of October 1871, he left the House of Villazzano, where he had been Master of Novices – and later, Director. He was accompanied by the well-wishes and even the tears of his Confreres. They were not without hope, however, of seeing him again. He then set out from Trent on his journey to Verona. However, it had been decreed that this was to be the last farewell, and that by the end of one full year, he would no longer be among us.

When he came to the Stimate, he wrote us a most edifying letter, thanking us with deep sentiments, as he put it, that we had expressed to him. He said that he had accepted them as a pledge that we had already pardoned him for the defects, for the faults that he had committed among us. He ended the letter, asking everyone to pray for him, and exhorting us to humility, to obedience and to the observance of our rules.

Another letter that he wrote to us was dated in March of 1872, and it was to be his last. This one was much like an Apostolic Letter, written under the inspiration of his holy soul. He directed himself in this letter particularly to all the Professed, the Novices and to the Aspirants. He left to all perhaps as a presage of his approaching death, the last remembrance of a Father who had loved us constantly in the Lord. At the time, he had recently recovered from an illness, and, as he put it, he was just then up and about again. It is the lot of man to wait – and the good servant of God kept constantly before his eyes in these days, this little reminder: 'Death can come at any instant; who would want to be struck down by it, while committing even the slightest fault?' He would often recommend himself to Mary most holy, for the grace of final perseverance.

On the vigil of St. Teresa, October 14, 1872, together with the Very Reverend Superior, he went to visit the Church of the Discalced Carmelites. They were discussing the sad court case with the government [121], upon the solution of which depended the very existence of the Congregation. Fr. DaPrato said these words that day: 'I, too, feel a great sorrow from all of this, and if my life were necessary to resolve this lengthy litigation in our favor, I would willingly offer it to the Lord, as I now offer it to Him with all my heart.' He said this with utmost generosity and sincerity, and then was silent for a moment. He then added: 'The offer is now made!'. On October 17th, he was dead.

The morning of that day, which was to be the last of his life, he got up with the Community. He spoke with Fr. Charles Zara about heaven, but with extraordinary joy and with such hope, that he would go there through the merits of Jesus Christ. It almost seemed as though he were already in possession of it. That same evening, at

recreation, he was jovial and was engaged in the conversation. He was marveling at the rather long walk he had taken with a Cleric, shortly after sunset, down to the Shrine of St. Blaise, in the Church of Sts. Nazarius and Celsus. He had stopped there for about a quarter of an hour to satisfy the devotion that he had for that great Saint.

After Night Prayers, when everyone had returned to his room for the prescribed rest, he had hardly laid down when he suffered a shortness of breath. It was immediately evident that he was sinking rapidly. The one closest to his room, seeing what was happening, hurried with others to his room. It was apparent that this was a fatal attack and that he did not have much time. While some were doing all they could to alleviate his discomfort, the Last Sacraments were administered to him. The good Priest received these with visible satisfaction. While struggling for breath, he seemed to be choking with asthma. Without any indication of regret, he fell asleep in the Lord, as an Oblation to Him in the fulfillment of his vows.

Deeply moved, his Confreres remained for a long time around his [122] body, piously reflecting on the words: ***Blessed is that servant, who, when the Lord comes, and knocks at the door, finds him watching.*** [Church Office].

So, on the 17th day of October 1872, Fr. Richard DaPrato, of the nobility, passed away very suddenly.

The effect of his virtues had won for him such esteem and a reputation for holiness that he was widely mourned. A usual comment as the news of his death spread, was: 'How fortunate was he – he was a saint – he is in heaven!' These were the exact words of the Prince-Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona, on receiving the word of his death. These were also the sentiments of his penitents and of all those who had known him, or who had had any contact with him.

Monsignor Zambelli, who at that time was the Spiritual Director of the Seminary in Trent, and who is now a Canon of the Cathedral there, said: 'It was enough to converse with him and the warmth of the holiness that was about him, would be felt.'

I remember hearing a good layman, speaking of the holiness of Fr. Richard, by now deceased for a long time, say that he could not find a suitable expression to exalt him adequately. He said that Fr. DaPrato was most certainly in heaven, and added: 'Very willingly would I swap places with him. I would be glad to die right now, and not even cross over the threshold of this door.'

Such was the reputation for holiness that he had at the time of his death. The heroic examples of his virtues, even in our times, are still regarded as a cherished inheritance. This holy memory will endure always among his confreres in Religion, for the common edification of both domestics and externs.

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Reminiscences

concerning

The Fathers and **the Brothers**

of the

**Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries
for the Assistance of Bishops**

Volume III

**Necrologies of other
Early Stigmatine Apostolic Missionaries
[1874 -1883]**

VERONA
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Dedication

To the
Very Reverend Peter Vignola, Superior General
on the
Occasion of his Golden Priestly Jubilee,
September 24, 1886

Very Reverend Father,

The friendship of many years, with which you honor me, that kind of kinship that unites us, and above all that great benefit that I alone know and profess to have received from you, for a long time now, have made me feel the need of paying tribute to you, with a public attestation of sincere affection.

It is because I have agreed wholeheartedly with the thought of presenting to you, on the most happy occurrence of your Priestly Jubilee, these brief *Reminiscences* of those Father and Brothers of the Congregation, over which you preside with such wisdom. These men have already returned to the bosom of God, to reap the reward of their virtues. These *Reminiscences* were given to me by some of your sons. To them, it seemed only just that these early products might extend their influence even beyond that cloister where they lived. In this way, there would be enhanced the cherished hope that the example of these men, whom the Congregation was called upon to bring to spiritual maturity, might have an even greater effect.

Accept, then, Very Reverend Father, these precious *Reminiscences*, as a sign of my gratitude, and of the ardent best wishes, that on this happy day, I offer up to the Lord for you, and for all of your beloved sons, in whose jubilation, with all my heart, I consider myself fortunate to be associated.

So, then, Very Reverend Father, if I might hope – and I do hope - that I may not be forgotten in your prayers before the Lord on this day. I would thus believe that I would then be compensated, with interest, for the little that I have been able to do on so happy an occasion.

Permit me, lastly, with all respect, to kiss your hand – in this act, I profess that I am filled with a holy joy!

Verona, September 24, 1886

Your most devoted and affectionate servant,

Fr. Ferdinand Colombari

Preface

If the death of the just is precious before the Lord – *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints...* [Ps 115:15] – then, so, too, are their virtuous acts. It is from these that their lives may be understood, and what it was that rendered them worthy of the Crown of Heaven. To gather *Recollections* about them, is a duty of piety toward the deceased, and it offers a useful service to those still living. What a beautiful inheritance has been left to us by the words and examples of the Reverend fathers and Brothers who have preceded us! The sweet odor of virtue, especially of some of them, still remains fragrant in our midst, and in our city and throughout the Diocese. However, since time destroys everything, it has already robbed us of a good part of so many pious memories, it was the earnest wish of all that these *Reminiscences* should be written.

The thought of ever having them printed did not dawn on us until a short time ago. As the celebration of the Priestly Jubilee of our Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola approached, this thought came to us. Therefore, there was much haste in compiling, as best we could, the information contained herein. We present here the results of our efforts, in the short time that was available to us. Hence, there are not a few defects, but may the reader pardon us, considering rather the good intention we had of satisfying the desires of all, and of adding one more tribute to the anniversary being celebrated by our most beloved Superior and Father.

Verona, from the Stimmate, September 1, 1886.

The Priests of the Stimmate

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BRIEF REMARKS

THE CONGREGATION OF APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES: FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BISHOPS

Its Origin – Difficulties – Nature and Scope

During the year 1810⁴², all religious orders were suppressed. A man of God, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a gem of the Veronese Clergy, was transferred by Bishop Liruti to the Parish of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. As a Curate for ten years in his home parish of St. Paul's in *Campo Marzo*, he had accomplished much good. However, it was in this next parish where he went to live that the Lord was waiting to communicate to him His special designs. A most successful Parish Mission was conducted at Saints Firmus and Rusticus by the celebrated Missionary Apostolic, Monsignor Louis Pacetti. With his ardent zeal, Fr. Gaspar took an active part in this Parish Mission. During it, he felt within himself ever more clearly, the inspiration from heaven to dedicate himself to this type of life. He manifested this idea of his to a group of priest friends of his, who had long considered him as their Father and Master. They gave their word that they were ready to follow him.

Therefore, on November 4, 1816, he, with his former pupil of the old Oratory of St. Paul's in Campo Marzo, Fr. John Mary Marani [2] and his beloved Paul Zanolì, first withdrew from the world. They took up residence as poor men, in a little house next to the Church of the Stigmata⁴³. The property included all the area of our present House, as well as that of the Convent of St. Teresa⁴⁴. The Church and the gardens had been offered to him by the Very Reverend Father Galvani⁴⁵.

In addition to these, there was another piece of property, including a garden, at the *Dereletti*, situated near the Parish Church of St. Stephen's – and still another building near the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity⁴⁶.

From the outset, they were occupied in teaching school to young boys. Somewhat later, other priests joined them: Fr. Gramego, Fr. Farinati, Fr. Bragato, Fr. Brugnoli and Fr. Cartolari. They were able to offer a complete high school curriculum, and some elementary classes. The place certainly did not provide any

⁴² Translator's Note: in the course of this translation, the page numbers of the original Italian edition of this work will be added in square parenthesis, as follows: [].

⁴³ This was an old Oratory under the care of the *Confreres of the Stigmata of St. Francis*, which had been disbanded by the law of Napoleon's suppression.

⁴⁴ This was an old Monastery of Discalced Carmelites.

⁴⁵ Fr. Galvani was a priest of great talent, vast knowledge and exemplary virtue. He was 'Lector' of Theology in our Diocesan Seminary, and Arch-Priest of St. John's in Foro. From the time he had Fr. Bertoni as his student, he came to love and esteem him for his virtues. When he learned of the great good he was doing and had planned for the Church, Fr. Galvani asked him to accept all those places he had purchased by himself from the Government. He wished only that Fr. Bertoni would assume the gratuitous duty of giving a liberal arts education to the young boys, then being taught there by two priests, whom Fr. Galvani was supporting in the little House next to the Stimate.

⁴⁶ This was part of a very ancient Convent and Abbey, founded in the 12th century, together with the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, by the Vallambrosian Monks.

comfort. The Church, although architecturally it did have some merit, had served previously as a black-smith shop, and was badly in need of renovation. On one side, there was a little Oratory, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is still standing today. Next to the Church and this little Oratory, five little rooms had been added on to the eastern and northerly sides. These were in a sad state of disarray, and could not have been improved without undertaking costly renovations. The entire complex, then, was in very poor condition. In order to maintain the School, our Fathers had to transport the furniture in and out of these rooms every day, and return it all in the evening. This was required because at night these rooms would serve as bed rooms, and then in the morning, they would be converted into class rooms. After serving as sleeping quarters for two, or more of the Fathers, in the morning they would have to provide these same rooms with all the necessary implements for school⁴⁷.

[3]

However, these few rooms did not suffice. The choir stall, the sacristy and the body of the Church were also used as class rooms. Once the Church was renovated and suitably decorated, thought was given to improve their own living quarters. Fr. Gaspar, therefore, took back from the Convent of St. Teresa a small piece of land, so that a suitable building might be built, that would require this additional extension. His idea was to construct a comfortable dwelling for his sons, and also provide the much needed space for the eight classes which the school soon included.

For this reason, in the year 1823, a well-planned and pleasant building was begun. It was to be a solid structure, and even elegant, that was of uncommon practicality. In addition to its advantages of style, it was well ventilated by means of a court-yard, which covered the entire interior of the plan. On the north side, it was closed off by a wall, that separated it from St. Teresa's Convent.

The new house was then provided with a copious library. Fr. Bertoni had set aside the two largest rooms in the center of the building for this purpose, and filled them with more than a thousand volumes of the rarest and most accredited editions. This library was so well planned that its books sufficed to serve magnificently for any group of studious men⁴⁸, especially of the sacred sciences. We should point out here that our early confreres assisted in the construction of this building.

How wonderful and edifying it was to see them, right after they had left their class rooms, put down their books and pens, to take their place at the side of the workmen. They assisted them in carrying the lime and bricks, and joined them in their fatigue. May their labors, on this holly ground protect it, sanctify it, and make it fructify!

At last, the building was furnished, the Church was opened and new Oratories were built, and the old ones were renovated. The thought behind it all was that an

⁴⁷ cf. The Biography of Fr. Bertoni written by Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe.

⁴⁸ cf. Fr. Giacobbe's Biography of Fr. Bertoni.

education in school was not considered [4] more important than was the moral and religious training of the boys. Our Fathers consecrated themselves with renewed vigor and fervor to the well-being of the youth, by means of teaching school. The Very Reverend Father Bertoni was the Prefect, or the Director of all the classes.

However, this was not the only work that our early confreres undertook. **They preached the Word of God, either through Catechism classes, or the Spiritual Exercises.** They sat for long hours in the **Tribune of Penance**. They assisted the **imprisoned** and the **sick**, and they dedicated themselves to long **study** and **prayer**. For them, this activity was their daily bread. As for their virtue and perfection, this is still on the lips of everyone who knew them. The odor of their holy lives still is diffused strongly and sweetly.

The example of the Founder, and the observance of his every word and example, was for them the only Rule and Constitution. Thus they lived without the title, as men bound to regular observance. The world, which is ever most curious, and capable of spying on such souls and finding defects in them, could only say of them that in mortification, they were excessive beyond measure. This was particularly noted in that they ate and drank as poor men.

Who would believe that in this discomfort and voluntary poverty, they were also so happy and content that it was a pleasure just to see them, or to listen to them. They were ready to bear any burden or fatigue, as if these things were nothing, or not difficult for them. They would accept the most arduous and displeasing assignments, as well as those that were distasteful to them. They acquiesced to all that their Superior asked of them ⁴⁹.

They continued in this life until 1844. During that year, the Jesuits opened a high school at St. Sebastian's. Because of the great esteem he had for those priests, Fr. Gaspar felt that they would provide better for the literary and religious formation of the youth. Furthermore, he was also short handed, so he closed the school at the Stimmate.

[5] Then began a period of trial for the holy man. A number of his priests had died, others had left, and practically no one had the courage to give his name to this Congregation. The reason, it was said, was that the penance of Fr. Bertoni was fearful! Some priests of the Oratory of St. Philip, who were very close to him, had told him many times in jest that if he wished his Congregation to grow, he ought to place over the door this inscription in large letters: *Here you can eat, drink and sleep!* However, it is hardly likely that Anyone one would have believed it.

His answer to this comment would be: 'In the early days of a foundation, what will be mitigated of itself, with changing times and changing needs, could never be considered excessive.' However, several years before his death, he made it known that everyone was to have proper nourishment. They were to keep a just balance between abundance and need, and this was written into his Constitutions.

⁴⁹ ib.

Nevertheless, his beloved family, rather than growing, was becoming smaller right before his eyes, as the years passed.

Now it seems incredible, but Fr. Bertoni did not lessen in the least his efforts to increase and improve this family. He tirelessly gathered books from every source that he could, he organized the library, he dictated the rules and discipline and governed the house as though the Congregation was flourishing more than it ever had; So great were his hopes that success would crown this endeavor, which God Himself had inspired, that he would say that if he knew for certain that on the morrow the world was to end, he still would have gone on in his work. To inspire his afflicted sons with this same confidence, he used to say: 'Have courage! – Let us trust in God, and let us leave to Him the future, as He can do all things!'

When anyone would leave, he would turn to the others and say: 'And do you, too, wish to go? I will stay here alone, with the help of God, until my death.' In brief, then, it can be said of him that **he hoped against hope!**

Then, the year 1848 came, the period that was so disturbed because of the insurrection among the people. The Servant of God rules [6] over his sons with such prudence that they did not suffer too much in those troubled times. There was, however, one exception. Two of the priests were falsely accused of trying to bribe some soldiers. It was said that while the soldiers were going to Confession, the priests offered them some money to desert. They were put in prison, and they faced the danger of even worse treatment, even the death penalty. A number of important citizens intervened for them, and finally, their innocence was established, and they were set free⁵⁰.

Between the years 1849 and 1850, many soldiers were camped in Verona, in an effort to stamp out the rebellion. Since our House was large and spacious, and almost entirely uninhabited, it was taken over and used as a barracks for soldiers. This provided a new field for the zeal of our Fathers and Brothers, and they managed to win many souls back to the sacraments and to the practice of Religion. The soldiers remained until 1854, but, the year before, our Venerable Founder was called to heaven to receive the reward of his heroic mortification and constancy. He named Fr. Benciolini as the heir of all his possessions.

Fr. Marani succeeded the Venerable Founder. In the year 1854, he was in Rome, at the feet of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Pius IX. The Pope blessed him and the little Congregation, and he expressed the desire that this **Little Flock** [these are the very words of the Pontiff] **might grow [Crescat Pusillus Grex!]** – and be diffused **for the glory of the Lord, for the good of souls and for the assistance of Bishops!**

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars examined the spirit of this new Congregation, the End to which it tends and the laws by which it is governed. On the 16th day of April 1855, it published a Decree in which was stated that His Holiness has ordered that this Congregation, and its Scope, by this present Decree,

⁵⁰ cf. The Life of Fr. Innocent Venturini, an early member of the Congregation.

is to be commended and accorded the most ample praise [Decretum Laudis - the Decree of Praise].

On the 30th of September of that same year, in the Church of the Stimmate, the Solemn Canonical Erection of our Institute was held with special ceremonies. The day was all the more sacred due to the presence of His excellence, Bishop Benedict Riccabona. To him, Fr. Marani, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, made his Profession of Vows. The others, then, one by one, kneeling before him, for the first time, they pronounced the Formula of Vows of perpetual Poverty, Chastity and Obedience⁵¹.

The blessing of Pius IX, and his expressed wish – **that the Little Flock might grow!** - soon began to reap fruit. 'Outstanding priests' of Verona, and of other places, as well as many young men and boys of varying ages, began to seek admission⁵².

The Convent of the Most Blessed Trinity, mentioned above, was renovated, and done over in a most suitable manner. There, the young members were trained, and they lived there peacefully until 1866. When the political storms of that era broke, a period that was so threatening for the Church and Religious Orders, Fr. Marani sought for our men another place to live. For his Success, we will profess eternal gratitude to His Highness, the Prince-Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona, for his most cordial hospitality. The storm then unleashed in all its fury, and it struck us most forcefully. On August 27, 1867, there began a time of most harsh trial for our religious family, that was almost totally destroyed.

Our House and meager funds were confiscated by the government. The Convent of St. Teresa and a great part of the House of the Stimmate were taken over, and used as schools. A few of our confreres were treated as tolerated guests in their own beloved home, so that they could care for the services in the Church. Fr. Marani, with extreme regret, retired with a few others, to a rented house. This was the Massalongo home, facing the Giusti Gardens, in the Parish of *Sancta Maria in Organis*. He died there in near oblivion in 1871.

This sad state of affairs lasted for six years, during which time it appeared clearly [8] what esteem the citizens of Verona had for the Congregation. These people were the heirs of the faith and the piety of their grand-parents who had been students at the Stimmate. They brought material comfort to the agony of an Institute that had always given of itself, without asking for any material retribution. Other benefactors also were not lacking. They were prompted to come to our assistance by that Father, Who from heaven, watched over His afflicted sons.

⁵¹ These priests were: Cajetan Brugnoli, Francis Benciolini [who is still living], Innocent Venturini and John Baptist Lenotti. The Coadjutor Brothers were: Paul Zanolli, Louis Ferrari [who is still living], and Francis Stevanoni. Many periodicals in Germany, and some papers in Italy, as well as the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* [Series II, Vol. XII, p. 702] had articles concerning our Congregation.

⁵² The practice of accepting and training young boys for the Congregation was begun by Fr. Bertoni. He himself accepted Louis Ferrari, aged 14, Charles Fedelini, who was 16. John Baptist Lenotti and Louis Biadego were also very young. This conforms to our Rule that determines the minimum age for acceptance to the 14 years.

In Him, we have placed all our trust, and in the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, the Patrons of our Congregation and we were not deluded. The legal justice of our case that was most evident, finally forced the government to propose a compromise that was accepted: whatever pertained to the substance of the property would be restored, but not the expenses incurred in the long course of the litigation. Complete justice is not to be hoped for on this earth.

By this time, the Superior General was **Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, who was an heir of the genuine spirit of Fr. Bertoni, by whom he had been trained.** He completed the negotiations begun by Fr. Marani, to have a House of our own, in the vicinity of the city of Trent. Shortly afterwards, he recalled the students to Verona, and lodged them in St. Teresa's Convent. Fr. Lenotti died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1875, and he was succeeded by our present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. He established at St. Theresa's the Novitiate. Before 1866, this was conducted at the House of the Most Holy Trinity, which in 1877, was sold to the Salesian Sisters.

In this same year, a House was opened at Bassano, with **a youth program** and a **high school**. In the meantime, this has been converted into a high school. In 1876, **a House was established at Parma, where our Fathers, in addition to teaching elementary school, also conduct the Oratories, teach Catechism, preaching the Spiritual Exercises, and perform all ministries to which they are called.** On the 4th of November last year, the Congregation also went to Pavia, where the Fathers conduct a **night school** during the winter; for the remainder of the year, they have practically continuous **preaching assignments** in every part of that diocese.

Among all the Houses of the Congregation, however, because of its antiquity, and the good done there, ***Santa Maria del Giglio, or the Dereletti*** ⁵³, mentioned earlier in this historical sketch, merits a place of honor. In 1836, when Fr. Marani and Brother Zanolli were sent there by the Founder to take up residence, there was only a squalid dwelling. Even at that time, it was already old; there was also the dark and decaying Church. Concerning this Church, Fr. Marani had begun the construction of a new one, but the work was interrupted by the happenings of 1866. It was then completed by Fr. Lenotti in 1874. The House was most recently rebuilt and renovated for the use of the community, by the present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. The Fathers conduct there an **Oratory** on holy days, for boys. There is a **religious instruction** every night, and the priests are frequently called to **preach** in the parish church of St. Stephen's. **More than anything else, they hear confessions**, especially on the Vigils of the solemnities until about mid-night. They start right in again the next morning for about four more hours. In this work, after Fr. Marani others have been assigned, and have labored with great zeal, but Fr. Francis Benciolini merits a special mention.

Turning now to the Mother House, that is the Stimate, we will note that in the last decade, the number of workers has grown, so that **the elementary school** was reopened in 1878. Gradually, there was also added the **high school** course,

⁵³ This was formerly a place for accepting abandoned orphans.

and all the teachers have received the required diploma. The other members render an assiduous contribution to **the sacred and apostolic ministry**.

From what has been said up until now, **the nature and the purpose of the Congregation can be seen**. It is entitled: ***Apostolic Missionaries for the Assistance of Bishops***. Our Founder did not limit himself to this, or that ministry, nor to a few determined cases and matters. The Congregation was intended to **assume every good work in the service of God and souls**, so that all those who have embraced this manner of life, **must be prepared and ready for this**. However, it is **proper** for this Congregation, **in addition to occupying itself in giving the Holy Missions [10]**, to **teach** every branch of literature and the sciences, to hear **Confessions**, to give the Spiritual exercises to every class of souls, to explain the **Catechism** in the schools of Christian Doctrine, to establish the **Marian Congregations** in the Churches of the Congregation. These should be promoted where it is possible. The members of the Congregation are to assist the sick and the dying, they instruct and assist those in prisons, they substitute for, and accept permanently **Chairs of Philosophy and Theology**, and **lend whatever assistance the Bishop may have need of**, even unexpectedly.

The manner in which **the** Institute fulfills its end is, as our rule states: ***to serve, or to assist the Bishop, in those things in which, due to different times and circumstances, he may have need***. The Bishop, then, asks the Superior of the Congregation, for one or more, **to perform some office, or duty, in conformity with the spirit of this Congregation, and according to its rules**. There must be in this Congregation, individuals who are qualified in the judgment of this same Superior.

This Institute is placed under the protection of Mary most holy, and of St. Joseph, whose examples are proposed for our imitation, with divine help. This is required of anyone who desires to serve His Divine Majesty in this Congregation.

This, then, is the simple and very brief history of the beginning and the development of this very small **Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries**. This is the **nature and spirit** that pervades it. It also makes clear that this union of priests, which was brought together by the fortunate decision of Fr. Bertoni, was not a work of chance. Nothing in this world every happens by chance, nor do the works of man, who, of himself, can do nothing. Everything is ordained and disposed by the infinite wisdom of God, Which ***reaches therefore from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly*** [Ws 8:1].



[123]
**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. LOUIS BRAGATO**

**Chapter 1
Birth, Education and Life Prior to entering the Stimmate**

He was born in Verona on the 7th of December 1790, the son of John Baptist Bragato, and Marguerite Lorenzetti. They were not rich in the good of this earth, but they were well endowed with the Christian virtues. Their extraordinary charity toward the poor brought them the great privilege one time of giving lodging to that renowned beggar, St. Benedict Joseph Labre. It is believed that he gave his blessing to the new born Bragato baby.

Louis Bragato studied with great success at the regional high at St Sebastian's. The Prefect there at that time was the learned Fr. Joachim Avesani. Young Bragato then completed the course in the sciences with equal honor at the Lyceum, under the philosopher, Fr. Segà. As long as he lived, Fr. Bragato would remember these two men with most grateful affection.

To these studies, he added the practice of solid piety. It was said that he had about him such an innocence, that it was evident in his face, and he was called another St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Early he manifested all the indications of a call to the Priesthood. He later did enter the Seminary and was assigned, as he had hoped, to the Church of the reverend Fathers of the Oratory of St. Philip, which he had attended as a boy. He was vested in the clerical habit in St. Sebastian's Church.

Shortly thereafter, because of Napoleon's famous edicts, he was drafted. To avoid giving up his vocation, he became a boarding student at the Diocesan Seminary. With great joy, he entered those halls of piety and learning. His was truly a beautiful and lovable soul, because of his innate modesty that was evident in his every act and in all his conversations. He had a gentle temperament and an affable manner that won for him the affection and the [124] esteem of his fellow seminarians – one of whom was John Marani. He also captured the admiration of his teachers and superiors. Of these, we will mention only Fr. Frisoni, the brilliant teacher of literature, and Fr. Louis Trevisani, the Prefect of Studies at the Seminary. This latter had already a reputation for learning so he was called by *antonomasia*, the 'Master.'

Young Bragato divided his application and his love between his studies and his spiritual life. He completed his theological course with great profit and was ordained a Priest. He celebrated his First Mass on September 24, 1814. At that time, the above-mentioned Fr. Frisoni had taken over the spiritual rector-ship of St. Lawrence's. Because of his great esteem and affection he had for Fr Bragato, he arranged for him to be named his collaborator. At St. Lawrence's, Fr. Bragato

became, as it were, the right hand of the brilliant and zealous Fr. Frisoni. He was the essence of patience and charity in receiving persons of every condition in the Tribunal of Penance. He continually preached the Word of God, in his homilies on the holy days, and through the informal exposition of Christian Doctrine. He also gave number less discourses and instructions to his beloved youth of the Marian Oratory.

Fr. Frisoni had entrusted the work of the Oratory to his care. Through the efforts of Fr. Bragato, its Director, in the year 1824, this Oratory numbered about 300 boys and adults of every age and condition. These comprised the main body of the Oratory, and there were an additional 200 children who would assemble in the rooms here and there off the main body of the Church. It was beautiful to see the order and the discipline with which this youthful Christian Legion, under the vigilance of Fr. Bragato, fulfilled the exercises of Christian piety, and the earnest struggle of these young people for the Christian virtues.

In this endeavor, Fr. Bragato enlisted the help of pious laymen. By exercising their authority in a gentle manner, they formed by discipline squads of boys who had been assigned to them. He was also helped by Priests and seminarians, who were imbued with the spirit of Christ, who had said: ***Let the little children come to Me!*** [Mt 19:14].

Among those Priests, we should mention Fr. Provolo. He was later to establish an Institute for the Deaf-Mutes and established an extraordinary system of helping these poor creatures express themselves. Fr. Bragato appointed him to instruct the young boys in his Choir, while he was still a Seminarian. Young Provolo had a knack of communicating with souls.

Because of Fr. Bragato's active zeal, an entire generation grew up in the Parish, imbued with piety, devotion to Mary, obedient to their elders, and to the fulfillment of their proper duties as well as in the frequent reception of the sacraments, which was extraordinary for those days. He had a talent for winning the hearts of the young Oratorians, and they were happy to be at his side. They were most docile to him in all that was for the betterment of their souls.

Fr. Bragato later gave up this work when Bishop Liruti appointed him **Prefect in the venerable Diocesan Seminary**. He was to succeed 'The Master', Fr. Louis Trevisani. It was on his recommendation that Fr. Bragato was appointed, as he had always retained the great esteem and veneration for his former student. Both the Students and the Professors found Fr. Bragato to be another Fr. Trevisani.

Three years after the death of Fr. Trevisani, Fr. Bragato also came to be admired by the deceased Priest's brother, John Trevisani. He was a most wealthy and a most generous man, and from his abundant endowments, he was most lavish in helping the poor unfortunates of society, as well as in his donations to Churches. This very religious man had planned on founding a College to gather there young Aspirants for the Priesthood. He entrusted the direction of the endeavor to Fr. Bragato. He took counsel from the Bishop, and also from Fr. Bertoni, whom he had

had for a long time as his own Spiritual Director. He resigned the position of Prefect at the Seminary, and also gave up the spiritual care of Mother Leopoldina Naudet, and her Religious Sisters. She had by this time already established the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Fr. Bragato, however, did not give up his Oratory at St. Lawrence's.

To begin this new endeavor, in the year 1826, Fr. Bragato opened his own home to three young students⁵⁴. However, this foundation from which Fr. Bragato had hoped to be able to serve so much food for souls, never really got off the ground. His Benefactor, John Trevisani, just as he was about to sign a notarized statement for the support of a good number of students, for some unknown reason, decided to visit one of his country estates. Shortly after his arrival out there, he died very suddenly.



Chapter 2

Fr. Bragato at the Stimate

Seeing his beautiful hopes suddenly dashed to the ground, Fr. Bragato then decided to carry out a plan that for a long time had been developing in his mind. He decided to enter the Stimate. He settled his family affairs, and then entered to give himself over entirely to the direction of Fr. Bertoni, who received him with open arms. That was the 30th of October 1828.

His first assignment was to teach high school. His outstanding qualities were his gravity, his placidity, and his unusual clarity of expression, especially in the Latin and Italian classics, in which he was very well versed. Among his confreres, he was gentle and modest. With his penitents, even the most bothersome, he was most patient. They used to call him another St. Francis de Sales. His preaching was noted for its order and clarity. His style was moderate, and he had a way of working his thoughts beautifully into souls, that would inspire the fervor of their affections. [127] Even in the more difficult and sublime themes, he had a facile and plain explanation, that he would make them understandable, even to those who had received but little formal education. From the time of his very first assignment at St. Lawrence's, he seemed to be an illumined and holy orator. He was truly a holy man, as he was so meek and humble of heart. He was so submissive and obedient to Fr. Bertoni, that he was much like a child in it, as this following episode may demonstrate.

During the year 1830, Fr. Bragato was teaching in our school. A Sovereign Decree was published, obliging all Clerics in their curriculum of sacred studies, to include the study of methodology. No Priest who was to teach either in public or private school could be except from this. Fr. Bertoni was desirous that some of his Priests would fulfill this requirement. He asked Fr. Bragato if he would not mind enrolling in the class of Fr. Lepilla, who was teaching this course for the first time. Fr. Bragato did not have to be asked twice, and set out immediately for school. It was

⁵⁴ One of these was the future Arch-Priest of the Santissima Trinità, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, who is still living. He wrote a eulogy for the month's mind Mass for Fr. Louis Bragato. We have a number of references to this Oration.

quite a sight to see him – this man who had one taught himself at the Seminary, and who had been Prefect of Studies there. Here he was, a Priest of about 40 years of age, much esteemed and venerated, mingling with the clerics of the student body, having returned to the Seminary as a humble student. Fr. Lapilla would never call on him without taking off his cap, and would manifest toward him that regard and reverend in which he held him.

Not much later, Bishop Grasser heard about this undertaking. From the yearly years of his episcopate, he had come to know the learning and the virtue of Fr. Bragato. When he heard of this act of humiliation, he then forbade him to continue on in it.



Chapter 3 **Fr. Bragato at the Court of Vienna**

During the year 1835, a request came from the Imperial Court of Vienna, to three Bishops in Italy, for an Italian Confessor for her Majesty, the Empress Maria Anna. She was a woman of deep piety [128] and had a generous heart.

The wise Bishop Grasser was one of these, and he thought immediately of the Stimmate and designated Fr. Bragato. Fr. Bertoni agreed with the choice. Fr. Bragato was more than surprised when he was made aware of it. He offered a number of excuses which proved to be of no avail, so he accepted the decision, and set out for Vienna.

On the 16th of July that year, on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, to whom he always had a great devotion, Fr. Bragato was presented to the Emperor Ferdinand, as the Court Confessors and Almsmoner. The Emperor received him most graciously, and assured him that from then on, he would have his full confidence. In time, this confidence was increased 100-fold.

As he was unaccustomed to the ways of the Court, he kept himself almost as a hermit, living in a humble and private dwelling outside the Royal Court. He was always disposed and ready to render any spiritual assistance to the Empress. After undertaking a journey during the month of September into Bohemia, in the Cortege of their Imperial Majesties, he was then lodged within the Palace.

In the nearby Imperial Villa of Schonbrunn, he went on with his schedule, alternating between his Priestly practices that were always dear to him, and his life at Court. He would recite his Breviary, celebrate Mass and perform his other religious duties. He dedicated himself to the German and the French languages. The religious Empress honored him with audiences, to receive from him the benefit of his knowledge and piety, as well as consolation and counsel. He lived in this active retirement from the world until October 1848. During those years, however, his life at Court was interrupted by some visits, required either by duty, or by his vacation, as we shall soon see.

He became known for his almost cloistered way of life, his reserve and moderation, as well as the respect he manifested for those over him. Without hypocrisy, or exaggeration, he became known for his affability with his equals, and his kindness toward his inferiors, even those who were bothersome to him. He was to be long remembered for that aura, I might call it, of religious peace that was evident in his countenance, and that was diffused throughout his person. He was a man endowed with gracious and polished manners, evident in his nobility of character and an uncommon learning. He made a lasting impression for his cordiality [129] with which he would meet everyone, and they all felt to have been embraced in his deep charity. He gave no evidence of self-interest, and would not involve himself in those matters that did not pertain to his ministry. These many qualities of his, in a very short time won for him the esteem and affection of all. He even won over those who were unaccustomed to Catholic Courts, and who were much astonished at seeing for the first time a Priest in residence at the Court.

In the following November, he was named Honorary Chaplain of the Imperial Court and received an income of 700 florins. The Empress added considerably to this salary and that from his income, he would be able to maintain himself and his servant. He was later confirmed in this position, as he had fulfilled the post to the full satisfaction of both the Empress and the Emperor. They had for him a most sincere veneration.

Other trips followed the one that was mentioned above. There was the journey into Bohemia for the solemn coronation in 1836; one to Italy in 1838. There were trips to Presburg, to Istria, to upper and lower Austria, through Stiria, Carniola, Carinzia and the Tyrol, always in the company of the Sovereigns. Some of his own trips took him to the Holy House of Loreto, to Verona, Moravia and other places. He would always return from these with much experience and knowledge, and also burdened with requests.

As the goodness of his heart was so well known, and also because of the exalted position that he held, there was never a poor or needy person who had recourse to him who would go away empty-handed. Over the years, he had helped seminarians, laymen, bishops, priests, soldiers and civilians. Whoever asked for a favor, or who merely wanted sympathy or help in saving desperate souls would seek him out. He was often asked to intercede to obtain a Decree from the Emperor for cases, or affairs that had remained unresolved for months, or even years. Many times, imprudent and ridiculous requests would come in. He would handle them with that forbearance and patience of his. He gave truly heroic examples of all this throughout his long life.

When it was necessary for him to deny the requests of others, he [130] would employ such courteous and polite expressions in his letters of response, that he did much to alleviate the bitterness of those who received them.

While on this subject of letters, we should also mention those that he would send in reply to anyone who had sought him out for spiritual counsel. Whether the

mood of these letters was serious, or joyful, his dignity was always evident in them. He was a man well versed in spiritual matters. He also carried on a wide correspondence with close friends and relatives.

He sent many letters to Fr. Bertoni ⁵⁵ whom he had always considered his superior and spiritual master. For our consolation, we should note that his separation and most exalted status in no way diminished his affection toward our Venerable Founder and toward our Congregation to which he remained united in spirit.

He did return to Verona many times to see his confreres. Every time he came near Verona on official duties, he did all he could to visit at least briefly his old friends. For him, it was a great joy to partake of their austere diet, and to put on again, for a few hours, the habit [then in vogue] in of the Congregation. When they were exploited by the government, he sent all of his own income he could to help them out.

In the Imperial Court, he had always remained a religious in spirit and heart. He was detached from the honors that were offered to him in abundance, and those he accepted were required by his duties. We will mention here those that came to him from the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IXth, who named him a 'Secret Chamberlain Supernumerary' in 1846. From that time onward, he had the title of 'Monsignor.'



Chapter 4

Monsignor Bragato at the Court of Prague

The unhappy year of 1848 brought many changes. Monsignor Bragato, faithful to the great cause of justice and religion, by necessity was thrust into the center of that turbulent and revolutionary year, at some risk to himself. The rebels had only contempt for the Throne and also the Altar, and the unrestrained press hurled its venom and insults at those in high station. Many were hung in effigy. This humble and wise man of God because of his integrity and prudence, suffered no personal insults, even when he would pass through agitated mobs, dressed as a Priest.

The cares of the realm were soon taken from the Emperor. He abdicated, and retired to Prague, with his august Consort. Two or three years after this, a new and vast field opened wide for the zeal of Monsignor Bragato.

He discovered that the chapels in the Palace of Hradschin, and in the nearby Castle of Reichstadt had been abandoned. He received from his Sovereigns a commission that was both honorary and arduous. He was given the assignment of supervising their renovation. It was precisely here that his creative genius stood out. Previous to this opportunity, this talent had remained unobserved. He set about this undertaking, with an inspiration that was unique to him. He was given a *carte*

⁵⁵ It is too bad that so many of these writings were either lost, or spread throughout all of Europe, and even beyond it, and those written to Fr. Bertoni were destroyed in an unfortunate incident.

blanche, for his work, and was assisted by Italian, German and Bohemian tradesmen. He inspired new life into their sculpturing, painting, sacred music and the other arts, within his sphere of influence. Very soon his labors were brought to a conclusion to the complete satisfaction of the pious Monarch who had entrusted this task to him.

With the same zeal and intelligence, he applied himself a few years later to the construction of a Chapel in the Palace of the Galliera, in Veneto. This palace was the personal property of the [132] Empress, Maria Anna. In it, the renowned painter, Grigoletti completed a work representing the Blessed Virgin. It proved to be an honor to the Mother of God, as well as to the Empress who had it done.

Fr. Bragato's zeal, and the generosity and sense of religion of the Emperor, brought to a successful conclusion a vast undertaking in the Province. The churches and chapels under the broad dominion of His Majesty throughout Bohemia were enlarged, renovated, cleaned and decorated. This project did not include others that arose over the foundations of destroyed churches, as well as a number of entirely new constructions.

After the material construction was completed, there followed a program of purchasing the sacred furnishings for them from the craft shops of Vienna, Milan, Lyons, Belgium and other places. Due to the ultimate perfection of church functions, especially in the Imperial Chapel of Prague, even though it was situated on a high mountain, the faithful flocked to it, from the most distant sectors of the city. They came to hear the sermons, take part in the sacred exercises, to assist at Mass and for all the other services to their utmost edification.

Among the well-attended services should be mentioned the devotion that he introduced in honor of the Seven Sorrows of Mary. The services were always celebrated with great magnificence on all the Fridays of Lent. The Way of the Cross was held on every Wednesday of the year, and the Rosary on every Saturday.

For specified objects of Catholic worship, and for many other projects, enormous sums of money were given away by the Monarchs living in Prague. Notwithstanding this, the poor were never deprived from their share of it, especially the poorest of the poor. Other beneficiaries were the Holy Father, Pius IXth, hospitals, convents, churches and schools, as well as a thousand other institutions of charity throughout Europe, were endowed by this outstanding charity.

Fr. Bragato understood well that generosity and munificence ought to be the prerogative of kings, and therefore, he did all that was possible to him to see that avarice under any form, would not tarnish the divine splendor. He did his utmost to see that their liberality would always be meted out for the alleviation of mankind everywhere for the greater glory of God.

In doing all this, there appeared in every clearer light the personal [133] disinterest and the integrity of the Priest. He was forgetful of himself, and convinced that it was better to give than to receive, as the Holy Gospel states. He experienced

no greater pleasure than to bring joy to his neighbor. He accepted no stipend for the celebration of the divine mysteries, unless it was necessary. Even then, he did not keep the money for himself, but instead distributed these sums, together with other monies as well as alms he had received for this purpose. In those instances, when the appeals to the clemency of the Sovereigns passed the established limits, he sought to alleviate as many needs as he could from his own money, always giving preference to those who seemed the most needy.

We will note here just one example out of the many we could include. Foreseeing the possibility of common disasters, which unfortunately do occur, there was an amount of gold on deposit to assist him in his eventual needs. Whatever was threatening at that juncture, passed uneventfully. He then came to know that in a distant place, an acquaintance of his was living a most wretched life. He took the gold pieces from his deposit, and sent it to the man as a gift. The amount of was a good 200 sequins, and represented his own savings over many years.



Chapter 5

The Virtues of Monsignor Bragato

All that we have narrated thus far would demonstrate quite clearly that the virtue of Fr. Bragato was a most solid endowment. Nonetheless, we will add here some further considerations.

The modesty and the humility of his bearing were unusual, but these were even more apparent in his soul. Whenever vaunted his brilliant intelligence, nor his extraordinary memory. However, to entertain, or to avoid less useful conversations, sometimes he would recite to others at table with him, long passages of both prose and poetry, from both the Italian and Latin classics. He had such a delivery that it was evident that his was [134] no ordinary talent at recitation. He could still do this in his advanced years, as there were still firmly fixed in his mind those passages from good authors that he had studied in his youth.

In 1837, he made a beautiful translation of a book entitled, *The Month of May*, into Italian, as a personal exercise. It had been written by Fr. Beeckx, the Prepositus General of the Company of Jesus. This translation was first published by the Melkite Press in Vienna, and then went through many editions in Italy. By his translation, Fr. Bragato also satisfied his own most tender devotion toward the Blessed Virgin Mary.

He rarely ever spoke of himself. He truly had no interest in his own person, nor the things that pertained just to him. He was also a most jealous custodian of secrets that had been confided to him concerning political and domestic matters, that involved the Imperial Family. As a result, he enjoyed the full confidence of the Emperor and the Empress. She, in particular, had for him a profound veneration, as his spiritual daughter. At the same time, she exercised over him a maternal care and solicitude.

He was a man of few words, and always spoke slowly and kindly, and with such a spirit that he penetrated hearts. In eating and drinking, he always observed an austere temperance. If he ever visited an inn, a florin and a half usually purchased a meal for himself and his servant. His meekness was very well known throughout the Royal Court. As he did enjoy the full confidence of the Sovereigns, not a few adversaries rose against him. These people did make him suffer considerably, but in answer to them, he offered only his calmness, silence and prayer. His dealings with them were always tempered by his loyalty and sanctity. He always sought to excuse his enemies, and either pardoned them himself, or asked pardon of them.

He never sought after earthly honors, as his heart was focused on heaven. On going into any room that had been prepared for him, that might have been too ornately set out, he used to say: 'See, how they treat you, you poor creature! How do you adorn your heart to welcome Jesus there, in the Sacrament you receive every morning?'

When he was on his way through Parma in 1854, the Duke wanted him to bestow on him the insignia [135] of the Knight of the First Class of the Sacred Angelic Imperial Constantine Order of St. George. Fr. Bragato, however, never wore the insignia.

On 1858, he was named an Honorary Abbot of Prinow in Hungary, by the Emperor Franz Joseph. Fr. Bragato never exercised the privileges of these decorations. He was content with his being named a Protonotary Apostolic in 1852 and its insignia, and also being named a Domestic Prelate of Pope Pius IXth by a Pontifical Brief in 1858. Among his many privileges, the one that meant the most to him was that of celebrating Mass, or having it celebrated in any Oratory whatsoever, that had been set up for it. He often made use of this privilege. It was an inspiring sight for those who assisted at his Masses, to see him at the altar, in great recollection and with lively faith and devotion, totally absorbed in the Eucharistic Mystery, that he celebrated. It seemed to them that Divine Love had transported him outside the realm of his senses. During his last years, however, he was no longer able to get about on his feet. It was only rare that he was able to offer Mass. He would ask other Priests to do this for him, and from them he very often received Holy Communion.

Every eight days, he used to go to Confession. He celebrated his last Mass on October 4th, the Feast of the Most Holy rosary. It was 60 years and ten days from his First Mass, offered on September 24, 1814 in Verona.

†

Chapter 5

His Death

Throughout his long life, he had always had a delicate constitution. This was weakened even further during the last ten years of his life, as he was run down in body due to frequently recurring illnesses. Right up until the end, however, he retained that clarity of his mind. Suffering a great deal, he was forced to submit to a most [136] rigorous way of life.

All the care and solicitude that were lavished on him, especially by the Empress to alleviate his sufferings proved to be of no avail. The last hour arrived, and his great heart gave out. His beautiful soul took flight to heaven. He most peacefully passed away in the evening of October 13, 1874, a little after 9:00 p.m. in the Royal Palace of Prague.

His remains were kept there until the 16th, on a most ornate catafalque. He was laid out in a large room of the Imperial Palace. The body was then taken to the nearby Metropolitan Church, where a solemn funeral was celebrated. With great pomp, the funeral procession made its way to the old cemetery on the left bank of the Moldave, and the coffin was placed in a new tomb near the Church.

The funeral procession was led by 20 or more orphans of every nationality, who were being cared for in the Italian orphanage there. This was described as the most beautiful funeral prayer for the deceased Prelate. The flower of the Imperial Court, all the parishes of the city, all the Religious Orders and the Metropolitan Chapter were represented with solemn pomp.

Another funeral Mass, with an even greater display of chant and music, was celebrated in the Imperial Royal Chapel on that October 27th. Thirty six Masses were celebrated from 6:00 a.m. until noon. Among the celebrants, special mention should be made of His Eminence, the Cardinal, the Prince of Schwarzenberg, the Arch-Bishop of Prague, and also His Excellency, C. Prucha, the Bishop of Hoppe, who pontificated at a solemn Mass.

The mortal remains of our Fr. Bragato rest in peace under a simple monument⁵⁶. On it, almost as a guard, there is an angel with a trumpet on one side – and on the other, there is a Crown of Glory. These are symbols of the resurrection, and they are at the same time testimony to the merits of the deceased and our own hopes. There is also the following inscription:

To the Priest, Louis Bragato, of Verona. The Empress Maria Anna, as a sign of her piety and gratitude, has erected this for her excellent Confessor. 1874

†††

⁵⁶ The Abbot Negrelli, who knew and lived with Fr. Bragato for a long time, wrote some recollections concerning him, from which we have drawn the greater part of our material. He concludes, saying: On the marble stone that covers his remains, I would only inscribe the name of LOUIS BRAGATO, with the epigraphy previously published by the *VOCE CATTOLICA* of Trent: *He lived his life benefiting others, and he died poor.*

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. JOHN BAPTIST LENOTTI**

**Chapter 1
His Birth through Ordination**

John Lenotti was born on the 5th of September 1817. His parents were Anthony Lenotti and Cecilia Cabianca, who were well-to-do by the standards of this world, but even more so in the Christian virtues. From his very earliest years, young John gave a clear indication that he was a gentle nature, and one much inclined to piety. As the years passed, this trait of kindness appeared even more predominantly in him. The candor of his soul was likewise evident on his face. He had a liveliness that was tempered by his innocent bashfulness. He exhibited a total and loving dependence on the will of his beloved parents. He was most natural and genuine in his bearing, and affable in [138] in his expression, while his posture was always composed. It was not difficult even then to foresee the great progress that he would make in virtue, and that his contribution for the glory of God would be significant.

When he was hardly more than ten years of age, his parents sent him to the School at the Stimate. At that time, the School there was flourishing, and young and gifted minds were being cultivated in the school in both study and piety. Young John studied with great diligence, and made much progress in the scholastic life. However, his progress was even more notable in the cultivation of the spiritual life. He was the edification of his fellow students, and the consolation of his teachers and most loving parents.

During his High School course, he began to take even more notice of these Priests who were his teachers. He was struck by their exemplary lives, their abnegation, modesty and the humility that seemed evident in their every act and word. He considered them the last word in all that pertains to a supernatural vocation, and he began to think about joining them. He thought of joining himself to their holy band, and to consecrate himself in the religious Life, to work for his own sanctification and that of his neighbor.

With fervent prayer, he asked light from God, and the strength to carry out his resolutions. He also prayed that he might know better the Will of God, and the best way to carry out his plan, if in truth this was a vocation from Him. His desire of consecrating himself entirely to God became ever more fervent. He spoke of it candidly to his Spiritual Father, who was already convinced that young Lenotti was a soul that was most dear to God. It was clear to him that God was going to take him out of the world, and transplant him into His Mystical Garden.

The prudent Priest lauded his excellent resolution, and exhorted him to continue in prayer. He advised him to apply himself with ever greater vigor to his studies. The boy had already given proof of both his diligence and his intelligence. He urged him to merit this grace by the ever more fervent exercise of the holy virtues, and especially with his edifying life at home. The young boy responded to these

exhortations with an ever increasing spirit of piety. To obtain this grace, he turned with particular devotion to Mary, for whom he had a most tender devotion. He also [139] prayed to her most chaste Spouse, St. Joseph, and from them both, he hoped that the realization of his dream was near.

Meanwhile, he had about reached the end of his high school course. Hence, Fr. Marani, being also urged by the boy, thought of presenting him to Fr. Bertoni. He wanted him to manifest his desires in person to Fr. Bertoni. He was told that if his request was humble and earnest enough, he would be sure to be received into the choice number of the Congregation at the Stimmate.

Fr. Bertoni had known the boy well, and had long admired his docile and gentle temperament, that was much inclined to piety. He, therefore, accepted him and gave him high hopes, and these were to be realized within a short time. He set a date for Fr. Marani to visit the parents of the boy, to inform them of his intentions, to obtain their permission, and then a date would be set on which their son would enter the society of his teachers and spiritual fathers.

On the established day, Fr. Marani went with confidence, as he knew the spirit of these parents. Although they loved their son tenderly, it was with a love that was genuinely Christian. Because of their deep faith, they felt that they would not be losing a son, but they would be gaining him, by giving him to God.

As Anthony and Cecilia heard the Priest describe the vocation of their beloved son, they felt a stirring in the depths of their hearts. They would in no way oppose this decision of their son, and willingly [rather, I would say] joyfully they consecrated him to the Lord.

On April 22, 1834, young John bade farewell to his beloved Mother and to his family, and his uncles. Her had always loved them all most tenderly, and had been loved in return with a warm affection. He was accompanied, then by his Father to the door of the Stimmate.

On his arrival, the good Fathers gave him a cordial welcome and brought him to Fr. Bertoni. With that benignity that was characteristic of him, Fr. Bertoni accepted the boy as his son. He then offered his sincere congratulations to the Father who had given his son back to God. Fr. Bertoni's words were as a comforting balm to the wounded heart of the elder Lenotti, and did much to comfort him in his sadness.

Just as this day was one of rejoicing for young John, and for the Priests of the Stimmate, I can say that it also was such a day for the Lenotti family. However, the 8th of May that same year, was an even more joyful occasion. It was the Feast of the Ascension.

On this day, young John was solemnly vested with the habit of the Congregation, by Monsignor Louis Castori, Vicar General of the Diocese. For the Vestition ceremony, in addition to his parents and friends, the Church was filled, and

all were most edified and consoled. For the newly bested, however, and for his parents, family and uncles, this was an especially happy occasion.

When young Lenotti saw himself vested in the sacred habit, he resolved to correspond ever more to his divine vocation. Under the guidance of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a most holy and learned Priest, the boy made rapid progress in virtue and knowledge.

He studied Philosophy and Theology in the Diocesan Seminary, which he attended every day. He was accompanied by Fr. Raimondi, who was then another one of the Priests of the Stimmate, and also Professor of Church History in the same Seminary⁵⁷. The young man applied himself to these studies with great energy. He soon stood out among his fellow students, as he was helped at home by the instructions of Fr. Bertoni, and his own diligent application. He later stated that Fr. Bertoni was an inspiration to him during those years.

As he pursued the course of theology⁵⁸, Fr Bertoni was preparing him for Ordination. The fervor with which young Lenotti approached the sacred Order of the Sub-diaconate cannot be described [141]. He received this Order on September 18, 1841 and then the Diaconate on December of that same year. His spirit and a glimpse into his soul may be discerned when he learned that he would be ordained a Priest on the subsequent March 12th [of 1842].

In the Spiritual Exercises that preceded his ordination, he fortified his already fervent spirit and his zeal increased even more. This was evident in the assiduous, fervent and intelligent effort that he had given in the vineyard of the Lord. His Devotion to the sacred Heart of Jesus also received a new impulse. His Devotion to the Mother of God and St. Joseph seemed to take on new vigor and meaning. He recommended his spirit to Jesus, Mary and Joseph and also the new life that he was about to enter. During those days of Retreat, it seemed that he heard these words being addressed to him: 'John Lenotti, a long journey remains ahead for you!'

He completed this Retreat with a flame in his heart for Christ, full of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. On the day after the completion of the Retreat, he was ordained.

Following the ceremony, he presented himself as a newly ordained Priest to his beloved Fr. Bertoni. He thanked him for this great part he had played in obtaining for him so outstanding a grace. The good Father then extended his congratulations, kissed his hands that had been so recently consecrated, and spoke to him briefly. He gave the young Priest a better understanding of his own humility. He inspired him to an ever more fervent spirit to grasp the new obligations of his sublime new state.

Young Fr. Lenotti had a good understanding of his lofty Mission. With joy in his heart, and with deep feeling, he offered his First Mass at the Stimmate on March 12,

⁵⁷ Fr. Vincent Raimondi later left the Congregation in 1843. After a short time, he entered the Company of Jesus.

⁵⁸ cf. The *Compendium* of the Life of the Cleric Louis Ferrari [+ March 6, 1842].

1842, just after the regular services for the Oratory were concluded. In addition to his parents, his family and friends, many young boys of the Oratory were present before the altar. All admired the modesty, the fervor and the piety of the newly ordained Priest who for the first time was offering to God the Host of Propitiation.

[142] This was truly a day of joy for the Fathers of the Stimmate and for the parents of Fr. Lenotti. For him personally, it was a glimpse of Paradise. His great hopes had been fulfilled, and he had reached this goal for which he had so long aspired. He was now to give vent to his zeal, and his heart felt a strong need for this.



Chapter 2

From his First Mass, until his Election as Superior General of the Congregation

The celebration of daily Mass was such a great consolation for this newly ordained Priest. He offered it each day with much devotion, modesty, recollection and exactness, which moved all who attended it. He persevered in this manner of offering Mass throughout his entire life.

It was also beautiful and edifying to see him recite the Holy Office, always with composure, attention and devotion. It was evident that he was entirely absorbed by the most holy action that he was performing.

While comforting his spirit with these devout practices, he also attended to his beloved studies. He reviewed all that he had learned, and perfected himself all the more in Sacred Theology, both Moral and Dogma. He reviewed Canon Law, and the study of the Church fathers. In these studies, he was still under the guidance of his most beloved Father and Teacher, Fr. Bertoni. He worked hard to profit by the wealth of knowledge and erudition with which even the common and ordinary conversations abounded.

However, because Fr. Lenotti's constitution was always somewhat delicate, shortly after his First Mass, he found himself quite run down. He was then forced to discontinue all studying, and was placed under the care of a doctor. Fr. Bertoni, in his sincere love for him, took every care to restore the health of the exhausted Priest.

Many prayers were offered for him, but it seemed that the Lord wished to prolong the trial of his faithful servant.

The doctor discovered that little progress was being made, even after some time had been given to his cure. He suggested that the young priest should return home for a while to see if a greater relaxation and the soothing climate of Bardolino where the Lenotti family had some possessions, might better aid his cure, and restore him sooner and more surely to health.

Fr. Lenotti found himself in a dilemma – he had a great love for the life, and he wanted to be ready soon to accomplish something in the vineyard of the Lord, to satisfy the urgings of his zeal. However, the state of his health left him in doubt.

The Founder let him return to his family, but that he would not assure him that he would be re-accepted. After having taken a leave of absence, and was restored to health, the door of the Stimmate would not necessarily be still opened to him.

Fr. Lenotti accepted these words as his decision. Greatly encouraged, he assured the Founder that he would rather sacrifice his life than his vocation. He stated that he would think no more about the suggestion of the doctor, and that he would remain at the Stimmate, and nowhere else, for the decision of Divine Providence, concerning himself.

Such a generous resolve was pleasing to God and also to Fr. Bertoni, who had such love for him. Fr. Bertoni, delighting in this decision, encouraged young Fr. Lenotti, and inspired him to total confidence in God. Meanwhile, his cure was continued and the prayers of the Founder and his Confreres were increased that this grace might be obtained. Fr. Lenotti never regretted the decision that he had made, and abandoned himself most confidently to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He prayed for his own health, but would always add: ***However, not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done!***

It was soon apparent that God had heard his prayer. After about one year of suffering and anguish, and more trial, Fr. Lenotti began to feel stronger. Every day his hope of being restored to health by God was increased. Soon, he felt strong enough to take up again his studies a little at a time. Shortly afterward, he began to preach and to hear confessions. As this good recovery was maintained, he was then able to preach a few courses of the Spiritual Exercises, either to some of the Oratories, or to some Religious Institutes. During the summer, he was also sent to teach Catechism in a number of Churches.

He felt supreme gratitude in his heart for the benefits he had received from God, and through the intercession of his Patrons, Mary most Holy, and St. Joseph. After he had many times repeated his fervent thanksgiving, to satisfy his devotion and gratitude, with even greater intensity, he strove in his sermons and in the Tribunal of Penance, to instill into the hearts of all a love for Christ, for Mary Most Holy and for St. Joseph. He took every opportunity to speak of them. He knew well how to inject confidence into afflicted hearts, so that all were quite consoled.

Now, at ease, Fr. Lenotti studied and worked in the vineyard of the Lord. Then, however, another trial besieged him – this was the death of his Guide, Teacher and Father, I mean to say, Fr. Bertoni, which occurred in the **15th [sic!] of June 1853**. Fr. Lenotti was the youngest of the surviving sons of the Founder. As such, he had always been the object of his paternal care. Out of necessity, he had approached him even more than the others, and he enjoyed the warm exhortations and the continuous instructions he had received and treasured. His only comfort in this bitter loss would be that now his Father was in heaven.

The Very Reverend John Marani succeeded the deceased Venerable Founder. Fr. Marani, too, had a great love for Fr. Lenotti, and much evaluated his virtues and intelligence.

At this point, it seemed that the time had arrived to make the public aware of the Congregation of the Priests of the Stimmat. The Superior, Fr. Marani, with his prudence and activity, decided to make the Plan and the ideals of Fr. Bertoni better known. He gathered about himself some confreres, and made use of every means so that our Congregation could prosper even more.

The solicitous care of Fr. Marani was blessed by God. Very soon, the zealous Superior saw other Priests approach him, asking to be admitted into the Institute [145], which just then began to call itself **Apostolic Missionaries**. In addition to Priests, the Superior also received some young men to be trained for the Priesthood. Fr. Marani entrusted these to Fr. John Lenotti, that he might train them all in that spirit and that life that Fr. Bertoni had outlined.

The new Master of Novices threw himself body and soul into this most important assignment that had been thrust on him by obedience. He trusted even more on divine help; and in the assistance of Mary and Joseph, and he most happily dedicated himself to training the minds of these young men. For them, he was even more much like a much like a loving Mother, rather than a father. He instructed them, exhorted them, and inspired them to virtue, and was most patient and constant in exercising them in it. He wished them to be outstanding in obedience, in modest, in humility – and to this, he directed all his efforts and loving solicitude.

He did not, however, neglect the Priests, but always had time to give them the necessary instructions and good advice. He had set for them a daily schedule covering their entire day. Each one had his activities planned and coordinated. By his own example, he set the pace for them. He was most observant of the regular discipline, and his modesty was exemplary. His kindness was ingratiating, and his own humility was most edifying. Twice a week he practiced some act of public humiliation. If he was ever humbled by Fr. Marani in public, he would accept it with a smile, and thank his Superior for it.

God so blessed the work of the industrious cultivator, and these young shoots grew and increased. They gave much hope for the future.

Fr. Lenotti thanked God for it all, and was happy himself in seeing the vocations thrive. In future years, these men would do much in the mystical garden begun by Fr. Bertoni.

He was transferred with his Novices and some priests to the *Santissima Trinitá*, as Fr. Marani had prepared there a suitable place for the training of young men. He dedicated himself there all the more [146] to this work with the young Novices and Students, upon whom he lavished all his solicitude. He insisted that they be observant, studious, devout and he personally was so devoted to St. Joseph that

he wished this devotion would become dear to them as well, and that it would be deeply ingrained on all the Novices.

During Recreation, he always used to read some brief passage in honor of the Saint from the periodical, *The Propagator of the Glories of St. Joseph*. In the garden of the *Trinitá*, he had a little image of the Saint set up under the branches of a mulberry tree. He did this so that the Novices and the Students might go there from time to time, as on a Pilgrimage. The day that this image was erected, there was a brief but devout and very pious function. The picture was carried in procession, in which the whole community took part. They all made their way through the garden and gathered around the tree. The image was then attached to it, and prayers were said. Then, a few hymns were sung to the great Patron. To be sure, it was a little service, but one that was undoubtedly very dear to St. Joseph. It was comforting as well as inspiring to all, especially to Fr. Lenotti, who exulted, blessed and prayed to St. Joseph for his beloved sons.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti was very happy in this work with his beloved Novices and Students, who were corresponding well to his care. Then again, a bitter and harsh trial came to the Community. The political atmosphere made it necessary for the entire Student House to be uprooted.

Fr. Lenotti, Fr. DaPrato and Fr. Vincent Vignola, with all of the young students, were sent to the borrowed House in the outskirts of Trent. They were housed in the summer villa of His Highness, the Prince Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona. He was always most affectionate toward our family. From this House, our foundation in Trent [1866] had its beginning.

The Director and Master of Novices was now Fr. DaPrato. Fr. Lenotti became Prefect of Studies, an office he fulfilled with the utmost diligence. His chief concern was that the students would always be inspired particularly with the thought of the greater glory of God. He did all he could to infuse into their young hearts a zeal for the salvation of souls. He wanted them to direct [147] their studies to these ends.

Because of his own great zeal, however, and because of the most ardent charity of his heart, he was never able to refuse anyone who asked him to help out, either hearing Confessions, or to give some courses of the Spiritual Exercises. Whenever his occupations made it possible, he also used to give Parish Missions in the little villages surrounding the Student House, with a companion. On such occasions, all his zeal, his virtue and his knowledge were most evident.

He was much in demand for preaching to Seminarians. His work always brought about the desired results, and this only increased his reputation in this apostolate. Many times he gave the annual Retreat, not only in Verona, but in Treviso, Belluno, Padua, Cremona, Vicenza and Trent. Everywhere he went, he was remembered as a holy and learned man. His modesty and gravity made him moved by all.

He was also invited to Convents to preach Retreats. His sermons were full of unction and comfort, and they would elevate any heart that was well disposed to an even greater love of God.



Chapter 3

From his Election as Superior General until his Death

During the month of June 1871, it was clear that Fr. Marani, the Superior General, after a long illness, had reached the end of his days. On the first of July, comforted by the Last Sacraments, he breathed forth his soul into the embrace of the Lord. He was full of merits, and was deeply mourned by his sons.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti was immediately chosen Vicar, and then later, on October 6, 1871, he was definitively chosen as Superior General. With trepidation, he accepted the grave responsibility, but trusting in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in the assistance of Mary and Joseph, as was his life-long custom, he dedicated himself with all his vigor and with all the ardor of his zeal to strive for the greater glory of God, and the greater prosperity [148] of the Congregation. While he worked most diligently for its spiritual advantage, he did not neglect its material well-being. He spared nothing that was at his disposal that could be of assistance in the court case which Fr. Benciolini was then waging against the government. He prayed much that this would have a happy conclusion, and asked others to do likewise. This grace was finally received on May 27, 1873. By means of a compromise, Fr. Benciolini was to receive back from the government all of the confiscated possessions.

The Very Reverend Fr. Lenotti exulted with all his sons, and he manifested a complete appreciation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to his Holy Patrons, Mary and Joseph. He wrote a letter to make known this happy news, and in it he suggested:

LET US PLACE OURSELVES ENTIRELY AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE HEART OF JESUS AND MARY AND UNDER THE MANTLE OF JOSEPH.

In 1873, he decided that the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus would be celebrated at the Stimmat with due solemnity. He wished that this would be continued every year in the month of June. When he had received some special faculties, he enrolled many in the Apostleship of Prayer, with the accompanying obligation of perpetual devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He showed in all this, a truly edifying zeal.

He brought to a conclusion the construction of the Church of Santa *Maria del Giglio* [at the *Dereletti*], that had been begun by his predecessor, Fr. Marani. In 1872, to promote even more the worship and devotion to St. Joseph, he had reprinted the *Manual* in the saint's honor. He was tireless in spreading the use of this booklet, and in recommending the Devotion.

In a feeling of gratitude, he took ever more to heart the interests of the Congregation, that had been so recently blessed by God. He had a piece of property purchased in Trent, and ordered that a suitable dwelling be constructed on it. His hope was to lodge his sons there who were still living outside the city in a rented House that they might live in less discomfort, and apply themselves for the good of their neighbor.

He would often visit these Houses, both in Verona and in Trent [149]. He watched over them with his solicitude that there might always flourish in them regular observance and discipline.

From the very first days of his administration, he entertained the thought of spreading the Congregation further, even to the **Foreign Missions**. Because of various circumstances, however, this never came to be. He brought to completion the negotiations for a foundation in Parma. He did not have the consolation, however, to see this totally realized. In the inscrutable decrees of the Lord, and in his adorable judgments, Fr. Lenotti's life as Superior was not to be a long one. He was to be called to heaven to be rewarded for the great good he had already done, and for his many virtues. After his great fatigue, he was to enjoy eternal rest.

God often prepares those souls who are especially loved by Him by long and cruel martyrdom. He thus purifies them from every danger and blemish. In this way, are they brought to complete happiness with Him after their deaths, in a much shorter time. In the beginning of his fourth year as Superior General, Fr. Lenotti began to be bothered by very severe headaches. The usual medical remedies proved fruitless to relieve him of them. The poor man suffered intensely, but his patience and resignation were most edifying.

In July of 1875, the doctor suggested that he should go to Rabbi, to partake of the highly reputed waters there. He was hoping that these would prove most beneficial to him. About the middle of the month, he went there with one of his young Priests, who was also in poor health.

At first, he seemed to enjoy the waters there. However, during those 15 days, a torrential rain fell. Furthermore, the temperature remained quite raw. Due to this, and also other factors, he returned from Rabbi in even poorer health. He was confined to our House in Trent, and remained in bed for several days. The doctor came and found him to be in a pitiable state. After several days, he did get up from bed, but while eating, he suffered more and more from acute indigestion.

He stayed with the Community in Trent for about twenty days. When he could, he celebrated Mass, but when this was impossible, he would assist at another Priest's Mass. With each passing day, his condition worsened. It seems that he already had a presentiment of his approaching death. He felt exhausted in body, but in no way was [150] he discouraged in spirit. He found comfort in his meditations on the **Spiritual Exercises** of St. Ignatius. During this period of time that he stayed in Trent, he was often seen with Belleccio's edition of the **Spiritual Exercises** of St. Ignatius in his hands.

A little after the middle of August, one of the Priests went up to Trent from Verona. His hope was to accompany the Superior back to Verona. It was felt now that the climate of the region of his birth, and even more the restful environment of Sezano, might be able to assist him greatly. His stomach disorder in no way diminished, and by now he was hardly able to keep any food down at all.

The Father Superior suffered all this most patiently. In his anxiety and exhaustion, he was heard to say many times: 'Blessed be God! May His holy will be done, and all that He wills, I, also will.' About the third or fourth day that was out at Sezano, he began to feel a little better. It was edifying to see him struggle to be up on time that he could at least assist at Holy Mass. He was no longer able to celebrate it, due to his advanced weakness.

Unfortunately, his initial improvement was not long lived. After about ten days at Sezano, he was visited by a doctor from Verona. It was decided during this visit that he should accompany the doctor back to Verona, as it was evident that his health had deteriorated to an alarming state. They arrived back at the Stimate in the evening, and Fr. Lenotti took to his bed, from which he was never to get up again.

His speech was now halting and it was a great effort for him to talk at all. However, despite his weakened and painful condition, his first thoughts as always, were of his sons. When anyone would come into to visit him, he showed a keen interest in the affairs of the House. When the students came in, he would bless each one before he left.

On the following day, the doctor in attendance decided to call in a well known specialist for consultation. Neither one of them now could give us any hope. The sick man was burning up with fever, and he was visibly a very weak man and worn out. There were periods when he seemed to be delirious. Finally, our Superior, Fr. Lenotti, was reduced to such a state, that it was decided to give him the Last Sacraments. He went to Confession with edifying dispositions and at 9:45 p.m., Christ was brought to him in the Blessed Sacrament as Viaticum. While the Very Reverend Fr. Peter Vignola held the Sacred Host in his hand, our Father Superior in a weak voice managed to say these words:

'FIRST OF ALL, I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD: I BELIEVE ALL THAT GOD HAS REVEALED, AND THAT THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES: AND I WANT ALWAYS TO BE UNITED TO POPE PIUS IXTH. I ASK PARDON OF GOD FOR MY SINS, AND OF YOU, MY BELOVED BROTHERS AND SONS, FOR THE BAD EXAMPLE I HAVE GIVEN YOU: AND I ASK THAT YOU PRAY FOR ME, THAT I MIGHT RECEIVE WELL THE HOLY SACRAMENTS, AND THAT I MIGHT ATTAIN THE ETERNAL REWARD, WHICH IS THE ONLY REASON WHY WE WERE CREATED.'

He then received Holy Viaticum and deeply moved and edified all those who were present. When he had been blessed by this Sacrament, he laid back, entirely absorbed in recollection with the Sacrament of his love.

The following day was one of agony for him. Extreme Unction was administered, and he received it with sentiments of devotion. He then expressed his gratitude, as the reception of this Sacrament had deeply moved him. A few minutes later, one of the effects of this Sacrament were seen in him. It seemed as though there had an alleviation of his physical sufferings. He then fell off to a peaceful sleep.

After midnight, however, he began to fail more and more. He ranted and raved, and said that he could see the young aspirants passing by his bed, carrying flowers in their hands. The Brother assisting him placed before his eyes the images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Fr. Lenotti kissed them all, while reciting devout ejaculations, and repeating the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

At 2:00 a.m., he asked them to call Fr. Peter Vignola, who was the Director of the Marian Oratory, and also Fr. Beltrami, his Confessor. When they arrived, he asked Fr. Vignola for the blessing to obtain the indulgences granted to those who were enrolled in the Marian Oratory. Fr. Peter Vignola assured him that he had been missing because he had been legitimately impeded. He [152] received the blessing and the indulgence with evident faith, gratitude and devotion. After this, he asked to be alone with his Confessor, to whom he often went due to the unusual delicacy of his conscience.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, even in his last agony, and pitifully reduced by so much suffering, continued to think about his sons. He had a special message for those Priests who were entrusted with the training of the students. Laying back on his bed, he told them:

TELL THE YOUNG STUDENTS TO BE MOST OBSERVANT OF THEIR RULES. TELL THEM TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR DUTIES, AND TO DO THEM WELL. TELL THEM TO LOVE OUR LORD AND THE MOTHER OF GOD MUCH, TO BE DEVOTED TO ST. JOSEPH, AND THEY WILL FIND HAPPINESS. TELL THEM TO PRAY FOR ME.

In this way, he passed the remainder of the night, and all of the following morning. By noon time, he seemed to be losing consciousness, but he still recognized voices. In the late afternoon, his hearing began to fade, but not completely. Whenever some ejaculations were suggested to him, he would repeat them in an intelligible voice and with much affection. At nightfall, just before the *Angelus*, His Excellency, Bishop di Canossa came to visit him, but Fr. Lenotti did not make any sign that he had recognized him.

Through the night, he was quite restless. For one moment, it seemed as though he had expired. He then awoke, and again asked for his Confessor. Leaning down closely to hear him, Fr. Beltrami repeated ejaculations, comforted him and suggested motives to him for his calm acceptance. He remained quiet, although suffering intensely, and his weakness was by now extreme.

At 10:00 a.m., Fr. Beltrami thought that his time had come, and began the prayers for a departing soul. The bell tolled solemnly, and announced to the

assembled Oratory [as it was a Sunday] that the Superior, Fr. Lenotti, was in his last agony.

Before he expired, however, Monsignor Serego dropped in to visit him, but Fr. Lenotti did not recognize him. He remained in this quiet state until about 2:30 p.m. At that hour, with his Confessor at his bed side, our most beloved Superior rendered back to God **[153]** his beautiful soul. His hands were folded across his chest, and the Rosary was wrapped around his right hand. The images of our Lady and the sacred Heart were placed over his heart. He had gone to heaven to receive the reward merited by all his virtues and long years of hard work. It was exactly 2:30 in the afternoon - September 5, 1875 - which created a marvelous coincidence. It was the exact hour of the same day of the same month, in which 58 years earlier, he first saw the light of day.

Word of his death spread rapidly. Many in the city, and outside it, echoed the grief of his loving sons. It was heard many times that day: 'A holy and most zealous priest is dead!'

His funeral was held on the morning of the 7th. A large crowd turned out for both the Office of the Dead, and for the Mass of Requiem, which were sung for him. When the Mass was over, the reverend Pastor of the Most Holy trinity Parish, vested in a cope, led the procession from the Church of the Stimmate. The younger boys of the Oratory preceded the coffin with lighted candles and torches. A large group of Priests and Seminarians were also in the procession.

Following the coffin were his beloved sons, and other persons who had been close to him. When the procession reached the Parish Church, the final obsequies were sung. When these were over, the Very Reverend Pastor delivered a brief, but meaningful and moving eulogy. In it, he deplored the loss of so great and so worthy a priest. He briefly touched on his rare characteristics, his virtues and his apostolic zeal. In brief, he proposed for consideration Fr. Lenotti's priestly life, as a true Apostolic **Missionary**.

The body was then brought to the cemetery, where the religious gathered. The last prayers were sung, and the entire group accompanied the body to the tomb of our Fathers and Brothers.

His memory will remain in benediction among all who knew him in life. So does he remain with us, as his virtues have been engraved deep within the hearts of us all.

†††

[154]

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. THOMAS VICENTINI**

The clock had just struck 11:00 a.m., on the 17th of October, 1875, the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fr. Thomas Vicentini, fortified by all the comforts of Religion, and also those of religious charity, passed on to a better life. As he expired, one of the Priests was ascending the altar to offer a Mass in Suffrage for his soul. When the Mass had ended, the bells of the Stimmate, and those of the Parish Church of the Most Holy Trinity, gave the triple funeral knell. We were all grieving, talking quietly about the last moments of our deceased Confrere, and about the edifying memories that he left us.

Fr. Thomas Vicentini was born in the Village of Zevio. His parents were Dominic Vicentini, and Mary Del-Fior. They were parents who communicated their own sense of religion and piety to their children. One of these had entered the holy Order of the Discalced Carmelites, and died as their Provincial. Two others were successively Pastors in the village of Bonferraro, in this Diocese. The fourth, named Thomas, who was the youngest, was a member of our Congregation.

From his earliest years, he gave every indication that he, too, had a vocation to the Priesthood. His good parents, to further his desires, sent him every day to school in Verona, from their village of San Massimo, where the family then lived. He made this walk every single day, even in the most difficult seasons. This was intended as a trial to test the firmness of his vocation.

[155] It was soon very evident that his vocation was genuine, and he was accepted as a member of the College of Acolytes in this city. The excellent young man dedicated himself with all earnestness to the acquisition of science and virtue. As he was endowed with a very jovial and candid temperament, he very soon won the affection of his Companions. So, too, his Superiors came to esteem and honor him to a great extent.

Therefore, even prior to the completion of his studies, and before reaching the canonical age, through a Dispensation, he was ordained to the Priesthood. His first years as a Priest, he was assigned to the Village of Boneferraro, where his brother, Fr. Alphonsus Vicentini, was Pastor.

Although he was much loved by his brother, and by the people there, he was not content. For some time, an interior voice seemed to be calling him to the Religious Life. His brother did not know of his plan, until about the time Fr. Thomas entered our congregation, on October 4, 1864.

Fr. Marani brought him to the Novitiate and introduced him simply, saying: 'Here is a Priest who wants to become an **Apostolic Missionary!**' On the 126th of October 1864, the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he was vested with

the habit of the Congregation, and began his Novitiate. In the company of the Novices, who were much younger than himself, he mingled in with them with the simplicity of a child.

His obedience was of a rare type. He used to say: 'That devil always suggests to me in the morning to wait until the **Angelus** is said, before I get out of bed. He offers the protest that I will then say it with greater devotion. However, I send him on his way, and I get right up out of bed!'

He had a deep sense of devotion to the Mother of God. He used to speak of her often, and in such a way that he would inspire all who listened with love for her. His charity toward his Confreres was most outstanding. There was never any danger that anyone in his presence could criticize anyone else. At the first word that seemed even somewhat critical, he would say; 'Let's forget about it', and then he would do what he could to change the subject.

[156] By nature, Fr. Thomas was alien to any semblance of a contrast of opinion. As he deeply loved the study of Moral Theology and the Liturgy, very frequently cases relative to these matters were presented to him for a solution. He would then apply his knowledge to the case at hand. If his solution then gave rise to other opinions, he would back up his thoughts on the matter with strong reasons. If he then noted that his adversary was getting angry with the discussion, he would end it, by this sentence, which seems to have been as a principle with him: 'This was my opinion –if it is acceptable, then let it be so; if not, so be it.' He would not continue the argument further.

Mention should be made also of the great humility with which he would receive any humiliation or correction, both from his Companions, as well as from his Superiors. One day, Fr. Lenotti who was then the Novice Master, at the end of dinner, said: 'Fr. Thomas, kneel here in the middle of the Refectory. The good Priest promptly obeyed. Fr. Lenotti then gave him a correction, as earlier during that day, he had created a disturbance while going through the House looking for someone to go with him to the Stimate so that he could say Mass. It seems that he was a little late. It was evident that Fr. Thomas was quite embarrassed because of his great confusion, but he listened with humility. He made no response, other than thanking the Novice Master for the correction; he asked pardon, and then for a penance.

There were many such anecdotes that we would recall here. The Superiors very soon recognized his virtue, and provided an occasion for even greater merit. They often publicly reprimanded him, and imposed on him humiliating penances. He accepted all of them, and when the storm had blown over, he would be as happy and content as he had been previously.

Upon the conclusion of his Novitiate, Fr. Thomas was initiated into the apostolate of the **Apostolic Missionaries**. He became quite proficient at giving the Spiritual Exercises and Retreats. However, he was really even more outstanding in explaining Christian Doctrine to the people, who would flock in large numbers to hear his instructions.

Unfortunately however, while he gave great hope for an abundant harvest in his apostolate, he was afflicted with a heart ailment. For five long years, this slowly sapped his strength, ever more **[157]** and more, even though all the remedies suggested by the field of medicine were applied. Because of this infirmity, he suffered much torment, especially from an almost continuous asthma, and a convulsive cough. The slightest effort soon became an extreme exertion for him. Even to go up one flight of stairs, he would have to stop every three or four steps to catch his breath, as it seemed that he was suffocating. When he would try to speak, he would cough violently.

Notwithstanding all his discomfort, he would call on every ounce of his strength to be able to ascend the altar steps each morning to celebrate Holy Mass. When he had concluded each day, then he would have to go back to his room, almost until the hour of dinner. This way of life, however, did not dishearten him, because as long as the doctor or the superior did not forbid him, he would celebrate Mass every day. He likewise exerted every effort to recite the Divine Office, at least in part, but would have to break it up to a great extent to lessen his fatigue.

His courage and resignation to God never waned, and he would enjoy conversations with his Confreres. Every once in a while, he would inject into the conversation a spirited comment that would make it quite lively. His interest would be enkindled when the conversation was about the Company of Jesus, for which he had a very high esteem. His interest would also pick up when the discussion turned on the incredulous and the liberals of our present era. Their activities, so hostile to the Church, and to Pope Pius IXth, wounded the depths of his heart, and enkindled in him a holy scorn.

One Sunday – for some reason or another – the Priest scheduled to give the sermon to the Oratory, did not appear. As a result, Fr. Thomas took his place and preached the Gospel of the day. His talk that Sunday was on the apparition of Christ to the Apostles, when St. Thomas was present and when he received the solemn reprimand for his lack of faith. Fr. Vicentini developed the theme, and applied it to the modern disbelief, that was rampant everywhere. He pointed out with great zeal how its poison infiltrates into the minds of those who read harmful periodicals.

He delivered another sermon that same day, in a nearby convent school. As he gave it that day after dinner, the added burden of the morning's sermon seemed to take its toll. Following the exertion of this **[158]** day, he had to remain in bed for three, or four days. This happened just after Easter in 1875.

None of these incidents could lessen his courage. On the following Sunday, he went right back to the same Convent School for his usual instruction on Christian Doctrine. He had been doing this for two years.

It was not until August 20th of that year 1875, that his strength gave out entirely. He was confined to bed, and was never able to leave it again. His ailment was caused in him frequently recurring fainting spells. These began to increase in

intensity, and in duration. He suffered one of these on the 29th of that month, that made us all very apprehensive. Our Very Reverend Superior, Fr. Lenotti, of holy memory, was at this time out in Sezano, and he, too, was ailing. When he heard of the serious state of Fr. Thomas' health, he wanted to return at once to the city. He felt that he could thus give his assistance to Fr. Thomas in his last moments, if the danger of his dying seemed imminent. He did return to Verona on the first of September, hoping that his own health would improve. However, it had been decreed that the hour of his death would toll sooner than for Fr. Thomas. As we have seen, he passed away, with most edifying dispositions on the 5th day of that same month [of September].

In the meantime, fears for the death of Fr. Thomas in no way diminished. His ailment had already been declared as incurable, at least as far as total recovery was concerned. He was by now emaciated, and this left in us all a grave concern. Toward the end of September, the swelling that had been caused by his illness seemed to subside. The sick man seemed much better, and for a little while, there was hope that maybe he would be able to get up and around again.

Early in October, however, he suffered a serious attack of diarrhea, and nothing seemed to be able to keep it under control. It lasted for quite a few days, and soon there was hardly any flesh at all covering his bones. He, too, began to realize that with hastened steps, he was approaching the end of his days. He then asked himself for Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, and his desire was immediately gratified.

It would be most moving to recall here the piety and the internal joy with which the Lord overwhelmed his spirit.

[159] He said to us four days later:

'WHAT A CONSOLATION IT IS TO RECEIVE VIATICUM, AND THE HOLY OILS! I DID NOT EVER IMAGINE THAT I WOULD FIND IN THE LAST SACRAMENTS SUCH CONSOLATION!

Another time he said:

'I HAVE OFTEN TAUGHT IN CATECHISM CLASSES WHAT A GREAT BLESSING IT IS TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENTS AT THE END OF ONE'S LIFE. NOW, I HAVE EXPERIENCED IT MYSELF!

During the following days, he wanted to receive Holy Communion as often as he could, and his requests were satisfied. On the evening of the 11th, Holy Viaticum was administered to him for the second time. Before receiving the Sacred Host, he renewed his Profession and Declaration of Faith. He declared that he wanted to die as an obedient son of the Church. He then added:

AND I ASK PARDON OF ALL OF YOU, FOR MY BAD EXAMPLE THAT I HAVE GIVEN TO YOU. PRAY, MY BROTHERS, FOR ME!

He had always had this trait of asking pardon. There were times when his discomfort was at its height that he seemed to answer the Brothers assisting him, with impatience. Immediately following these outbursts, with humility, again and again, he would ask to be pardoned. He would say that his impatience was because of his illness.

Especially during his last week, his discomfort was extraordinary. He was hardly able to swallow two spoonfuls of medicine intended to alleviate him. He cried out in his agony: 'Stop, because I am suffocating!'

His prolonged dysentery reduced him to extreme weakness, so that he could no longer move by himself. In the midst of all this travail, he maintained an edifying resignation. Often he was heard to exclaim: 'May the will of God be done: Jesus Christ has suffered even more for me!'

Every day, he wanted to hear spiritual reading. He seemed happy when anyone spoke to him of God, of the vanity of the world and of the eternal goods of heaven. When anyone would ask how he was, his answer would be; 'Well enough – for heaven. Yes, in heaven, all is well!' The moment for his going was not very far away.

Then, the feast of the Blessed Mother dawned. A Brother came near his bed, and said to him: 'Father, have courage: today is the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Mother...! [160] At these words, Fr. Thomas came to, and answered: 'The Purity of the Madonna – what a beautiful thing!' The Brother then added: 'You will see, Father, she will help you to suffer all of this with great resignation.' 'That is good!', he answered, 'I do trust in her!'

The Priest who was assisting him said to him: 'Are you glad that these prayers of the Church are being said?' He answered very emphatically that he was happy. When some of the prayers had been completed, he said: 'You can take off the surplice and stole: I do not think I will die so soon ... sit there!'

Then he began to run his fingers down over his nose, across his lips and over his closed eyes. He realized that there was sweat on his brow. He seemed to be checking to see if he had the customary signs of a dying man, and then he said: 'It seems that I do not...!'

There was a young Priest who was assisting him, and he kept repeating the same ejaculation: ***Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart!***

Fr. Thomas then asked him: 'Do you always use the same one? You should vary it. You young fellows do not know how to assist the dying!'

Such was the mastery he had over his faculties even in these last moments. Shortly after saying this, he really entered his last agony, and the bell with its solemn tolling, spread the word.

Finally, with his eyes fixed on the Crucifix and the image of Mary, which he always wanted near him, he turned on his left side. He looked like he was just sleeping. At the words: '*...May the assembly of the Angels greet...*' - his half shut eyes rolled back. His mouth closed, and his breathing stopped. His soul had departed into the arms of his Heavenly Father. He had gone to receive a copious reward for his many and long sufferings.

He had lived 30 years in the world, and 11 in our Congregation. In all, he had remained on this earth for 41 years – and now he certainly lives in heaven.

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**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. LAWRENCE PIZZINI**

Villa Lagarina nestles at the foot of a high mountain in the Italian Tyrol. The little Village of Castellano stands near an ancient castle that was built around it, and from it most likely took its name. In this little town, Lawrence Pizzini was born on June 16, 1848. He was to be a man dearly beloved to all who came to know him.

Before he saw the light of day, his father died. Even before his birth, his Mother, a very fine woman, had remarried. Because of the iron will of her new husband, she was forced to abandon her new born son. He was left in the home of his Grandfather who was a man of great faith and character. The boy was then brought up in a Christian way by him.

Young Lawrence spent his early years by going to school in the winter, and in tending the flocks of his Grandfather, and those of the neighborhood during the other three seasons. It seemed that the boy was destined to spend his life among the herds, and on the farm, in the woods, and in the ravines.

However, Divine Providence had lovingly watched over the little orphan, and had other designs for him. In the year 1862, a Fr. Gasperini, a zealous Missionary, had seen the young shepherd and discovered that he was gifted with extraordinary talents. He then recommended him to Fr. John Mary Marani, who at that time was our Superior. He asked if he would be willing to accept the boy in his Congregation. In March of that year, Fr. Marani was visiting Trent, and the boy was presented to him. He briefly examined him and [162] approved of him, and brought him back to the Stimmate.

There he immediately applied himself to the study of Latin. He overcame those difficulties which, in truth, are not insignificant, common to all young boys, when they make the big jump from the country schools to the study of the Latin language. As each day went by, he gave an ever clearer indication of his attachment for his religious vocation. This showed itself ever more firm, in that he had to overcome obstacles that were considerable.

A little more than a year after his entrance into Religion, the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21st, he was vested in the habit of the Congregation by Monsignor Louis Bragato. He then began his Novitiate.

Much could be said here about his religious fervor, and his devotion to Mary, most holy. In her honor, even as a Priest, he never took wine on Saturdays. We could say much about his love for prayer, and for all the practices of piety. He found happiness during recreation in conversing with his companions about the Lord. There also could be mentioned the appreciation he showed to those who pointed out to him his defects' he showed a genuine gratitude for this. He would tell his companions that he would pay them back with a *Hail Mary* any time they would point out a defect of his. Worthy of note, too, is the faithfulness with which almost every evening, he would go to his Spiritual Father, to review the events of his day, and the faults that he had committed.

There is one trait of his that merits our consideration. As a Novice, he stood out in this quality. He had a sincere enthusiasm for the décor of the House of God. The Royal Psalmist has written: ***I have loved, o Lord, the beauty of Your House, and the place where Your glory dwells.*** [Ps 24:8]. These words in all truth can well be applied to young Pizzini.

Because of his repeated requests, he obtained from the Superiors the permission of being made the Vice sacristan, and then later, sacristan of our Novitiate Chapel. By the express command of Fr. Marani, that floor had to be kept shining like a mirror. Young [163] was hardly able to make recreation any more. In those brief quarter hour periods, that were allowed after two hours of study, he would always go to his beloved Chapel. He was constantly cleaning, washing, polishing and shining. Although he was somewhat robust, many times he had worked with such ardor, that he would come out of the chapel, even in the dead of winter, covered with sweat, and completely exhausted.

Whenever one of our family solemnities occurred, he seemed to want to outdo himself in the care of his beloved Chapel. He spared no effort, and he worked with such contentment, that it seemed to be a challenge to him. He was most happy when his work was well done, and it was evident that his idea was that the appearance of the Chapel was to convey the thought of Paradise. He achieved this very well, and anyone who stepped inside the Chapel, was inspired with devotion, recollection and heavenly affections. He succeeded so well that he often merited the praise of Fr. Marani himself – and he rarely, if ever, gave praise for such things.

It should not be concluded that his affection for the House of God lasted only during his Novitiate. It lasted all throughout his student years, and even later as a Priest. He always had this holy enthusiasm. When he was made Sacristan at the Stimmate, no matter how busy he may have been with other tasks, it was beautiful and edifying to see him, during every free moment that he had, going over to the Church to work. He often worked along-side the Brother sacristan and other times he would go there to plan what might be added to increase the decor of the House of God. Again, these words of the Psalmist could be applied to him: ***I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Your House, and the Place where Your glory dwells!***

When his two years of Novitiate had been completed, he pronounced his Holy Vows on the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21, 1865, with great happiness in his heart. He could never adequately describe the appreciation he had of these Vows. He had the custom of renewing them every day. He had an attachment and a truly filial affection for the Congregation. The Founder expected [164] this quality in all his sons: ***They are to have much affection for this Congregation.*** His spirit of obedience was indescribable, especially in those things that were most repugnant to him. This is clearly seen in what we found among his resolutions that were written during the Spiritual Exercises of 1872:

'I will follow You, my Jesus, You are my King and Leader. Grant that I may the more securely follow You. I promise to adhere perfectly and joyfully to all the commands of my Superior.

In another place he wrote:

... 'WHAT DOES IT PROFIT A MAN ...? IF YOU NOW SEEK TO DO YOUR OWN WILL, AND THEN YOU LOSE YOUR SOUL, WHAT DOES IT PROFIT YOU? WHAT DOES IT PROFIT A MAN? ... AT DEATH, TO HAVE LEARNED AND DONE MUCH GOOD, BUT NOT ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD? THEREFORE, I PROPOSE FIRMLY TO SUBMIT MYSELF ENTIRELY TO THE WILL OF MY SUPERIORS, AND THUS I WILL AVOID ALL ILLUSION.

We will not mention all the qualities that he had. These we have mentioned would indicate to us quite clearly the great dedication he had to achieve his own perfection. Let us, though, pause here, to consider the characteristics of the life of Fr. Pizzini.

From the time that he was still a student, in addition to his zeal for the décor of the House of God, he was also most fervent in his affection for the spiritual temples of God. He had an ardor for the salvation of souls. His favorite conversations with his Companions centered on the Missions of Africa, India and America. During his studies, while preparing young children for Holy Communion, in teaching Christian Doctrine, in giving talks in the Church, or Oratory, and in his ordinary conversations, he would express his thoughts, with that persuasion and affability that were characteristic of him. These phases of the apostolate were in truth a diversion for him. As he hoped one day to go to the **Foreign Missions**, from his student days, he applied himself to the study of languages.

Before he was ordained, he knew French, Spanish, German and English so well that he was able to converse easily with anyone he might meet from any of these nations.

[165] He was ordained a Priest on March 31, 1875, and then his zeal knew no bounds. The Holy See proposed for our Congregation a Mission in Sweden. Fr. Pizzini was the first one to offer himself to his Superior, and he stated that he wanted to spend his entire life there. On the other hand, when it was pointed out what great good could be had at the Stimate through the schools, he was among the first to take the examinations to obtain the License to teach the upper grades of Elementary School. When the Superior was asked for a Priest to teach Catechism to the poor

prisoners, Fr. Pizzini considered it as a real blessing that he was one of the first two chosen to go.

The need arose in the Diocese that whoever was teaching Christian Doctrine in the parishes of the city, would also have to give retreats, triduums, the Spiritual Exercises and the Parish Missions. Fr. Pizzini, being a most zealous worker, not only showed that he was ready, but also stated that he had a longing for such an apostolate. He set to work night and day to prepare himself. He was visibly most content whenever he was among the young members of the Oratory of Monteforte. He won them all over to himself, especially through his fervent talks to them. With his goodness and generous heart, he did a world of good among them, and always returned home jubilant. He had already begun his life as a Missionary.

One time he remarked most enthusiastically to one of his confreres: 'If you only knew what energy, what courage there can be felt when one had the Crucifix protecting his chest!'

My God! My God! How incomprehensible are your judgments! These were the sentiments of the young Missionary. He was already now wounded, but he did not want to give up the combat. Although he was indisposed, he went off to Desenzano to give the Spiritual Exercises there to the young boys of that College. This was to be the last of his apostolic labors. When he returned to the House, he was confined to bed. Even though his sickness was diagnosed right away as serious, there was not thought of him not being saved. To the great consolation of his confreres, he was cured, almost miraculously. He completely recovered and was able to leave the House once again, to the contentment of all who knew him. It seemed that there was no longer anything to fear.

[166] During the month of June 1876, plans had been made for the solemn observance of the Feast of the sacred Heart of Jesus. Fr. Pizzini, as Sacristan, had worked himself up into a lather of sweat. He suffered a kind of collapse, and very soon his condition gave cause for concern. He suffered a relapse into the illness from which he had but recently recovered. The doctors forbade him to say his Breviary. On hearing this news, he pleaded: 'Prohibit me from all the other prayers, but please let me say my Breviary!'

To recuperate, he was sent to our House in Trent. Unfortunately, all remedies proved fruitless. The illness continued on its relentless course, and in a few days, he was in mortal danger. The Last sacraments were administered to him. He expressed his resignation to the Will of God, and he made the offering of his life to Him.

Surrounded by his grieving confreres, he rendered his soul up to God, on the 12th day of August of that same year, 1876. It was a Saturday, consecrated to Mary most holly, to whom he had been most devoted all through his life.

O generous soul! You have suffered agony for the salvation of your neighbor, for whom you would willingly have given your life. The Lord was satisfied with your willingness to go, and thus called you from this valley of tears to the joy of Paradise,

at the young age of 28: ***Be prepared, because at an hour you do not think, the Son of Man will come!*** [Jn 12:40].

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother
JOHN B. SALBEGO**

He was a strong young man from Laverda, the Diocese of Padua, in the Province of Vicenza. At the age of 24, he entered the Stimmate, aflame with the desire of serving God. How many proofs of patience and constancy did he give in overcoming the many [167] obstacles that stood in the way of his vocation. Finally, in November 1876, he pronounced his Holy Vows and began to live the delightful peace that the Lord sooner or later bestows on anyone who places his hopes in Him. He showed continual good will, and he was a tireless worker. However, he contracted miliary fever, and in a few days, he was brought to his tomb. He died, as do those who have loved the Lord, on April 9, 1877.

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**Compendium
of the Life of the Professed Student
JOSEPH NICOLINI**

He was a young man from Villazzano, near Trent. He had a strong constitution, sufficient intelligence and good will, and he even surpassed the hopes that were held out for him. He sincerely loved the religious life, and he was most intent in overcoming every difficulty. These qualities can be seen from the following passage of a letter that he wrote in confidence to a fellow religious:

THE GOOD FORTUNE THAT HAS FINALLY COME TO ME IS TRULY BEAUTIFUL, AND WORTHY OF THE CONGRATULATIONS OF OTHERS. I REJOICE THAT WE ARE NOW EVEN MORE CLOSELY AND MORE FRATERNALLY UNITED, WITH THOSE MOST SWEET CHAINS THAT ARE NOW COMMON TO BOTH OF US. THE TIMES THAT PRECEDED THIS HAPPY EVEN IN MY LIFE WERE TRULY SAD, TROUBLED AND AFFLICTED. AT THAT TIME, I PRAYED: 'O LORD! IF YOU WANT ME IN YOUR HOUSE, WHY DO YOU ABANDON ME? WHY DO YOU NOT LIGHTEN THESE TRAVAILS OF MINE?

I THEN PRAYED: 'BUT, PARDON ME, O LORD, I DID NOT RECOGNIZE IN THESE TRIBULATIONS YOUR PATERNAL HAND. YOU VISITED ME EARLY IN THE DAY AND PUT ME TO THE TEST. PARDON ME, IF ALL THIS WAS NECESSARY TO MAKE ME PLEASING TO YOU. [168] HERE I AM, LORD, DO WITH ME WHATEVER PLEASES YOU THE MOST. EVEN IF YOU GRIND ME, AS IS GRAIN; EVEN IF YOU MUST HAMMER ME, AS IS THE IRON; EVEN IF YOU MUST PUT ME TO THE FIRE, AS IS BRONZE — HERE I AM, READY FOR ANYTHING. DO WITH ME WHATEVER IS PLEASING TO YOU.

Such were his thoughts, and in them he found comfort:

AND AS I HOPED TO BRING IN HIM MY LEFT HAND, IT WAS FOLLOWED ALSO BY THE RIGHT. 'HIS LEFT HAND IS UNDER MY HEAD, AND HIS RIGHT HAND SHALL EMBRACE ME.' HOW QUICKLY IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THOSE DAYS PASSED! THE FLIGHT OF

AN EAGLE TO HIS POST DOES NOT SEEM AS SWIFT. A COACH DOES NOT PASS AS SWIFTLY AS THOSE DARK DAYS FLED FAR FROM ME. NOW I AM HAPPY AND I LIVE CONTENT IN THE POSSESSION OF THE LOT I DESIRED. NOW I AM ALL HIS, HE WHO HAS LED ME IN SO EXTRAORDINARY A WAY TO SAFETY. I BELONG TO JESUS, AND I ALWAYS WILL. IN HIM I TRUST I WILL ALWAYS REMAIN ATTACHED TO HIM, AND I WILL NOT TREMBLE AT THE ASSAULTS OF THE EVIL ONE.

I AM IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD; I DWELL IN THAT GARDEN, SURROUNDED BY A WALL OF THE FINEST SILVER. HERE BREATHES A PLEASANT AND FRESH AIR. IN BRIEF, IT ALL SEEMS LIKE A PARADISE. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, BUT IT IS A PRELUDE OF IT. IF THIS LIFE, WHICH SEEMS TO ME LIKE A PARADISE, BUT IT IS NOT, WHAT CAN THE REAL PARADISE BE LIKE? OH! HOW GREAT WILL BE THE CONTENTMENT AND THE PEACE WHICH REIGNS IN THE TRUE PARADISE, IF THESE ARE SO GREAT HERE IN THIS VALLEY OF TEARS? ... NOR IS THAT DAY FOR WHICH I LONG SO DISTANT, WHEN I WILL PASS FROM THIS EARTHY PARADISE TO THAT HEAVENLY ONE. LET US PRAY THAT GOD GIVES US ALL THE GRACE TO BE TOGETHER THERE ONE DAY.

From these lines of his writings, it would seem that he had a presentiment of his approaching death.

His Companions noted in him an extraordinary recollection and enthusiasm for prayer. Every day, after school, rather than spending the time in recreation, he used to go to visit the Blessed Sacrament. In general, he manifested a disgust for the things of this earth. He was in the Third Year of Theology, and had already received Minor Orders. He became ill with miliary fever, and received the Last Sacraments. After a few days, on the 15th of March 1879, he peacefully rendered his soul to God, at the House of San Bernardino, in Trent. He was 22 years of age.

His remains are interred in that city.

†††

[169]
**Compendium
of the Life of the Novice Brother,
ANDREW TRAPIN**

He was born in Mezzotedesco, in the Trentine, the son of Joseph Trapin and Teresa Hauser. He came to the vineyard of the Lord somewhat late, beginning his Novitiate when he was 44 years of age. During the second year of it, he fell mortally ill. He was granted the privilege of pronouncing his Holy Vows. Comforted by all the benefits of religion, he passed from this life on April 8, 1879. He was a man who spoke little, and worked much. He seemed always joyful and devout, and was most diligent, evening the most menial tasks.

May God give him glory.

†††

**Compendium
of the Life of the Novice Coadjutor Brother
ANTHONY RIGATTINI**

He was a young man, endowed with a meek and quiet nature. He worked as a tailor, and was fully content in being able to serve God in His holy House. After being a Novice for only three months, during the night of June 25, 1880, he became seriously ill at St. Teresa's. His labored breathing had awakened the Brother in the adjoining room, who summoned the Spiritual Father. He received Sacramental Absolution, and after a few minutes of agony, he expired. He was 25 years of age.

†††

**Compendium
of the Life of
Fr. CHARLES ZARA**

The memory of Josias, says Sacred Scripture, is like a composition of various odors, blended by a perfumer: ***The memory of Josias has been made into a composition of odors, the work of a perfumer*** [Si 49:1]. We can apply these words to our own Fr. Charles Zara, whose life we are to recount briefly here.

Fr. Zara was born in Verona, on the 2nd of July, 1843, of Nicholas Zara and Louise Bonzanini. They were extraordinarily pious parents. From his earliest years, he directed his mind toward the knowledge of God. From that early period, he consecrated to God the virginal beats of his heart. He had a most lively temperament, but he was guided in all things by obedience. With his family, he was docile and loving, and at school he was a good example to all. Because of his unusual diligence, as well as because of his alert mind and his powerful memory, he was among the few to crown his scholastic year by winning an award.

In those years, he was more interested in the things of God than he was in games, even though usually at his age, boys are more avid for the latter. He often read devout books, and also made a little altar in his home. He took an active part in the Oratory, and in the Doctrine Classes. He used to assist at the sacred functions, served Masses and dedicated himself to similar practices of piety. We can also apply to him the words written of the pious King Osias: ***When he was still a boy, he began to seek God.***

These were the first clear signs of that sublime vocation to which he [171] would one day be called by God. From his childhood, he had informed his parents that his desire was to consecrate himself entirely to God, that he might work out better his own sanctification, and to bring about the salvation of souls. He asked the Lord for this grace every day, and also offered his meditation on the Most Holy Virgin for this end. From his boyhood days, he was always most devoted to her. His prayers were not long in being heard.

On the 127th of February 1856, when he had not yet reached his 13th birthday, to his great joy, he was received into our little Congregation. The boy experienced an unspeakable joy in being taken out of the world even before he had come to know of it.

With great fervor, from those first days, he girded himself for the struggle to attain the religious virtues and the necessary knowledge. He made such progress that a little more than a month after his entrance, he was vested with the religious habit. When he had reached the minimum prescribed by the sacred canons, he began his Novitiate and then pronounced his Holy Vows.

However, not much later, in the year 1860, the 17th of his life, he came down with a very grave illness. He really never recovered from this, and for the rest of his life, he bore the effects of this malady within him. As a result, we all remember well the doctor saying that for as long as he lived, he would have to pace himself to conserve his strength. It was always a great wonder to all of us that he was able to continue his useful existence as long as he did, despite so much suffering, so much fatigue and exertion. He allowed himself to endure all of this because of his unflinching zeal. The love for God and for his neighbor that burned so ardent joy in his heart fed the flickering flame of his life that many times seemed to be on the verge of going out.

Love God and your neighbor! - this sums up the life of the entire mortal pilgrimage of Fr. Charles. This became even more [172] evident from the time of his Ordination. He became a Priest on March 16, 1867. He loved God, and he applied himself to cultivate and increase this love with the most beautiful practices of piety.

Each year, as Christmas approached, even though because of his delicate constitution, he was most susceptible to the rigors of winter, he worked for days on end to prepare the crib. Even months before the Feast, he would begin to prepare the devout program that was to be given during the evenings of the Christmas Season, in honor of the God Who became a Child for us.

He also nurtured a tender love for the sorrowful mysteries of the life of Christ. We all recall that from the time there was introduced into our Church of the Stimate the pious exercise of the Seven Last Words on Friday, the sermon in honor of Christ crucified was reserved for him every year. Through these talks of his he was able to move even the coldest and most disinterested hearts.

Because our Fr. Charles loved God so fervently, he likewise had a most tender and warm affection for the great Mother of God, Mary most holy. In a particular manner, he nourished a great affection for her sorrows, and he did all in his power to enkindle this in the hearts of others. It was due to him that in our Church there was erected an altar in honor of the Sorrowful Virgin. The piety and fervor with which that Queen of Sorrows is honored there, is also due to him. Every year, he would open and close the Sorrowful Month with one of his moving and inspired sermons. These would penetrate hearts and inundate them with sincere love.

Because of this same love for God of his, especially after he had become Director at the Stimate, that the Temple of the Lord was maintained with such décor that it inspired devotion in anyone who visited it.

The love for God, however, does not remain inactive in the hearts of His servants. Of necessity, it impels them to honor their neighbor by trying to lead him out of sin, or to preserve him from it, and to inspire him to the practice of the Christian virtues. Fr. Charles thirsted for the salvation of souls. To understand how great this zeal of his truly was, it would be enough to cite the following expressions of his zeal that was truly apostolic. These words were taken from the text of a letter that he wrote a few months before he died from a villa where he had gone under obedience:

THIS IS FOR ME THE LAST WORD IN COMFORTS: TO DO GOOD FOR SOULS. WHAT GOOD IS ANYTHING ELSE? FOR ONE HOUR OF FATIGUE IN BEHALF OF SOULS. I WOULD EXCHANGE ALL THE COUNTRY-SIDE OF THIS WORLD. IT IS TRUE, AS I HAVE BEEN READING DURING THESE DAYS, THAT IN THE EVENING OF LIFE, THE SOUL FINDS ITSELF MOST CONTENT WHEN IT CAN SAY: TODAY, TOO, I DID SOME GOOD FOR MY BRETHREN. THIS IS THE BEST MEDICINE THAT ANYONE COULD TAKE. HOW I HOPE THAT THE LORD WILL NOT REFUSE MY MEAGER EFFORTS THAT I AM ABLE TO OFFER HIM FOR HIS SOULS.

This gives a good idea of what he was like. From these words we can see that Fr. Charles was on fire with zeal for the salvation of souls. Because of this zeal, shortly after his ordination, he worked with tireless effort to prepare various types of sermons that are used during Missions. However, because of his chronic weak and unstable health, which was then abused and mistreated by such suffering and discomfort, he was not assigned to deliver these sermons. Nonetheless, in preparing them, he was able to find a way to satisfy his zeal.

More than anything else, he worked and labored for the good of the youth, especially of the Oratory at the Stimate. From the time he became its Director, we can say that his thoughts were always centered on this Oratory. He worked constantly for the good of his boys, with the industry of a father, and with the

tenderness of a mother. If there was any means that would help to maintain, or to increase the welfare of the Oratory, he would put his hand to it and would overcome every difficulty.

Although by temperament, he was not much for diversions, nonetheless, to attract the young boys to join the Oratory, he would take part in their recreations. Even though he was sometimes worn out by his fatigue and continual sickness among the boys, he was **[174]** full of spirit and life. He was so active and agile, that he seemed to be in the best of health. It was his desire for the good of their souls that sustained and reinforced him.

It was not, however, only to his own Oratory that he confined his zeal. He extended it to the majority of the Oratories of the city. The courses of the Spiritual Exercises that he gave, as well as the Retreats, not only to the Oratories, but also to the Religious Institutes during his last years, can be said to be without number.

We should also say something about his diligence in the Confessional. Very early every morning, through every season, he was always the first to be up out of bed. Many times, even before the *Angelus*, he would celebrate Holy Mass, so that he could take his place in the Confessional where he would remain until about noon every day. After dinner, and often without taking even a brief rest, he used to go to hear the Confessions of the Sisters. From there, he would return again to his own Confessional in our Church until nightfall.

It is not possible to estimate the number of troubled souls that he was able to lead back to God. Those who were wavering, he confirmed in truth; the tepid, he inspired; the fervent, he directed to an even more perfect life. He would encourage them to turn their backs on the world, to consecrate themselves to God in the State of Religion. The good that he did through his Confessional is a mystery even to us. Only in heaven will it be given to know it clearly, and to admire it. For now, we can only say that the good he did was extraordinarily abundant and precious before God. This is how he lived for many years.

His fatigue, however, placed a drain on his precarious health. There were other discomforts from which he had been suffering for many years, that brought about a terrible malady. For about a year, he was subjected to the purifying fire of suffering that was most cruel, atrocious and tormenting. Even just recalling it, one cannot help shuddering on the one hand – but, on the other, we are overwhelmed in amazement for the truly heroic patience and resignation with which he suffered everything.

His sickness was a cause of anguish for the many who loved him for all they received from him. There was great anxiety, many prayers, Holy Communions, Triduums and Novenas, and so many hopes ... that it would not be easy to note them all. Even though many felt that they still had need of such a father, God decreed otherwise, and decided that Fr. Charles was not to live much longer on this earth. However, to enrich him with even greater merits, and that he might gain the crown of martyrdom, He willed that Fr. Zara would be tormented for almost a full year, with

agonizing sufferings. As time passed, it was believed that every week, or even every day, and hour – might be the last of his life.

At the end, fully conscious, he received Viaticum and Extreme Unction with the sentiments of a saint, on the 20th of June 1883. After a few more hours of the most painful agony, during which he lapsed into unconsciousness, at 9:00 p.m., he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord. The Members of the Marian Oratory of the Stimate had the following epigraph printed:

TO CHARLES ZARA, PRIEST OF THE APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES, BECAUSE OF HIS ADMIRABLE ZEAL, ABNEGATION AND GENTLENESS, HE WAS MORE A LOVING FATHER, THAN A DIRECTOR OF THE MARIAN ORATORY OF THE SACRED STIGMATA. HE DIED ON THE 20TH OF JUNE 1883, AT ABOUT THE AGE OF 40, NO STRANGER TO SUFFERING, FULL OF MERITS AND MOURNED BY EVERYONE, BUT EVEN MORE BY US, THE SONS OF HIS HEART, TO WHOM HE LEFT AN INCORRUPTIBLE HEREDITY OF WORD AND EXAMPLE.

**THE CONFRERES OF THE MARIAN ORATORY,
CELEBRATING THE SOLEMN MONTH'S MIND MASS, SUNDAY, JULY 22ND.**

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Reminiscences
of the life of
Father Antonio Conte

of the
**Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata
of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

[+ December 18, 1888]

By Fr. Paul Gradinati

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§§§

DEDICATION**to****JOSEPH CONTE & TERESA SERAFANI**

These pages have been written especially to satisfy the pious wishes of my venerable Confreres, and for the edification of our young students. By almost natural ties, we also belong to you, illustrious Parents, who had the enviable fate of bringing such a son into this world. Since twice he has been taken from you – once by Religious Life, and now by death – it is only just that what is written here in these *Reminiscences* should be dedicated to you. I only wish that I could have truly captured his memory here, just as it is engraved in your hearts. However, what art could ever equal the love of a Father and a Mother?

As I do not have the eloquence that his actions had, I have not sought to embellish the virtues which were beautiful enough in him, in his pure and simple way of life. His own spiritual writings in which he poured out the secrets of his heart, are inserted in the telling of his life's story. By means of these, you will hear him speak, and you will witness him praying and sighing before his God. These will manifest to you his intimate thoughts and affections. In your loving imagination, as you read these pages, he may come alive before your eyes, in that school of secret but refined virtue, by which he reaped so many merits for heaven.

The second anniversary of his death has now passed. As his memory is still fresh and alive, may these pages provide a lasting means of your consolation – may they bring comfort to pious souls – and may they bring a blessing upon this poor effort of one who calls himself, and who is honored in being

Your most devoted Servant**Fr. Paul Gradinati****of the****Priests of the Stigmata****†**

[5]⁵⁹

Preface

On the 11th day of April 1883, a young man of 26 years of age, bade a tearful farewell to his parents and relatives and all that was near and dear to him in this world. He came to Verona to become a member of our Congregation. He lived in it for five years, and died in it as a Priest, at Pavia, on December 18, 1888. The virtues of this man, Fr. Anthony Conte, were evident to all who knew him, both in the world and in the Religious Life. During his life-time, he was considered a model, and his death evoked most profound grief, and spontaneous tribute, in Pavia, in the city of his birth, and throughout our Congregation. We will note here a few of the tributes paid to him.

Monsignor John Gobbi, the Arch-Priest and mitred Abbot of Bassano, wrote a letter to our Superior General in which he was most effusive in his praise of Fr. Conte. He stated that he was a Priest of irreproachable life, and outstanding for his extraordinary piety. While he was on this earth, he was one of the most beautiful [6] products of this illustrious Congregation, as he is now most certainly in heaven.

Mr. Peter Nosadini, former secretary of the Association of San Bassiano, to which Fr. Anthony belonged, wrote:

MAY THAT DAY BE NOT FAR OFF WHEN HIS LIFE WILL BE PUBLISHED. I AM SURE THAT FROM HIS BIOGRAPHY THE FAITHFUL OF BASSANO, AND OUR ASSOCIATION, WILL DERIVE MUCH PROFIT. THE MEMBERS COULD WELL MODEL THEIR LIVES ON SO SPLENDID AN EXAMPLE.

Bartolo Zanchetta, a fellow townsman of Fr. Conte, who knew him intimately, stated:

IN A VERY FEW WORDS, I WILL GIVE MY IMPRESSIONS OF FR. ANTHONY CONTE. I FEEL NOW THAT HE IS GONE, THAT I PREFER TO RECOMMEND MY OWN SOUL TO HIM, RATHER THAN PRAYING FOR THE REPOSE OF HIS SOUL.

One of Fr. Conte's Confreres in Religion remarked:

AS HIS VIRTUES WERE SO WELL KNOWN TO EVERYONE, I SAY ONLY THAT FR. ANTHONY WAS REALLY A SAINT. I BELIEVE THAT NOW IN HEAVEN, HE, WITH ALL THE OTHER SAINTS, CONTEMPLATES GOD FACE TO FACE, AND THAT HE IS PRAYING FOR OUR BELOVED CONGREGATION THAT HE LOVED SO MUCH.

All those who knew him in religious Life are in full agreement [7] with these sentiments. Among these, we will note the Superior of the House of Pavia. In his sincere tribute, he states that Fr. Conte was a real gem. Then, the Priest who was assigned to take Fr. Anthony's place, wrote of him:

⁵⁹ **Translator's Note:** the page numbers of the original Italian edition will be included in bold print throughout the text enclosed in brackets: [...]

HE WAS A MIRROR OF VIRTUE AND ZEAL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, FOR THE GOOD OF SOULS AND FOR THE SPLENDOR OF HIS TEMPLE, WHICH WAS HIS FAVORITE AND CONTINUAL HAVEN. HIS MEMORY WILL ALWAYS BE HELD IN BENEDICTION, AND THE EXAMPLE OF HIS VIRTUES ARE A SCHOOL FOR EVERYONE, BUT IN A SPECIAL WAY, FOR ME.

Since a number of other tributes of his Confreres will be found in the narrative that follows, that of the Very Reverend Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola, will serve as a seal to the ones that have been considered above. The Superior General wrote:

THE NEWS OF THE DEATH OF FR. ANTHONY CAUSED A PANG IN MY HEART. HIS PIETY, MORTIFICATION, AND HIS ZEAL WERE WELL KNOWN TO ME. THEY GAVE ME EVERY HOPE THAT THE CONGREGATION WOULD HAVE IN HIM A TRUE APOSTLE. AND NOW I SEE THAT I AM DEPRIVED OF HIM FOREVER! MAY HIS EXAMPLE AT LEAST SERVE TO FORM IN MY NOVICES OTHERS LIKE HIM!

I felt that these tributes, as laudatory as they are sincere, should be placed here before the telling of the life story of Fr. [8] Anthony Conte. In this way, those who did not know him personally, may clearly see why we wanted to write at least this *Compendium* of his life.

In truth, the activity of this Servant of God, was not news-worthy according to the standards of this world. However, his apostolate was sanctified by his abnegation, his piety and his sacrifice. To use a metaphor of St. Francis de Sales, his apostolate brought forth sacred flowers that grow at the foot of the Cross, and are watered by the Blood of the Nazarene. Their beauty and their fragrance are not noticed by those who only love themselves. They are, though, most precious before the lord, and to these souls, permeated with his spirit, and trained in accord with it.

Therefore, it seemed to me as right and just to gather here the memory of those virtues, that he diffused in abundance during his short mortal journey. They thus form a garland to place by his grave, for his ever-lasting memory, for the example and comfort of those who will come after us.

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[9]

Chapter 1

The Birth and Early Years of Anthony Conte – His Virtues

Bassano is a picturesque city in the Venetian Republic, and the birth-place of many illustrious men. There on the 31st of March, 1857, Anthony Conte, the second child of Joseph Conte and Teresa Serafani, was born. They were a well-to-do family, and were even more commendable for their sense of religion and upright life.

During the years of his childhood, there was nothing of note, except for his gentle nature, and his early inclination to virtue and piety. He spent many happy hours around a little altar that he had set up and decorated with extraordinary taste. From his pious Mother, he derived a devotion to Mary most holy. Even as a very young [10] boy, he never omitted his offering of some act of mortification in her

honor every Saturday. These little acts would consist in his refusal of fruit, or candy, or the prayers that he would offer to her.

What is more worthy of mention is that from his earliest years, he practiced the virtue of obedience in a manner that was far superior to his tender age. No occasion can be recalled when he was hesitant to carry out, not only the commands of his parents, but even their preferences. This is worthy of note here, when we keep in mind that total obedience is always the foundation, or the basis, of the most sublime virtues. After his First Communion, it was noted that he made even greater strides along the path of virtue.

His frequent reception of the Sacraments, his visits to Church and the virtues he practiced at home were all unusual in his childhood. To this piety, he added a love for study. He attended public school, both for the Grammar and High School levels, and he consistently gave unmistakable signs of his fine intelligence. He always won the first prize awarded for excellence in study. This was not entirely due to his gifted mind, but also because of the unusual diligence and admirable order he displayed in carrying out all that had been assigned. He performed exceptionally well in the comprehensive examinations for his High School diploma. His teachers noted that he was the finest student who had ever attended that school.

Even more remarkable was his conduct record, his refined manner of speaking and his good example. The better families of that city [11] disputed, so to speak, in claiming he was the friend of their sons. They all hoped for the benefit of his choice company. Notwithstanding all this adulation, he remained modest and unassuming. Whenever his father, out of just pride, praised his son in public, the boy was seen to be embarrassed and was evidently made uncomfortable. In a most polite manner, he would ask his Father not to continue.

When he finished school in Bassano, he qualified for the University of Padua, where he intended to major in mathematics, and become an engineer. However, his maternal grand-parents were opposed to the idea, as they did not want to see him taken away from them. They feared even more that the world would deprive them of their treasure.

Anthony, therefore, generously made the sacrifice of his aspirations, and settled down to private study. When he had finished several years of such study, he did leave the family circle. He took up his studies under a Dr. Valerius Tattara, and later with Bartolo Zanchetta. Scarcely had this latter come to know the boy, he had no hesitancy despite his youth, to entrust him with the management of his own financial affairs. At times, this would involve sizable sums of money. In the administration of all this, young Conte manifested both an ability of mind, and a meekness of character. His work became noted for its outstanding order. His beautiful [12] handwriting and his exact keeping of the financial records made his services appreciated all the more. Mr. Zanchetta tells us that he then fulfilled honorably a position of Accountant in a most important firm.

By the time he had reached his 20th birthday, he was still undecided concerning the vocation that he would follow in life. It was noted, however, that he scrupulously avoided conversations with women.

Then, his Uncle, Fr. Louis Serafini, received a blessing from his own parents, and entered the Company of Jesus. He was most pleased with this project, and there opened before him an entire new world. We find his thoughts at this juncture of his life in the private thoughts that he recorded. He describes it as though he heard 'a voice coming from heaven.'

His Uncle's actions deeply impressed young Anthony. He began to think that here was a man of considerable means, most loved and revered by his parents. He had turned his back on the world, on his own family – on every created gift for the salvation of his soul. Anthony asked himself if he was going to remain inert and lazy all his life. From that day onward, his thoughts, aspirations, and, if it is permissible to put it this way, his whole life took on a new aspect. Nothing would now sway his great soul that yearned to belong entirely to God.

He started to fit daily Mass and Communion into his schedule. He began a daily spiritual reading, and every now and then, each day, he would go apart from his family for private recollection and prayer. He was full of regret when this had to be short. His evening visits to Church were lengthened, and more than once he was [13] almost locked in by the Sacristan. A number of times, his Father discovered that some early mornings, he would put his bed in disarray. From this he deduced that the boy had remained in prayer until dawn.

This was the manner of his life during this period. He was later to write of these times which he called his 'apprenticeship for the religious life.' Being imbued with this spirit and with the desire of doing good to his fellowman. He began to take an even more active part in all the Church endeavors of the city.

He was among the first to enroll in the Association of San Bassiano, which was organized in 1874, and was then affiliated with the Italian Catholic Youth Society. From the start, his fellow members entrusted to him the delicate tasks of Treasurer, and he remained in this office until he entered Religion. This was a mark of the sincere esteem in which he was held by all. He frequently was the arbiter in little disagreements that at times would arise, and which sometimes seemed to be on the verge of dissolving the organization. Because of him, more than anyone else, there was established a 'Catholic Cabinet', that still flourishes today, and which can compare favorably with those of larger cities.

He was also a member and for several years, and the Secretary, of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. In this office as well, he gave proof of a zeal and an apostolicity that were far from ordinary. He was a member of the Parish Committee from the time of its organization, and he never spared himself when it was a question of the [14] sake of the Church, and the good of his beloved Bassano. On all the holy days, he showed himself as a tireless and loving teacher of Christian Doctrine. It was beautiful to see him, always among the first to arrive, gathering the

children around him, encouraging them with little rewards and his affable manner, to frequent the Catechism classes.

This Charity of Jesus Christ that burned in his soul, was equally manifest in his tender compassion for the poor. No one ever approached him and went away empty-handed. He visited a number of these poor families who used to call him the 'poor man of St. Anthony.' Even though on occasion, those who were not really poor came to him for a hand-out, and this was detected, he would go to their defense, asking that some bread and even money be given to them.

At home, he truly merited the title 'Angel of Good Counsel'. He was most diligent in helping his Father run his business in keeping the shop for him in his free time. He was often the intermediary if ever a dispute arose in the family, and among the dependents.

He was a second father to his younger brothers, in that he took an interest in their studies, their conduct, and also to train them in matters of economy. To the older of the two, Angelo, he gave a little Register in which he kept the accounts of a small poultry business. On the last page, he wrote 'Today I gave it all to my brother, Angelo, that he, too, might be able to realize some savings.'

He asked for nothing, and had no interest in amusements or luxuries [15]. He was content with everyone and everything. He never complained about the weather, or other discomforts to which we all must adjust. He was always ready to lend his help, especially in view of his beautiful hand-writing, to anyone who asked him. He did this with such disregard for himself, that what is derived only from a generous exercise of virtue, seemed natural to him.

Because of his pensive nature, he remained undecided concerning his choice of a state of life. Shortly after his death, among his papers was found a letter he had written when he was 23. In it, he told his parents that he wanted to enter Religion, but for some reason, he never gave them this letter. The young man pondered over this great step, and he imposed on himself a life of voluntary penance, that he might learn the will of God in this regard. He began to practice the more severe forms of mortification. His Mother states that after he entered Religion, she found a scourge that he used to use on himself, and which he kept hidden under his mattress.

However, the desire had not yet come for his decision. Meanwhile, he was promoted from the employ of Mr. Zanchetta to a position in Monte Pieta'. In a very short time, he won the affection of everyone, and would have earned the most responsible and trustworthy positions in the business. His employers and colleagues were most satisfied with him, and when they were to lose him, his departure was felt keenly.

During the office breaks, while the others would stand around chatting [16], he stayed by himself and would take out a pious book to refresh his soul. His fellow workers were not offended by this behavior because of his affable and pleasing nature.

I will bring this Chapter to a close with the words of an illustrious Priest of Bassano, Fr. Anthony Nardello, who was his Spiritual Director for a long time:

IN ANTHONY CONTE, I ALWAYS NOTED A PURPOSE OF MIND, AND AN ENVIABLE MATURITY OF UNDERSTANDING. THESE WERE THE RESULT, OR THE EFFECT OF HIS VIRTUE, ESPECIALLY THAT OF HUMILITY AND AN UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE TO ALL WHO DIRECTED HIM. TRULY, HIS DELIGHT WAS PRAYER, AND ESPECIALLY MEDITATION. HE WAS MOST ORDERLY IN EVERY FACET OF HIS LIFE, BOTH AS REGARDS HIS RELIGIOUS DUTIES, AND THOSE OF HIS STATE IN LIFE. I NEVER HAVE MET ANYONE MORE PRECISE AND EXACT AS HE WAS.

MOST INNOCENT SOUL, PRAY FROM HEAVEN FOR YOUR OWN LOVED ONES, AND ALSO FOR HIM, WHO FOR SO MANY YEARS, WAS YOUR UNQUALIFIED GUIDE ALONG THE PATH OF VIRTUE.



Chapter 2

He decides to enter the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata

- He is accepted, and begins his Novitiate.

There was one circumstance that moved him to reach his decision. He came in contact with our Fathers who had come to Bassano to direct the Student's Guild and the Boys' Oratory. Their fervor, zeal [17] and their edifying example had a strong influence on him. His mind was enlightened, and he began to work with them more intimately and found contentment in this work. After hesitating for many years concerning the choice of a Religious Institute, he was beginning to see that the will of God was being made more clear in his regard.

While his decision was forming in his mind, every evening, after his daily occupations, he would make his way to the House of the Congregation. With great enthusiasm, he applied himself to ecclesiastical studies, under the guidance of an excellent and expert Religious. On holy days, he began to help the Priests in supervising the youth. He took part in the recreation program, as well as in helping in the Oratory and the School of Christian Doctrine. In their midst, he was truly a lay apostle. He was most diligent in teaching the boys the principles of religion, the love for high moral standards, mutual peace and a particular devotion toward the Blessed Mother and St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

When the month of April in 1883 rolled around, all his doubts seem to have vanished he gave his parents a letter in which he asked their permission to consecrate himself to God in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata. This resolution was the result of long meditations, prayers and even tears, as well as the counsel he sought from these men who were illumined in the ways of the Lord. He now felt a certainty about the will of God, and trusted more n Him than in his own weakness.

About this time, he wrote:

IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE, IT IS NOT STRONG CEDARS [18] THAT ARE PLANTED, BUT THE FRAGILE REEDS THAT BEND AT EVERY BLOWING OF THE WIND. IT IS TRUE THAT HERE EVERYTHING SMILES ON ME, AND ENTICES ME TO REMAIN IN THE WORLD. BUT, WHAT WILL ALL THIS AVAIL IF I SHOULD LOSE MY SOUL? IN RELIGION, I WILL BE PRESERVED FROM THESE DANGERS TO WHICH I HAVE SEEN SO MANY OF MY COMPANIONS OF MY EARLY YEARS SUCCUMB. THE VOCATION TO RELIGION WAS FOR A LONG A TIME THE SUBJECT OF MY INNER THOUGHTS. THIS WAS THE DEEPEST YEARNING OF MY SOUL, THE ONLY GOAL OF MY DESIRES. FURTHERMORE, MY HEART, THANKS TO GOD, SEEMED MORE AND MORE DETACHED FROM THE AFFECTION OF WORLDLY GOODS. I FELT DRAWN TO PERFORMING MERITORIOUS WORKS.

Permit me to cite a passage from that letter he wrote to his Parents. The spirit that motivated young Anthony can be known better through this letter:

THE VANITY OF THE WORLD, THE BREVITY OF LIFE, THE PROXIMITY OF DEATH, THE UNCERTAINTY OF SALVATION, THE LENGTH OF ETERNITY, THE GREATNESS OF THE PROMISED REWARD — ALL OF THESE MOTIVES IMPEL ME TO MAKE THIS DECISION. FURTHERMORE, THE BLESSINGS AND THE SPECIAL GRACES WITH WHICH GOD HAS WILLED TO ENRICH ME, DESPITE MY LACK OF MERIT, WERE ALSO REASONS THAT INFLUENCED MY DECISION. THEY INCLINED MY HEART SO THAT I CAN NO LONGER REFUSE THE INVITATION, WITHOUT OPENLY CONTRADICTING HIS WILL. BY REJECTING IT NOW, I WOULD EXPOSE MYSELF TO GRAVE DANGERS, AND WOULD FOLLOW A PATH THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE THAT HAS BEEN LAID OUT FOR ME ... I KNOW WELL THAT CUSTOMARILY THE WORLD, WITH ITS MALICIOUS TONGUE, CENSURES ANYTHING THAT SMACKS OF RELIGION. [19] IT WILL SHOUT AT ME NEXT TO THE CROSS, AND CALL ME STUPID A FANATIC, OR CRAZY. IT WILL MAKE ME THE OBJECT OF ITS JOKES, AND WILL WRITE ME OFF AS AN ABNORMAL SON.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MATTER? I AM CONVINCED THAT IT IS NOT THE WORLD WHICH IS TO GUIDE ME, BUT GOD. I WILL TRY TO SMILE AT THESE INSULTS, AND CONSIDER THEM AS PRAISE, OR THE ACCUSATIONS OF A CHILD, WHILE INWARDLY I WILL CRY AT THE SAD STATE OF OUR TIMES THAT ASCRIBES TO INSANITY THE DESIRE TO DEDICATE ONESELF TO GOD, AND TO LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS LAW. I WILL TAKE ITS SNEERS, IN THE ASSURANCE THAT I AM MERELY FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIM, WHO SUFFERED SIMILAR INSULTS.

There was, however, no longer any doubt concerning the wisdom of his choice. His father prudently decided on one more proof of his vocation, and suggested that he make a voyage. However, Anthony was able to persuade him to give the permission for which he longed without further delay.

This does not mean that he was able to go away without difficulty. In saying farewell to his family, and in receiving his Parents' last blessing, he shed bitter tears. His Mother then came to understand what her brother, Fr. Louis, had said to her. She had complained to him that Anthony, with his reserve, did not show such love for his family. Her brother answered that Anthony had an extraordinary love for his family. He said that he had to exert much restraint so that it would not appear more openly, and so that the family would not have too much affection for him. His letters are proof of this, especially that the he sent back home when he had become a religious. These letters remove any doubt that there may have been in this regard.

He would write to his family from time to time and his letters were full [20] of his filial love. He wrote once: 'This love is not lost by the sacrifice of all things of this world, but it becomes deeper, more purified and more perfect.'

The 11th day of that April would always remain dear to his memory, as on that day, Anthony Conte entered the Congregation. Although he was somewhat hesitant by nature, the profound joy of his soul was readily apparent in his evident serenity and happiness. He described it this way:

WHAT JOY THERE IS TO BE OUT OF THE SIN, THE CONFUSION AND THE CHAOS OF THE WORLD. BECAUSE OF MY WEAKNESS, SURELY I COULD NOT HAVE WITHSTOOD IT MUCH LONGER. HENCE, THE LORD, IN HIS INEXHAUSTIBLE MERCY, BY HIS INCESSANT AND EVIDENT INVITATIONS, HAS CALLED ME TO FOLLOW HIM. ALMOST FORCEFULLY, HE BROUGHT ME INSIDE OF THE SACRED WALLS OF HIS SANCTUARY...

He experienced profound happiness from the exalted regard he had for the Religious Life, as well as for the deep sense of gratitude that he felt for the grace of his vocation. He wrote:

WHAT A GREAT, INESTIMABLE GRACE THE LORD HAS GRANTED ME IN CALLING ME TO THE RELIGIOUS STATE! THIS HAS BEEN AN ENTIRELY GRATUITOUS GIFT, AS THERE IS NOTHING IN ME THAT HAS MERITED IT. I OUGHT TO BE IMBUED, AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME, WITH SORROW AND APPRECIATION. I REALIZE ONLY TOO WELL MY OWN UNWORTHINESS IN FINDING MYSELF HERE, IN THE MIDST OF SUCH HOLINESS, AND SUCH FERVOR. HERE AM I, IN THIS CLOSED GARDEN OF THE LORD, I, WHO INDEED MERITED TO SPEND MY LIFE AMONG THE BEASTS IN THE DESERT! OH! LORD! MAY YOU BE BLESSED A THOUSAND TIMES OVER! *ONE THING I HAVE ASKED OF THE LORD, AND THIS [21] I WILL REQUIRE, THAT I MIGHT DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE!*

His conduct concurred in every way with these sentiments. His Superiors, and the other Priests from the first days following his entrance, saw in him a young man, of excellent spirit. He gave the highest hopes to the Congregation, and was soon approved to receive the habit of the Congregation. He was vested on the 19th of June of that same year, at St. Teresa's in Verona. He was to remain in this House until he was ordained a Priest, and sent to Pavia.

On entering the Novitiate, he described this as being transplanted 'into a nursery of the earthly Paradise of religion.' He resolved to give every possible effort to divest himself ever more from the 'old man', and made great strides in putting on the 'new'. He made the following resolutions:

1. To live always and everywhere in the presence of God, imagining that He is here before me.
2. To keep before my mind the thought of death, with the certainty of its arrival, as well as the uncertainty of when this will be.
3. In my thoughts, words and actions, I will reflect and ask myself: Would you do this on your death-bed?
4. I will always recall that the Supreme Master one day will demand an account for every word and deed.

As a Novice, he was convinced that the spiritual profit depends on the exact observance of the rules of one's Institute. As a result, every single week, he read over the common rules. Some of these, he even read every day to see how he was fulfilling them. He had resolved not to break any one of them deliberately, even the least [22] important rules.

During the Retreat in preparation to his Vestition, he paid particular attention to some of these rules. He pondered over the method of making his Meditation well, which is the first of these rules. He reflected on promptness at the Common exercises, the custody of the eyes, speaking in a low voice, and then only out of necessity, in the times of silence. He studied the rules on following completely the counsel of his Confessor, and doing all things with perfection. He prayed often to St. John Berchmans, and made every effort to model his life after that angelic youth. He reflected that this young man found the secret of an exalted holiness in the exact observance of his rules.

These resolutions did not remain a dead letter. Sufficient proof of this was had in observing the devoted posture he maintained during prayer. There was evident about him a modest recollection that he preserved throughout the day. He continually dedicated himself to study, and the fulfillment of the duties asked of him, as well as reading spiritual books. As for these latter, it seemed as though he meditated on them, rather than just read them. From his readings, he compiled a notebook, which he entitled: *Precious Pearls, gathered in Spiritual Reading*.

He showed contentment with all that was distributed to him, the food, his room, the clothing that was assigned to him. He seemed almost avid to mortify and to bring his body into slavery to his soul. He often asked permission to undertake harsh penances. These were usually restricted to much less than he had requested. He usually abstained entirely from wine and fruit at table, as well as from those things that were the most appetizing to him. He arranged [23] his bed in such a way that his repose would be somewhat uncomfortable. He often made the sign of the Cross on the floor with his tongue, and would seek out the most common and mean tasks. He never showed any inclination to listen to gossip, or in maintaining lengthy conversations.

He accepted with joy those mortifications that are customary in our Congregation for the Refectory, such as eating on one's knees, kissing the feet of the Priests, or publicly accusing oneself of some fault, and asking for a penance. He kept before his mind the reason why had he left the world, and often repeated to himself 'Why have you come?' He was motivated by the resolution of attending with all his strength to his own perfection. He did add these restrictions, however: 'Without anxiety, without anguish, which so often tighten the cord excessively, so that it breaks'. Furthermore, as the Council of Trent says: 'it is impossible to avoid all imperfections'.

He made great account of even small transgressions, especially concerning prescriptions of the Rule. He resolved:

WHEN I FALL IN THIS REGARD, I WILL MAKE AN ACT OF CONTRITION RIGHT AWAY, AND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, I WILL ACCUSE MYSELF OF THEM TO THE SPIRITUAL FATHER AND PERFORM A PENANCE. BY ACCUSING YOURSELF OF YOUR FAILINGS, YOU OVERCOME SELF-LOVE, AND YOU AVOID THE DANGER OF A RELAXED SPIRIT, AND THAT OF GOING FROM LESSER FAILINGS TO GREATER FAULTS.

He also resolved that he would not put this self-accusation off from one day to the next. He believed that his enemy would then persuade him that the fault which had bothered him at first, in the long run, [24] was really not so serious that it merited his self-denunciation. He wished always to be sincere and open, and precise with his Confessor – like clear water. He would manifest to him not only his imperfections, but also his temptations, his inclinations and his heartfelt thoughts and his inspirations.

As is customary with the saints, in this austerity he inflicted on himself, he was equally condescending toward others. He would adapt himself to their temperaments, and make excuses for their faults. He was most willing to give them whatever help he could, never considering his own comforts. He had such a way about him in doing this, that it seem that he found delight in it. He once wrote:

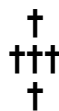
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL VIRTUE IS CHARITY – THAT IS, THAT MUTUAL LOVE AND RESPECT THAT BROTHERS MANIFEST ONE FOR THE OTHER! IT MAKES OF A RELIGIOUS HOUSE THE WAITING-ROOM FOR PARADISE!

BE VERY CAREFUL, THEREFORE, THAT YOU NEVER DERIDE, OR MAKE FUN OF YOUR COMPANIONS' DEFECTS. NEVER EMBARRASS YOUR NEIGHBOR, NOR SAY A WORD, OR TELL A JOKE THAT COULD WOUND THE SELF-ESTEEM OF ANOTHER. TO AVOID EVERY ACT CONTRARY TO CHARITY, CONSIDER EVERYONE AS YOUR SUPERIOR. MANIFEST TOWARD ALL A KINDNESS, AND NEVER NOURISH IN YOUR HEAR SENTIMENTS OF ANTIPATHY, NOR SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS - BECAUSE EACH ONE IS YOUR BROTHER, AND EVERYONE IS BETTER THAN YOU.

He kept these resolutions to such an extent that never during his Novitiate, nor after it, did he ever knowingly hurt, or upset anyone. The author of the *Imitation of Christ* considers this to be a noteworthy achievement:

It is no small thing to live in [25] monasteries, or in a congregation, and to remain there, persevering until death, without giving offense... [Part I, c. 17].

With this fervor, he went through his Novitiate, and completed the portrait the outlines of which he had sketched in the world. However, a longer and more painful trial awaited him, as will be described in the following Chapter.



Chapter 3

Prefect of the Aspirants

It is not usually the custom to assign to Novices duties that will give them the occasion, or the duty of contacts with others of the House, or outside of it. However, in the case of young Conte, an exception was made. After 3, or 4 months of his Novitiate, the Director of the House, considering that young Conte was of mature age, and because of his extraordinary virtue, he named him the Prefect of the young Aspirants. They are a group of students, of high school age, who live in our House of Studies. They must show an inclination for our way of life. They are trained with special care, until they are proven for a greater or lesser length of time, depending on their age. Thus, their vocation is subjected to a rigorous scrutiny, and only then are they admitted into the Congregation as Novices.

Hence, it is clear that the one assigned, as it were, as their 'Guardian Angel', both day and night has no small task. He must supervise their study, their recreation, their conduct in the Refectory [26], on walks and in the Dormitory. He must correct their bad inclinations and must maintain them in love for order and discipline, In a word, he must guide their every step.

If this is a formidable task for everyone, for Anthony, it was a cross. On the one hand, he had a most delicate conscience, and he felt the weight of responsibility keenly. On the other hand, his nature was such that it abhorred the thought of being in authority, and demanding submission. Only he who has had experience in training young boys, can know the effort it cost him to maintain discipline.

Nevertheless, the Superiors were most content with him. He was always most attentive, solicitous and on the alert to correct the transgressions of the rule. Furthermore where there was a failing in a point of order, this was abundantly made up for by the great good he presented to the young boys, by the efficacy of his example and his loving and patient zeal.

Evidence of this is found in the life he led in that office, which I present here from the testimonies of the boys who had him as their Prefect. One of these has stated:

FOR ALL THE TIME THAT BRO. ANTHONY WAS MY PREFECT, AS I WAS A MISCHIEVOUS LAD, I DID NOT PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO HIS GOODNESS. BUT, NOW I REALIZE HIS ADMIRABLE VIRTUE AND MY OWN INGRATITUDE. I WAS SOMEWHAT STUBBORN AND VERY SLOW TO GIVE IN TO MY COMPANIONS. AS A RESULT, I FREQUENTLY ARGUED. HE OFTEN ADMONISHED ME, AND TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE EXHORTED ME TO CORRECT MYSELF, BUT I ONLY FELT ANNOYED AND BOTHERED. AFTER A LONG TIME [27], I WAS FINALLY PERSUADED BY HIM, AND WAS TOLD TO OBSERVE MY RULES BETTER. HE NO LONGER YELLED AT ME, BUT RATHER TREATED ME WITH A LOVING KINDNESS. HE SAID THAT AS I WAS DEVOTED TO THE BLESSED MOTHER, HE ASKED ME TO SAY A *HAIL MARY* FOR HIM.

At the end of this rather lengthy tribute, this young man concluded:

I SAY, THEN, FOR ALL THAT HE SUFFERED BECAUSE OF ME AND OTHERS, AND BECAUSE OF THE AUSTERITY THAT HE ENDURED IN HIS OWN LIFE, THE TWO AND A HALF YEARS THAT HE WAS PREFECT, WERE FOR HIM A SORROWFUL MARTYRDOM.

This tribute only referred in assign to the mortification of his Prefect. Another student stated this:

I DARESAY THAT FR. CONTE SPENT HIS ENTIRE NOVITIATE OBSERVING A FAST, AS HE ATE SO LITTLE EVERY DAY. BEFORE SITTING DOWN TO TABLE, HE WOULD SAY THE USUAL PRAYERS WITH THE ASPIRANTS. WHILE THEY WERE EATING THEIR SOUP, HE WOULD REMAIN STANDING, SAYING OTHER PRAYERS, OR FINISHING THE LITTLE OFFICE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN. THEN HE WOULD BEGIN HIS SOUP, WHICH HE OFTEN ATE ON HIS KNEES. HE WOULD OFTEN GET UP AND GO ALONG THE TABLES TO SEE IF ANYTHING WAS MISSING. IT SEEMS HE FREQUENTLY WAS PRAYING, AS HIS LIPS WERE ALWAYS MOVING. HE MOST OFTEN KNELT IN THE REFECTORY. HE WOULD MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS, AND SEEMED TO BE ABSORBED IN PRAYER.

HE WOULD TAKE A FEW MOUTHFULS OF POLENTA, AND ONLY WOULD EAT THE FIRST COURSE. HE ATE VERY LITTLE BREAD, AND AS FOR WINE, HE EITHER DID NOT DRINK IT AT ALL, OR MERELY POURED A LITTLE INTO A GLASS OF WATER. IT SEEMS HIS MORTIFICATIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN GREATER, BUT THE [28] DIRECTOR, HAVING BEEN INFORMED BY THE STUDENTS, KEPT A TIGHT REIN ON HIM.

HE HAD OTHER WAYS OF PRACTICING HIS SELF-DENIAL. WHEN FOOD WAS SERVED THAT WAS POORLY SEASONED OR EVEN DISTASTEFUL TO HIM, HE SEEMED TO PREFER IT TO EVERYTHING ELSE. ONE DAY A MEAL WAS SERVED IN WHICH THE COOK HAD INADVERTENTLY PUT TOO MUCH SALT INTO IT. HARDLY ANYONE COULD SWALLOW IT. ANTHONY, HOWEVER, WELCOMED THIS OCCASION TO MORTIFY HIMSELF AND SEEMED TO EAT IT WITH THE AVIDITY OF A GOURMET.

HE SEEMED TO GIVE SUCH VERY LITTLE TIME TO EATING. THE REST OF THE PERIOD HE WAS IN THE REFECTORY, HE WOULD GIVE TO PRAYER. HE ALSO OFTEN SUBSTITUTED FOR THE READER. I DO NOT REMEMBER HIM EVERY TASTING A FRUIT IN THE GARDEN DURING HIS NOVITIATE, OR AFTERWARDS, EVEN THOUGH PERMISSION HAD BEEN GIVEN FOR THIS. HE NEVER ATE THE THINGS THAT THE ASPIRANTS' FAMILIES SENT TO THEM, ALTHOUGH THESE WERE ALWAYS OFFERED TO HIM.

IN THE MORNING AFTER CHAPEL, THE STUDENTS WOULD GO TO THE STUDY HALL. HE WOULD ALWAYS STAY WITH THEM. HE OFTEN KNELT AT HIS PLACE, AND ALTERNATED STUDY AND PRAYER. WHILE ON WALKS ALONG THE STREETS OF THE CITY, HIS MODESTY WAS EVIDENT.

AT NIGHT, BEFORE GOING TO BED, AND AFTER HE HAD TAKEN OFF HIS CASSOCK, HE WOULD KNEEL FOR A LONG TIME ON THE COLD, BARE FLOOR. MANY TIMES, HE WOULD ALSO KISS IT. I THINK THAT OFTEN HE WENT TO BED DRESSED. DURING THE NIGHT, WE OFTEN SAW HIM IN THE CANDLE LIGHT OF HIS ROOM, OR IN THE NEAR BY STUDY HALL. HE WOULD CONTINUE THESE VIGILS UNTIL THE DEAD

OF NIGHT. I OFTEN WOULD SEE HIM THROUGH MY HALF-CLOSED EYES; IN THE DIM CANDLE LIGHT, HE SEEMED MORE LIKE A SPIRIT, MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE DORMITORY. TO ME, THIS WAS A CLEAR PROOF OF THE CONSCIENTIOUSNESS THAT HE BROUGHT TO THIS OFFICE, AND THE LITTLE SLEEP THAT HE PERMITTED HIMSELF.

This same student continued his tribute, and stated that his good Prefect, no matter how cold it was, never wore a cape. On his bed, there was only one woolen blanket, which he used even during the summer months. I believe this was an act of penance, and not for what he used to say, that it was because of the coolness of the summer nights that bothered him more than the cold of winter. It is very true that with the warmth of his spiritual life, he could withstand the inclemency of the seasons, and this love made everything relatively easy for him.

He also gave other examples of his virtue to the young aspirants. He always spoke well of everyone, both of his Confreres and externs. There would be trouble if anyone mentioned in his presence the faults of anyone else, even though these may have been evident. He would rebuke this conduct, and always found a way to cover the flaws of others. He did not even want the natural defects of others discussed. One day, a student told him that a certain Priest had a very poor singing voice. His answer was that he had a strong and good voice.

This trait of his came not only from his sincere charity, but also from his humble conviction that others were better than he. He considered himself unworthy to live among innocent souls, such as [30] these young Aspirants were. He used to say that they were like angels, or doves. When he sat among them in study this conviction of his was most evident. He enjoyed helping them, following the example of Jesus Christ, who had come not to be served, but to serve. He copied the example of the Divine Master, Who washed the feet of the poor Fishermen.

Another of the Aspirants wrote of Fr. Conte:

MANY TIMES, HE WOULD WASH AND SWEEP THE ROOMS, AND MAKE THE BEDS, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A DEACON. OFTEN, TOO, HE WOULD TAKE ON EVEN MORE HUMBLE DUTIES. ONCE, ONE OF THE PRIESTS SAW HIM DOING THESE CHORES, AND HE TOLD HIM THAT HE SHOULD LEAVE THEM FOR OTHERS. SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED, HE ANSWERED: 'BUT, FATHER, SINCE I AM NOT STRONG ENOUGH FOR OTHER CHORES, I DO THESE LITTLE TASKS THAT ARE NO BOTHER TO ME, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE IDLE'.

His former students also recorded this recollection: during the summer of 1885, all the Students were out at Sezano in Valpantena. As young boys enjoy hikes, and the longer the better, they persuaded their Prefect to accompany them to a very distant mountain called *La Purga*. Although they were full of enthusiasm in the morning, a broiling sun accompanied them along their way. When they had arrived at the foot of the mountain, they were utterly exhausted, and no one wanted to carry the lunch basket any further, as it was quite heavy. Up to this point, they had been taking turns with it. All they had thought about was the joy of reaching the top of the mountain, as such is the pride of youth.

[31] Anthony was even more tired than they were, and he had come along on the hike, not for his own enjoyment, but to acquiesce to their requests. Without saying anything, he picked the basket up, and strapped it on his back, and started the ascent. The trail was very uneven, and strewn with stones, and overgrown with a thorny bush. Dripping with sweat, he finally reached the top, more dead than alive!

An indication of the little account he had of himself, and the meekness of his heart, can be found in the following anecdotes. These were recorded by one of the Aspirants. One day, they had gone for a walk, and had stopped in the shade, somewhere outside the city:

WHILE THE PREFECT WAS SAYING SOMETHING, I WAS TEARING UP LITTLE PIECES OF PAPER, PUTTING THEM ON HIS HAT. JUST THEN, ONE OF OUR PRIESTS PASSED BY, AND AS ANTHONY TOOK OFF HIS HAT TO GREET HIM, ALL THOSE LITTLE BITS OF PAPER FELL TO THE GROUND. THE PRIEST STOPPED AND ASKED WHO HAD DONE THIS. WHEN HE LEARNED THAT I HAD DONE IT, HE LOOKED AT ME SEVERELY: 'IS THIS THE RESPECT THAT YOU HAVE FOR YOUR PREFECT?' ANTHONY IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO REPORT IT TO THE DIRECTOR, I WILL!'

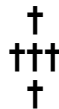
'DON'T DO IT THIS TIME — LET'S FORGET IT,' ANTHONY ANSWERED. 'BY THE WAY, IT IS QUITE WARM TODAY, ISN'T IT, FATHER?'

'OH, NO', THE PRIEST SAID, 'DO NOT MAKE EXCUSES FOR HIM, OR TRY TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT. IF YOU DO NOT REPORT IT, I WILL!'

ANTHONY LOOKED EMBARRASSED, AND WHEN HE CAME UP TO ME TO COMFORT ME, I WAS CRYING. HE DID NOT GIVE ME THE PENANCE THAT I DESERVED. WHEN WE ARRIVED HOME, AND THE DIRECTOR CAME TO REPRIMAND ME, BRO. ANTHONY ASKED THAT FOR THIS TIME, I NOT BE PUNISHED.

Another time, he did not want to wait for the barber. He gave one of the Aspirants the scissors and a razor and told him to cut his tonsure. The Aspirant was something of a rogue, and cut the sign of the Cross on the back of his head. Anthony was apparently absorbed in prayer, got up, thinking that the boy was finished, got up to leave. The boys, who were standing around started to laugh, and when he found out why, he laughed, too. He then called the boy who had made the Cross on the back of his head, and asked him to round it off, and form the customary circle. When this was completed, for a while, his tonsure was much larger than was customary⁶⁰.

Anecdotes like this one, rather than lessening his popularity, only increased the affection that the Students had for him, and the reputation that he enjoyed among them.



⁶⁰ **Translator's Note:** In the 1950's, the custom among the American Stigmatines in Rome, was understood thus: for an ordinary cleric, the Tonsure was to be the size of a small Host for Mass; for a Bishop, the Tonsure had to be the size of a large Host!

Chapter 4

His Perpetual Profession – His Studies

There is no wonder, that for such a Novice, as his two years of probation came to an end, everyone gave a favorable opinion. He was approved for Profession in the Congregation, and thus became their Confrere. As he had his Retreat, to prepare himself for this solemn act, his heart expanded in genuine sentiments of [33] appreciation. He expressed his heart-felt desire of correspondence to such grace, by the perfect observance of his vows.

During this Retreat, he wrote:

NOW I DESIRE THOSE VOWS THAT WILL SO BIND MY HEART TO THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS – THAT THE BREATH OF PRIDE MAY NEVER LESSEN THEM, NOR THE FIRE OF CONCUPISCENCE EVER CONSUME THEM, NOR EVEN WEAKEN THEM ... I WILL REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT THE RELIGIOUS LIFE IS THE ONLY ONE FOR ME. ANYWHERE ELSE, I WOULD BE A FISH OUT OF WATER, AND I WOULD DIE.

In addition to the increased conviction that he had been called by God, the lofty esteem that he had always had for the Religious State had also grown. He remarked:

I CAME TO KNOW THAT THIS STATE IS MOST EXCELLENT BECAUSE OF ITS DIGNITY, IT IS MOST USEFUL, BECAUSE OF ITS MERITS, AND IT IS MOST HAPPY, BECAUSE OF ITS PEACE ... WHAT BEAUTY AND SUBLIMITY THERE IS IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE! IT IS A PARADOX ON EARTH – IT IS AS GREAT A GRACE AS IS CREATION, BECAUSE IT PICKED ME UP FROM NOTHING, FROM THE SNARES OF THE WORLD, WHEN THEY MOST ATTRACTED ME ... I CAME TO KNOW THAT THE RELIGIOUS LIFE WILL HAVE THE REWARD OF MARTYRS. THE MARTYRS GIVE THEIR LIVES RATHER THAN RENOUNCE THEIR FAITH. RELIGIOUS, SO THAT THEY WILL NOT FAIL IN THEIR RESOLUTIONS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST CLOSELY, ACCEPT SIMILAR SACRIFICES THROUGHOUT THEIR ENTIRE LIVES.

Desiring to offer himself to God, with perfect indifference to created things, in the silence of this Retreat, he gave serious thought to his own inclinations. In his words, these inclinations were that he showed a tendency to 'self-love, and to natural weakness.' When this is well pondered, his realization indicates a genuine detachment from all creatures.

In his humility, he wrote: 'If I am indifferent to some things, this is a natural tendency with me, and not the result of virtue.' His spirit yearned to belong entirely to God, and in those days of Retreat, his heart cried out:

YES, O MY LORD, TIME AND TIME AGAIN, I HAVE OFFERED MYSELF, DEDICATED MYSELF AND CONSECRATED MYSELF ENTIRELY TO YOU. YOU HAVE GIVEN ME FREE WILL, AND I OFFER IT BACK TO YOU – ACCEPT ME AS AN ETERNAL SACRIFICE.

The Day of his Holocaust fell on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul in 1885. For him, it was a day of Spiritual Nuptials, and he noted this in those precious Memoirs of his life. The paper from which he read the Formula of Profession, he later kept as a memorial of that day. He used to take it into his hands many times, and repeated his consecration to God. With the passing of time, it became quite worn with use, and he continually repaired its torn edges. Furthermore, he kept a copy of this Formula on his chest, near his heart. From that day, he seemed to be dead to all his own personal desires. He never missed an occasion, or opportunity to increase in holiness.

His efforts for interior perfection, and his manner of living the Vows and the Religious Virtues, I will recount later on. From what has already been said, though, these can easily be deduced, just as a beautiful morning presages a splendid day. Meanwhile, though, I do think it would be worthwhile to say something of his studies, as these are the particular occupation of the Professed Students.

As we noted above, after the 7th Class of the *Giannasio*, Anthony's formal education ended. He took up his studies again with the ardor of a fervent soldier, who had stopped along the march, and who then hurried to catch up to his battalion. He might also be compared to a miser, who gives his every effort to make up for the gains he did not realize.

While he was still living with his family in Bassano, and had made the decision to become a religious, he took up his studies again, under the direction of one of the Priests stationed there, as has been said. When he later came to the Congregation, he dedicated himself to them wholeheartedly. He never would have taken recreation if obedience had not obliged him to it. He began to steal time from his sleep to dedicate it to study. In his studies, he was never ruled by his own tastes of personal preferences by concentrating on one subject more than another. Under obedience, he applied himself with the same love to those studies which were considered necessary, as well as to those that were only useful, or helpful. He also applied himself to those fields that he enjoyed, with the same ardor that he applied himself to those he found difficult, or dry. Once his Greek teacher suggested that as he was older, and burdened with other studies, that he should just read over Homer. He felt, though, that more was necessary for him, so that he would not look out of place in front of the other students. He listened to the counsel with respect and expressed his gratitude for it. Without neglecting his other work, he still found time to carry out with minute diligence all of his Greek assignments. He took notes of every explanation and comment that he heard in school.

He did, though, give the majority of his time to sacred studies, the importance of which he understood well. Proof of this is had in the considerable amount [36] of his papers that contain philosophy notes, dogma and moral notes, Patrology, Exegesis and Canon Law. His papers abound in citations from the Fathers and Catholic Doctors. Whatever he felt could be useful to him, he noted. He wrote down anecdotes and the sayings of famous scholars, and passages from modern orators. He recorded statements of unbelievers concerning the beauty and evident credibility of our holy religion. He noted many examples derived from the lives of the ants, which he always enjoyed reading.

His notes also included physics and the fine arts. From various books and even from newspapers and periodicals, he gathered useful observations, and arguments concerning false philosophies, the fallacy of rationalism, the slavery of liberalism and in the freedom enjoyed by evil, while being denied to the good.

He dedicated many pages in these notes for all that served to defend the Church and the Pope, for whom he manifested a profound love. He was convinced that a **Missionary** needed a profundity of learning to oppose the ready, but shallow reasons of unbelievers, who so easily spread their infection among the people. How quickly does specious reasoning provide arms to fight against that truth and morality that are upheld by the Catholic faith and the Papacy. He was willing to defend these even to the shedding of his own blood.

It was, therefore, the spirit of faith and devotion that nourished his devotion and faith. He never experienced the temptation to take [37] time from his Spiritual Exercises, to provide more time for study. He used all his free time for prayer. Above everything else, he employed great diligence in his daily meditation, observing those inviolable laws and rules prescribed by St. Ignatius of Loyola. The grace to make it well was one of those for which he continually prayed.

He used to say:

MEDITATION IS THE MIRROR IN WHICH THE SOUL LOOKS AT ITSELF, JUST AS THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE IS THE WATER WITH WHICH IT WASHES OUT IT STAINS, OR THE KNIFE THAT CUTS OUT THE WEEDS. MEDITATION IS THE LIFE OF THE RELIGIOUS, AND FOR NO REASON WHATSOEVER, SHOULD HE OMIT IT, NO MATTER WHAT IT MIGHT COST HIM.

He was not content with the half hour prescribed by the rule, but every day, he used to make a second half hour, according to the suggested method. He was thoroughly convinced of the need of prayer.

In this regard, these words of his are memorable:

FOR THE RELIGIOUS, PRAYER OUGHT TO BE HIS SPECIAL OCCUPATION, HIS GREATEST DELIGHT AND HIS COMFORT. HE HAS RENOUNCED BY VOW ALL THAT THE WORLD OFFERS TO PLEASE AND COMFORT HIM. AND TO WHOM WILL HE TURN, THEN, IN HIS AFFLICTIONS, IF NOT TO THE GOD OF CONSOLATIONS – TO HIM, EXPOSING AS TO A FATHER, ALL HIS NEEDS, HIS SUFFERINGS, HIS DEFECTS AND HIS DESIRES? IF A RELIGIOUS DOES NOT PRAY, OR IF HE PRAYS BADLY, VERY SOON HE WILL LOSE HIS VOCATION, OR HE WILL LEAD A DISSOLUTE LIFE IN RELIGION AND WILL BECOME A SCANDAL TO OTHERS.

Since the spirit of prayer cannot remain in a soul that is subdued by the senses, he gave this reason why he restrained and mortified himself [38] so much: 'Every act of abstinence is a blow to his flesh and to his appetites. From this, the soul more easily rises to taste the sweetness of prayer.'

Whenever he felt that the fervor of his study had lessened because of his studies, he took comfort in this passage of a letter of St. Ignatius. The Saint wrote it to his sons concerning their Aridity of Spirit. Fr. Conte copied it down on a scrap of paper:

THE APPLICATION OF THE MIND IN THE SPECULATIVE SCIENCES SOMEWHAT DRAINS, OR DRIES UP THE AFFECTION. NEVERTHELESS, THESE VERY STUDIES ARE DIRECTED PURELY FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD. OF THEMSELVES, THEY ARE EXCELLENT DEVOTIONS. WHENEVER THE FOUNDATION OF VIRTUE IS NOT NEGLECTED, AND THERE IS GIVEN TO PRAYER THAT TIME THAT IS PRESCRIBED BY THE CONSTITUTIONS, IT MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE WHETHER OR NOT IT IS DISTURBED BY THIS. WE SHOULD RATHER TAKE FROM THE HAND OF GOD, AND ACCEPT WHATEVER HE IS PLEASED TO GIVE US. WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONCERNED WITH WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT, NAMELY PATIENCE, HUMILITY, OBEDIENCE AND CHARITY.

Anthony coupled his scholastic efforts with those of his piety. He did his best to attain the exalted purpose of his vocation, which is to glorify God, and to sanctify himself and others.

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Chapter 5

Minor Orders – Major Orders - Priesthood

The soul of the just man is the heaven of God, says St. Gregory the Great [cf. *Hom. 38, In Evang.*] It is there that He places His throne. If the soul is faithful to His love, or rather to the treasures of His grace showered upon it, He renders it majestic. It is adorned in an ineffable way, with a myriad of stars, even more than is the firmament.

Whoever strives to reach the sublimity of the Priesthood, God himself prepares such a soul, to receive the divine configuration of His Son, the Eternal Priest. He infuses into it a stupendous flow of graces and such an abundance of favors, that all that is needed is the fidelity of man, and this omnipotent liberality continues.

Anthony was just such a faithful soul. Hence, we can have some idea of the abundance of graces that God showered upon him, as he ascended like steps to the Priesthood, the Major and Minor Orders. In his papers, however, he has only provided us with a glimpse of these favors. He has noted only his deep conviction of his own unworthiness, and disregard for himself. As these were the thoughts uppermost in his mind, he shows repeatedly his desire [40] to humble himself all the more, as God elevated him in Levitical honor.

On his part, he neglected nothing to dispose himself for the effusion of the Divine Spirit. He made the prescribed Retreat before receiving Minor Orders. These were conferred on him the same month that he made his Perpetual Profession. From his notes, we know that he prayed to Mary most holy, to St. Joseph, St. Anthony his Patron, to his Guardian Angel, to St. Aloysius Gonzaga and to St. John Berchmans. He wrote:

I ASK YOU TO PRESENT MY NEEDS TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS, THAT HE MIGHT TAKE ME UNDER HIS PROTECTION. FROM THIS, WILL I HAVE THE LIGHT, THE STRENGTH AND THE GRACE TO KNOW ALWAYS BETTER THE TRUE PURPOSE FOR WHICH I CAME TO RELIGION, THE TRUE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY VOWS AND THE DISPOSITIONS THAT ARE NECESSARY TO SET OUT ON THE PATH TO THE PRIESTHOOD... I REALIZE THAT I MERIT NONE OF THIS, AND I WOULD NOT EVEN DARE TO ASK FOR IT. HOWEVER, I ASK YOU FOR ALL THIS IN VIEW OF THE MERITS OF MY BELOVED FATHER AND FOUNDER, GASPAR BERTONI. FOR HIM, I ASK GLORIFICATION, AND THAT I WILL NOT BE UNWORTHY OF HIM, BUT RATHER THAT I MAY BE ANIMATED BY THAT SAME PRIESTLY SPIRIT.

Impelled by the continual desire he felt to reform his own life, he wrote:

SINCE TRUE HOLINESS DOES NOT CONSIST IN DOING GREAT THINGS, BUT IN DOING THE ORDINARY THINGS WELL, AND WITH A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE — AND FOR ME, AS A RELIGIOUS, IN THE EXACT OBSERVANCE OF THE RULES — I WILL REVIEW MY EVERY ACTION OF THE DAY, BEGINNING WITH THE RISING IN THE MORNING TO SEE HOW I AM CONDUCTING MYSELF.

He made these resolutions:

- 1. BE PROMPT IN GETTING OUT OF BED, IN DRESSING MODESTLY, QUICKLY. I WILL RECITE THE PRESCRIBED PRAYERS ATTENTIVELY. I WILL ALSO SAY A FEW PRAYERS OF MY OWN CHOOSING, BUT I WILL SAY THEM WELL.**
- 2. DILIGENCE IN MEDITATION, TRANQUILITY AND RECOLLECTION.**
- 3. DO ALL THINGS IN THE PRESCRIBED TIME AND PLACES, AND WITH THE RIGHT INTENTION. DO NOT MENTION YOURSELF, NEITHER YOUR FAULTS, NOR YOUR VIRTUES.**
- 4. DURING SPIRITUAL READING, BE ATTENTIVE TO GOD, AS IN IT, HE SPEAKS TO US.**
- 5. USE KINDNESS, AND BE NOT OVER-BEARING, EVEN IN GIVING CORRECTIONS, TO AVOID EMBITTERING ANYONE.**
- 6. KEEP CUSTODY OVER YOUR SENSES, AND DO ALL THINGS CAREFULLY.**

At the close of this Retreat, he noted: 'By the intercession of Mary, my Holy Patrons, and my Father Founder, I passed these days in much peace'.

On March 20, 1886, he received the Sub-Diaconate. From his notes, we see that his sentiments were still much the same: 'O, happy day! what graces have been

bestowed on me! I see in them the work of the Lord. Who will keep me from giving my all to Him?’

In this exulting state, he also made note of the new sacred ties that bound him more closely to God. He wrote:

HOW YOU ARE INDISSOLUBLY BOUND! O! WHAT PLEASURE I EXPERIENCE IN SEEING FULFILLED SO FULLY MY ARDENT AND LONG-TIME DESIRE TO CONSECRATE MYSELF ENTIRELY, BY AN ETERNAL OATH TO THE LORD. LORD, YOU AFFIX THE SEAL, AND IMPLANT THE NAIL WITH YOUR GRACE.

By his Sacred Ordination, and by his Religious Vows, he felt himself entirely departed from this world. He felt as though he had been placed in the very heart of the Catholic Church, and that he was enclosed [42] within the very soul and spirit that vivifies it. In this spirit, he wrote:

O LORD, HOW GREAT IS MY GRATITUDE, MY CONTENTMENT AND MY JOY IN FINDING MYSELF IN THE BOSOM OF THE ROMAN, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC CHURCH, AND TO BE PLANTED IN ONE OF ITS MOST CHOICE GARDENS! HOW ALIVE HAS BEEN MY FAITH, HOW BEAUTIFUL THE RESOLUTIONS AND PROPOSALS, HOW GENEROUS MY ACT OF OBLATION DURING THESE DAYS OF MY CONSECRATION THROUGH THE SUB-DIACONATE. O! HOW MUCH HAVE I ESTEEMED THE GREAT GRACE OF MY RELIGIOUS VOCATION! TO SEE MYSELF DOUBLY BOUND AND CONSECRATED AS A HOLOCAUST, AND TO FIND MYSELF WITHOUT EFFORT AND ANXIETY LIVING IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF VIRTUE AND GOOD!

In this continuing state of soul, he received the Diaconate on June 19, 1886. On this day, the heaven of his soul was inundated with peace and light, and was over-flowing with love. These were the effects of the multiple grace with which the Lord adorned His choice Minister.

However, as the day of his Ordination approached, these joyful sentiments vanished. In their place, there arose in him a most violent agitation of spirit. It became so acute, that it brought about an intense, interior suffering with which, except for rare exceptions, he was to endure throughout the remainder of his life. We will note, as our narrative continues, the descriptions of this that he has left in his writings. There were doubts, periods of dryness and temptations against the faith that sorely tried him. He prayed and begged for help, he had recourse to Mary, with the confidence of a son. He also invoked his Holy Patrons. This trial in no way led his soul off the path, but he steadfastly went on in preparation for his great day. His heart was more decided, and his will more resolute in the work of his own sanctification, no matter what it would cost him.

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This was a time of great difficulty for young Anthony. Ordinarily, the newly anointed of the Lord, especially during the first days after their Priestly Ordination, experience the joys of Paradise. For him, though, these were days of struggle and trial. Surely,

whoever looks at it in the light of faith, as is but proper, can profit from it. In suffering, he only deepened his virtues, and his resolute soul acquired an even stronger fiber. If the Lord, rather than leading him to Mount Tabor, had instead brought him to a bloody Mount Calvary, He did it to bring out in him an even greater similarity with the Eternal Priest and Victim, Jesus Crucified.

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Chapter 6

His First Mass and Assignment to Pavia

Anthony Conte was ordained a Priest by His Eminence, Cardinal di Canossa, Bishop of Verona, on the 7th of August 1887. It was the Feast of St. Cajetan of Thiene, the Wonder-worker, who was one of his heavenly Patrons. On the following day, Fr. Anthony offered the Bloodless Sacrifice for the first time, in the Church of the Stimate in Verona. His First Mass was celebrated at the hour when the young boys of the Marian Oratory were assembled there for their customary practices of piety. At such an occasion, as a First Mass, much edification is derived. Perhaps during it, in some of the boys, the first seed of a vocation is planted.

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On such an occasion as this, the Church and the House are permeated with an extraordinary and most pleasant spirit. This particular service, however, was especially moving, and more than a few shed tears. On that day, his fellow students and Confreres manifested their happiness in the verses and the compositions that they presented. There were also many people from Bassano who expressed their affection and consideration for their fellow townsman.

His parents merit special mention, as on that day, they wanted to do all that they could to increase the splendor of their son's day. The entire family was present for the Mass, and all received Holy Communion from his hands, with exemplary piety. On this day, however, Fr. Anthony was the center of attraction. In all the honor shown to him, and the best wishes and congratulations heaped on him, he indicated his sincere and grateful appreciation. His customary unassuming and humble manner, was in no way altered. The sublimity of his new state, rather than gladdening him, only caused him to tremble. It was as though, that fear of the saints, that inspires fortitude and gives the soul the courage to undertake even the most difficult services for God.

Fr. Anthony sought to attain this divine strength from the Eucharistic sacrifice. From that day onward, he celebrated it every day with the utmost devotion. He prepared himself for the apostolate to which he was very soon to be assigned by obedience.

He was just 30 years of age, and a priest of but a few months, when the Superior General assigned him to Pavia. He was sent to assist **[45]** the two Priests

who had been stationed there in 1885, to work under the present Bishop of Pavia, His Excellency, Augustine Riboldi. This celebrated Bishop has renewed in our times the example of St. Charles Borromeo, to elevate the state of that Diocese. It has suffered much from Jansenism, which now, thanks to God, has just about spent itself. It has also been plagued by disbelief, which unfortunately, is still firmly entrenched there, and which wants to be the absolute mistress.

This was made very clear when our Fathers first arrived there. The whole city was up in alarm, because of the rampant and wild radicalism. Hand-bills were in evidence along the streets, insults, derision and appeals to the excessive patriotism of the people. Articles appeared in the press, and terrible threats were leveled at Religious. Whatever the art of evil could conjure up, was thrown into the fray. Formal protests were registered with the public officials.

These officials then sought information from Verona, and were informed that these men were but poor Religious, and that they were harmless and peace-loving citizens. Freemasonry was forced into silence, and had to restrain its fury.

It was to this thorny field that young Fr. Conte was sent in October 1887. On his arrival, he was assigned to teach in the night school, and to preach on holy days to the Men's Oratory of San Dalmazio. At first, he experienced great difficulty and even repugnance in this ministry. He wrote: 'I have come to know the truth of these words: *The Lord is my helper in my struggle!*'

He experienced an even greater reluctance in hearing Confessions, especially [46] of women. Nevertheless, he obeyed with his usual docility and promptness. He saw for himself how the Lord leads the obedient soul to triumph over every obstacle. I think it would be revealing to note here a candid letter he wrote to the Superior General, dated June 6, 1888. In these letters to the Superior, he frequently gave an account of himself, and his work at Pavia:

DURING THESE DAYS, I HAVE BEEN VERY BUSY. IT SEEMS THAT I AM BECOMING AN EXPERIENCED CONFESSOR. ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE COME HERE FOR CONFESSION. THEY SAY THAT IN OBEYING, ONE NEVER ERRS, AND I CONFESS, THAT I HAVE CLEARLY EXPERIENCED THE HELP OF THE LORD IN SOME OF THE MORE INTRICATE CASES. A DAY NEVER PASSES THAT WE DO NOT LAND SOME BIG FISH — THAT IS, SOME LONG TIME SINNER RETURNS TO THE SACRAMENTS.

In August, he wrote to a friend of his:

THIS IS MY LIFE: THE HOUSE AND THE CHURCH — UP AND DOWN THE 60 STEPS TO THE SACRISTY, THE CONFESSIONAL AND MY ROOM. LAST WEEK, HOWEVER, I WAS MORE OUT OF THE HOUSE THAN IN IT. FIRST, THERE WAS THE DIOCESAN SYNOD, WHICH WE ALL ATTENDED. THEN, I WENT TO THE CANOSSIAN CONVENT TO HEAR THE CONFESSIONS OF THE YOUNG GIRLS WHO ARE ON RETREAT THERE. AT 5:00 EVERY MORNING, THERE ARE PEOPLE WAITING AT MY CONFESSIONAL. IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I AM ACCUSTOMED TO GETTING UP EARLY, EVEN AT THE COST OF MY REST. I READ DURING THESE DAYS THAT TO BE A GOOD CONFESSOR, THERE ARE NEEDED 25 OUNCES OF LEARNING, 50 OF PATIENCE AND 100 MORE OF PRUDENCE. THIS IS CERTAINLY A STRANGE PROPORTION, BUT A

TRUE ONE. I KNOW THAT I AM LACKING IN THE FIRST TWO INGREDIENTS, BUT I MAKE UP FOR IT WITH THE THIRD, THAT I OFTEN HAVE TO EMPLOY.

[47] He developed these same thoughts in a few lines which I will cite from a letter that he wrote to one of our Priests, who was his Director in Verona:

EVERY DAY, I AM MORE CONVINCED THAT ABOVE ALL, BECAUSE OF THE MODERN IGNORANCE OF RELIGION, AND THE FALSE TEACHINGS THAT ARE IMPARTED SO OPENLY, THE 3 VOLUMES OF GURY ARE NO LONGER SUFFICIENT. A FOURTH IS NEEDED, THAT WOULD INCLUDE A TRACT '*ON MERCY*'. COMPASSION IS SO NECESSARY, AS WELL AS KINDNESS AND CHARITY — AND TO BE CONTENT WITH ACCOMPLISHING JUST WHAT WE CAN

Who cannot see in these words the heart of a true Father and Pastor of souls? His style has a certain grace, that is both pleasing and edifying. Here is another example of it, that even better reveals the blessing of God on the works in which Fr. Anthony was a witness and had a part. This letter was written in November 1888, to one of his Confreres:

I HEARD THAT THERE WAS A POSSIBILITY THAT YOU WOULD BE COMING HERE AS A COMPANION FOR ME, BUT NOW ALL THIS IS CHANGED. HOW MUCH YOU WOULD HAVE REJOICED IN THE LORD, AND WHAT CONSOLATIONS WOULD YOUR DELICATE AND RELIGIOUS HEART EXPERIENCE, ESPECIALLY THIS MONTH. WE CELEBRATE DURING THESE WEEKS THE PRINCIPAL FEASTS OF OUR CHURCH — THAT IS, THE PATRONAGE OF MARY MOST HOLY, AND THE OCTAVE MEMORIAL FOR THE POOR SOULS.

THEY WERE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND EDIFYING DAYS UNDER EVERY ASPECT, AND ALSO MOST FRUITFUL. THERE WAS AN EXCELLENT ATTENDANCE AT THE SERMONS — IN FACT, THE CHURCH WAS FILLED TO THE BRIM. IT WAS NOT JUST THE PIOUS OLD WOMEN WHO CAME, BUT ALSO MEN AND THOSE OF THE HIGHEST STATION. THERE WERE GREAT CONVERSIONS OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, WHO FOR 22, 15 OR 10 YEARS HAD LIVED BAD LIVES. HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS TO SEE NOT ONLY THE ORDINARY PEOPLE, BUT ALSO THOSE OF IMPORTANCE COMING HERE IN PENANCE TO CONFESS THEIR SINS.

In another letter, he manifests a similar spirit:

I CAN ONLY BLESS THE DAY THAT I WAS ASSIGNED HERE TO PAVIA. I AM ALL THE MORE HAPPY ABOUT IT BECAUSE I KNOW THAT I NEVER MANIFESTED ANY PREFERENCE, BUT ONLY AN ABSOLUTE INDIFFERENCE. THEREFORE, WHAT HAS HAPPENED IS THE RESULT OF THE INFALLIBLE WAY OF OBEDIENCE.

He was imbued with a grasp of the two great means of meeting with success in work for souls: prayer and learning. He was a most diligent student of moral theology. Sometimes he even brought a Volume of Gury into the Confessional, or the synthesis he had made of it. In whatever time was available to him, he would read it on his knees, bare-headed. He rarely went for a walk, but was most often in his room, the sacristy with a book in his hands. Every day, with special prayers to the Holy Spirit, he asked for the necessary light for the direction of souls. He alternated his study with prayer, which therefore, can be said to have been continual with him.

He often knelt before the Blessed Sacrament or a Crucifix, and would remain in the same position for a long time. He would beg mercy for himself, and on poor sinners. He inflicted on himself all those penances he was permitted to perform. Such was his zeal that it often brought him to forget his breakfast. Many times, it was necessary to call him for dinner, and to remind him to eat.

His virtuous life soon was very well known. Many came to admire [49] him, and were moved to repentance by him. His life was a continual sermon, silent but eloquent. He brought many souls to God by his words, but many more by his example – and still more by his prayer. The Holy Doctor, St. Bernard says that prayer is the greatest weapon in the apostolate: *word, example and prayer, but the greatest of these is prayer!*

His sincere charity appeared to externs as the fire of zeal, but to his Confreres, it appeared under the form of kindness, patience, diligence and thoughtfulness. One of these men said of him:

ONCE I WAS VERY UPSET AND WAS ON THE VERGE OF TEARS. FR. ANTHONY STOOD BY ME, AND DID ALL HE COULD TO CONSOLE ME. HE NEVER LEFT MY SIDE, UNTIL HE SAW THAT THIS CRISIS IN ME HAD PASSED. HE STAYED WITH ME, AND EVEN GAVE UP HIS RECREATION. AS HIS ROOM WAS QUITE DISTANT FROM MINE, MANY TIMES AFTER NIGHT PRAYERS, HE ACCOMPANIED ME TO MY ROOM. WITH HIS GREAT KINDNESS, HE MADE SURE THAT I COULD RETIRE FOR THE DAY AT LEAST SOMEWHAT ENCOURAGED. HE SUFFERED MORE FOR ME THAT I DID FOR MYSELF. WHAT CHARITY HE HAD, AND WHAT KINDNESS. I WILL NEVER FORGET HIS WORDS, NOR HIS SOLICITUDE.

I will bring this Chapter to a close with a tribute paid to Fr. Conte just after his death, by the Director of Pavia in his letter to the Superior General:

I IMPORE YOU TO SEND US SOMEONE WITH THE SPIRIT OF FR. ANTHONY. THIS BELOVED CONFRERE WAS FOR US A GEM. IN OUR CHURCH HERE, HE WAS EVERYTHING. WHEN I KNEW THAT FR. ANTHONY WAS IN CHURCH [AND HE WAS USUALLY THERE, EITHER HEARING CONFESSIONS, DISTRIBUTING HOLY COMMUNION, OR PRAYING], I WAS AT EASE, WHETHER I WAS IN MY CONFESSIONAL, OR OTHERWISE ENGAGED. I COULD ALWAYS BE SURE THAT EVERYTHING WAS ALL RIGHT, AND THAT EVERYONE WAS BEING SERVED.

Such was the life that Fr. Conte led in Pavia for 14 months – the last of his mortal life. As he increased the more in interior perfection, there still remains something to be said about those virtues which were outstanding in him. We will treat of these separately.

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Chapter 7

The Humility of Fr. Conte

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God - says the Apostle, St. Paul [Col 3:3]. These words seem to summarize what the saints call the interior, or the hidden way. Substantially, this consists in detachment from all creatures, and not allowing oneself to be motivated by nature, but only by the inspiration of grace. In this life, the soul seeks the divine good pleasure. The soul accustoms itself to look at temporal things, as it were, with one eye, while it keeps the other eye focused on eternity. It comes to consider itself as a Temple of God, in Whose presence, with loving solicitude it fulfills its duties.

Such a life does not produce weak men, that are of no use in this world, as the followers of a haughty system of thought believe. This way of life produces the genuine Christians, the apostles and the saints [51]. In the last analysis, this life is merely the Reign of God in souls. Such was the life of the Virgin Mary on earth, and that of Jesus Christ Himself. He never left that humble workshop of Nazareth, except to follow step by step, the will of His Heavenly father.

This was the ideal toward which Fr. Conte struggled to reach. In renouncing the world, he lived the hidden life in the cloister to live for God alone. Uppermost in his mind was his resolution to keep Jesus Christ before his eyes. He wrote once:

HE IS THE DIVINE EXEMPLAR — HIS WORDS ARE THE MODEL AND THE REFLECTION OF WHAT IS TO BE DONE. THEREFORE, MEDITATE AND MEDITATE OFTEN ON THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF HIS LIFE. YOU WILL THEN BE SECURE THAT YOU HAVE DONE YOUR BEST, AS GOD CERTAINLY HAS TAUGHT WHICH ARE THE BETTER AND MOST SUITABLE MEANS TO ATTAIN THIS ESTABLISHED END.

In this **School of Christ**, Fr Conte learned that the Reign of God on earth was restored by the mysteriously profound humiliations of the God-Man. In like manner, the spiritual structure of the soul must rise over the foundation of humility. He wrote: 'Let your humility be the continual theme of your reflections, your meditations, your devotions and your resolutions, because you have much need of it.'

However, since humility can so easily have a false front, and pride itself often wears the guise of humility, Fr. Conte noted this:

THE GREATEST GRACE THAT I IMPORE WITH ALL THE STRENGTH OF MY SOUL [52] RECOGNIZING, O LORD, UNDER YOUR INSPIRATION, MY OWN WEAKNESS] IS HUMILITY. NOT THAT ARTIFICIAL HUMILITY, BUT HUMILITY OF THE HEART AND JUDGMENT THAT ACQUIESCES AND SUBMITS TO ALL THINGS. IT IS NOT PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS OWN SELF-INTEREST, OR PERSONAL ADVANTAGES. IT IS THAT VIRTUE THAT KEEPS BEFORE MY MIND AND IN A MOST PRACTICAL WAY, THAT EVERYTHING COMES FROM YOU, O GOD. IT HAS US UNDERSTAND THAT FAITH AND CHASTITY ARE YOUR GIFTS, AND THAT HUMILITY ITSELF IS NOT WON BY MY EFFORTS, STRUGGLES OR EXERTIONS. IT KNOWS WELL HOW TO DISTINGUISH ALWAYS, THAT WHATEVER I HAVE IS FROM YOU, AND THAT TO YOU IS =DUE WHATEVER GLORY OR PRAISE IS DERIVED FROM MY OWN GOOD, OR THAT OF OTHERS.

Totally imbued with love for this virtue, and hatred for pride, he exclaimed:

‘OH! IF HUMILITY WAS BROUGHT TO THIS EARTH BY OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST, IF IT WAS PRACTICED AND TAUGHT BY HIM AND LEFT TO US AS AN INHERITANCE, IT IS THE PEARL OF HEAVEN. IT IS A MAGNET THAT ATTRACTS ALL GRACES, AND IT IS A SIGN OF PREDESTINATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, PRIDE IS THE CAUSE OF EVIL, AND THE ROOT OF ALL SINS. IT IS AN INHERITANCE OF THE DEVIL, AND A SIGN OF REPROBATION. HAVE PITY ON ME, O LORD, MAKE ME POUT ASIDE THE SPIRIT OF PRIDE, AND TO PRACTICE INSTEAD THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY.’

He made the following resolutions for the practice of humility:

1. IN THOUGHT: NEVER GIVE IN TO SELF-SATISFACTION, NOR ASPIRE FOR HONORS OR GREATNESS. NOURISH HUMBLE THOUGHTS, AND DO NOT FEEL YOU ARE WORTHY OF ANYTHING.

2. IN WORD: NEVER SPEAK OF MYSELF, NEITHER OF MY VIRTUES, NOR MY SHORT-COMINGS. IN BOTH INSTANCES, THE TRUE MOTIVE COULD BE PRIDE [53], ESPECIALLY WHEN I SPEAK EVIL OF MYSELF, WITH THE INTENTION THAT OTHERS WILL SPEAK WELL OF ME. THIS IS THE PRIDE OF A REAL EXPERT[!]. ALWAYS SPEAK WELL OF OTHERS, AND OVERLOOK THEIR DEFECTS. THINK OF THEM AS BETTER THAN YOU ARE, BECAUSE BEFORE THE LORD, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHO WILL BE THE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO HIM.

3. IN DEED: NEVER UNDERTAKE ANYTHING, EXCEPT FOR THE GLORY OF GOD: ‘DO ALL THINGS FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD.’ THIS IS WHAT GIVES VALUE TO ALL ACTIONS, EVEN THE MOST MEAN. HAVE A HOLY INDIFFERENCE TO WHATEVER OBEDIENCE ASSIGNS TO US, AND UNDERTAKE EVERYTHING WITH THE SAME SPIRIT, EVEN THAT WHICH IS REPUGNANT. NEVER NEGLECT ANY DUTY OUT OF HUMAN RESPECT, BUT SAY TO IT: ‘YOU HAVE COME TOO LATE – I HAVE NOT BEGUN BECAUSE OF YOU, NOR WILL I DO ANYTHING BECAUSE OF YOU.’ STRIVE ESPECIALLY TO PERFORM ACTS OF HUMILITY THAT ARE IN ACCORD WITH YOUR RULE. IF YOU ARE ACCUSED, DO NOT MAKE EXCUSES FOR YOURSELF, AS THIS IS A SIGN OF SELF-LOVE. GIVE IN ALWAYS, AND IMMEDIATELY, AND DO NOT BE THE SOURCE OF CONTRASTS IN YOUR OPINIONS. PRACTICE BOTH INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR HUMILITY – IN PRIVATE AND IN PUBLIC. DO IT IN SECRET FOR THE GREATER MERIT OF HUMILITY, AND DO IT IN PUBLIC FOR GOOD EXAMPLE. IF YOU COMMIT A FAULT, ACCUSE YOURSELF RIGHT AWAY, AND ASK FOR A PENANCE. THIS WILL SERVE AS A REMINDER TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING AGAIN.

I RESOLVE TO KISS THE FLOOR THREE TIMES EVERY MORNING, AS SOON AS I GET OUT OF BED, WITH THE INTENTION OF THANKING GOD FOR THE BLESSINGS RECEIVED. THIS WILL ALSO SERVE AS AN ACT OF RE-DEDICATION TO [54] HIM, SO THAT HE MAY PROTECT ME AND AID ME IN ALL THE ACTIONS OF THE DAY. THIS WILL SERVE TO DIRECT THEM TO HIS GLORY, WITHOUT VOLUNTARILY COMMITTING DEFECTS AND ERRORS: ‘CONFIRM THESE RESOLVES, O LORD, WITH YOUR BLESSING!’

These resolutions that he made, he kept. He had such an unassuming way about him that he never displayed the least semblance of presumption, either as a Novice, or Professed Student, or as a Priest. In the very first letter that he wrote to

the Superior General, manifesting his desire to enter the Congregation, he began by expressing the secret manner in which his vocation had developed. He not only did not de-emphasize his defects, but he even exaggerated them. He said that he had little intelligence, that his studies had been discontinued and that he had a timid nature. He considered himself as a great sinner, and that he was unworthy to live among religious men, even for the very reason that he had decided to leave the world so late.

He used to say:

HOW LUCKY ARE THEY WHO ENTER RELIGION EARLY! IF THEY ONLY KNEW MY DEFORMITY, THEY WOULD NEVER COME NEAR ME FOR FEAR OF BEING CONTAMINATED ... WITH ALL THESE SINS, I HAVE HAD SO MUCH GRACE! HOW MUCH GREATER IS MY DUTY OF CORRESPONDING! NO MATTER HOW MUCH GOOD I MAY DO, I CAN NEVER MAKE UP FOR THE SCANDAL I HAVE GIVEN.

What these 'scandals' were we have already seen. We will cite here some more of the same. A Brother states:

ON MANY OCCASIONS, I SAW THAT HE GENUINELY CONSIDERED HIMSELF AS THE LAST IN THE HOUSE. I HAVE HEARD OTHERS SAY THAT THEY SAW HIM KISS THE VERY GROUND THAT HIS CONFRERES HAD WALKED OVER. HE USED TO SAY TO ME: 'IF I ONLY HAD [55] A FRACTION OF THE HOLINESS THAT HE HAS! I WOULD THEN BE MOST CONTENT!' HE WOULD SAY THIS ABOUT THE PRIESTS, BUT MORE OFTEN ABOUT THE BROTHERS. HE GAVE ME MUCH EDIFICATION.

He had a great love for the Brothers, and he used to enjoy conversing with them. He felt that they were simple men, such that are ordinarily more receptive to devotion and the favors of God. Of the likes of these, it is written: ***His communication is with the simple.*** [Pr 3:32]. He used to volunteer to do their chores, as Porter, Sacristan, Janitor or help out in the kitchen.

It was observed, especially at Pavia, that before the Fathers he spoke but little. He manifested a reverence for them, and never contradicted them. In his pleasant way, he would agree with their statements. He was often seen dusting the banisters, and sweeping out the Confessionals, and would help clearing the table.

There was an Aspirant who had to stay at Pavia for a number of reasons. He has said:

ON OPENING THE DOOR OF FR. CONTE'S ROOM, HE SEEMED A LITTLE EMBARRASSED IN WHAT I HAD DISCOVERED WHAT HE WAS DOING. IT WAS EVIDENT THAT HE HAD BEEN STUDYING ON HIS KNEES. OTHER TIMES I SAW THAT HE HAD BEEN PRAYING, PROSTRATE ON THE GROUND, OR THAT HE HAD KISSED THE FLOOR. HE DID THIS OFTEN IN HIS ROOM, IN THE SACRISTY, IN CHURCH – OR, WHEREVER ELSE HE FELT HE WOULD NOT BE SEEN. THERE WERE TIMES THAT THE DIRTY FROM THE FLOOR WAS EVIDENT ON HIS FACE.

A Brother stated: 'Once I asked him to see a copy of his beautiful handwriting [56]. He immediately changed the subject, and began talking about something else. This is how he would act in such situations.

His personal writings are full of his sense of humility. I will record here a few of his statements:

I KNOW FULL WELL WITHOUT THE HELP OF GOD, I KNOW NOTHING, I CAN DO NOTHING, I AM NOTHING! ALWAYS REMEMBER, ANTHONY, HOW MUCH EVIL YOU HAVE DONE. REMEMBER, TOO, THE LITTLE GOOD YOU HAVE DONE — AND IF YOU DO IT AT ALL, IT IS NOT YOU, BUT IT BELONGS TO GOD, WHO ASSISTS YOU WITH HIS GRACE. IF YOU DO NOT HELP ME, I WILL FALL, O MY JESUS! — HUMBLE ME, O LORD, THAT I MIGHT FULFILL EXACTLY YOUR HOLY LAW.

When he had done a good action, he would say: 'I thank You, O Lord, for giving me the grace to perform this good act!' He always tried to hide these things out of his instinctive humility.

In his letters, he would always ask for the prayers of others. He used to refer to his own need of them in a most candid and unaffected way. Here is a passage from one of his letters to the Superior General:

I TAKE THIS OCCASION TO RECOMMEND MYSELF TO YOUR PATERNAL PRAYERS, AND ASK FOR A *MEMENTO* IN YOUR MASS — THAT THE LORD MAY NEVER TAKE HIS HAND FROM MY HEAD. AS I AM SO WEAK AND FRAGILE, I AM CAPABLE OF DOING ANY EVIL.

From this can be understood his fear that those pages to which he entrusted his secret thoughts might one day fall into the hands of others. He was afraid that his writings would change the views that others had of him, so he wrote:

I STATE THAT I KEEP THESE PAGES ON WHICH I WRITE MY MOST INTIMATE THOUGHTS AND RESOLUTIONS [57] ONLY SO THAT I ALONE MAY READ THEM, ACCORDING TO MY NEEDS. THEY WILL BE ESPECIALLY USEFUL TO ME IN THE TIMES OF MY TEMPTATIONS, THAT I MIGHT REFRESH MY MEMORY OF WHAT ONCE WAS, AND WHAT I THOUGHT AND REFLECTED. IN A PARTICULAR WAY, WILL THEY RECALL TO ME THE PROVIDENTIAL HAND OF GOD IN DRAWING ME TO HIMSELF [THIS I WILL ALWAYS CONSIDER AS A MIRACLE]. FROM THESE PAGES, I WILL ACQUIRE GREATER STRENGTH TO REAFFIRM MY POSITION, AND AS A MEANS OF GETTING UP AGAIN, IF I HAVE FALLEN BECAUSE OF MY WEAKNESS, AND LACK OF CONFIDENCE. I DECLARE THIS SO THAT IF BY ACCIDENT THEE PAGES SHOULD FALL INTO THE HANDS OF ANYONE, HE WOULD BE SO KIND AS TO BURN THEM. THIS IS MY INTENTION, BECAUSE IN ALL TRUTH, WHATEVER I HAVE WRITTEN HERE, NO ONE IS TO BELIEVE THAT I HAVE EVER ACHIEVED ANY OF IT ... THERE ARE MANY WORDS, BUT THEY ARE JUST WORDS ...

Another effect of his humility was his profound and continual sense of regret for his own faults. In his own mind, they were far more serious than they were in reality. It was a regret, however, that was soothed by his profound hope in God, which often brought him to tears of joy. Thus, the Holy Spirit states: ***the just is the first accuser of himself.*** [Pr 18:17]. Even as a Priest, he used to write to his parents asking them pardon for the hardships he feared he had caused them. In October 1888, just two months before his death, his Mother wrote to him:

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS THINK OF ASKING PARDON FOR OFFENDING US? DO YOU NOT THINK THAT YOUR MOTHER DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO FORGIVE AND FORGET? WORDS LIKE THAT FROM YOU MAKE ME [58] VERY SAD. THEY MAKE ME THINK THAT I, TOO, OUGHT CERTAINLY TO ASK YOUR PARDON, IF PERHAPS, NOT BECAUSE OF MY LACK OF LOVE, BUT RATHER BECAUSE OF MY WEAKNESS AND FRAIL NATURE, I HAVE FAILED IN ANY OF MY DUTIES TOWARDS YOU AND YOUR BROTHERS. PLEASE FORGIVE ME, ANTHONY, AND LET US LIVE TRUSTING IN THE GOOD GOD, WHO WILL SUPPLY FOR EVERYTHING IN WHICH WE MAY HAVE BEEN FOUND LACKING.

Such was his mother, who was truly worthy of this son.

The clearest indication of his genuine humility is that he kept himself meek and patient in every task. This is unusual, in that Fr. Anthony was of an irascible temperament and very sensitive. He was never seen arguing, or at odds with anyone. I do recall one time when he was angry with a Confrere, but in a short time, he asked pardon in all sincerity for it.



Chapter 8 His Poverty, Obedience and Chastity

The interior and hidden life of God resembles an enclosed garden in which beautiful flowers are abundant. These are the acts of virtue and good works. This is why the Beloved of the Canticle of Canticles, the symbol of the just soul, is called a 'Closed Garden'. She invites the Heavenly Spouse to come into this garden, to partake of its mature fruits in the sun of His divine Charity" ***Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees*** [Ct 5:1]

[59] The heart of Fr. Conte was just such a garden, and we have seen, here and there, the choice flowers growing in it, in the course of his life's story. We have perceived their fragrance – as in the preceding chapter, that of his humility. We will now treat briefly of those three virtues which form the substance of the Religious Life.

We will first treat of Poverty, which is the sister of humility. He once wrote:

CONSIDER JESUS CHRIST, WHO FROM HIS BIRTH UNTIL HIS CRUCIFIXION WAS A POOR MAN, AND DEPRIVED EVEN OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE. I, TOO, MUST PRACTICE THIS BEAUTIFUL VIRTUE, BECAUSE ONLY THEN WILL I HAVE THE TRUE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT.

He was really dedicated to the acquisition of this virtue. He was always content with what he had, even though his clothes were old and thread-bare. He ate only frugally; he not only never asked for anything, but sincerely felt he was living the life of a king. He once remarked after supper to one of the Priests: 'Don't you think that polenta and beans make a fine meal?'

As for his eating habits, we have already discussed them. If obedience had not restrained him, he would have observed the diet of a most austere Carthusian. When he entered the Congregation, he had a silver watch chain that was quite ornate. When he became a Novice, he gave it to the Director, and used instead one of copper, or tin. Later, he substituted this with a piece of string.

The pens he kept for his use were those that had been discarded by others, and he gathered them in a box on his desk. Although he was quite near-sighted, he never wore glasses. To trace the Gothic style letters, in which he was quite proficient, he would [60] use straws from a broom, or turkey feathers. His notebooks were made of scrap paper, folded in half, and sewn together. He would write in them in his very small and neat penmanship.

Even though he could have had whatever he wanted by merely asking for it, out of his love for poverty, he kept for himself only what was the most abject. In his faith, he considered everything to be of great value.

When he arrived at Pavia, he was brought to the room that had been prepared for him. At the head of the bed, he noticed a large pillow such as are used there. He removed the bolster, and said that the pillow would be enough for him. In his room, there was a little table, that was always neat and clean, the bed, a Crucifix – one, or at the most, two chairs, and a few necessary books. These were all the furnishings that he ever had.

Through this same spirit of Poverty and Mortification, as a Novice, and then as a Professed Student in Verona – and later as a Priest in Pavia, he would shave without a mirror, or shaving cream. He would use plain water, and many times, he gave himself a hair-cut. It is very evident that he kept this resolution that was found among his papers:

TAKE GOOD CARE, BECAUSE SO MANY TIMES, RELIGIOUS, AFTER HAVING LEFT FAR GREATER REALITIES, IN RELIGION, BECOME ATTACHED TO INSIGNIFICANT GOODS. LET THIS NOT BE TRUE OF YOU. UPROOT YOUR HEART FROM EVERY ATTACHMENT. IF YOU FIND THAT YOU ARE BECOMING ATTACHED TO ANYTHING, GIVE IT TO THE SUPERIOR SO THAT YOU CAN CONQUER YOURSELF.

He had also firmly resolved not to keep anything that was not absolutely necessary, not even if he had permission.

He had a like affection for Obedience, the virtue he felt was the focal point around which every community revolved. He noted in his Diary [61]:

OBEDIENCE IS THE SYNTHESIS OF THE LIFE OF JESUS AT NAZARETH. IT IS DESCRIBED IN THESE WORDS: *HE WAS SUBJECT TO THEM*. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT TO TEACH US ALL THE OTHER VIRTUES, HE USED ONLY THREE YEARS, BUT TO TEACH OBEDIENCE, HE TOOK 30.

Elsewhere in his Diary he noted:

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN HEROIC ACTS. HE WHO OBEYS, NEVER ERRS, AND EVEN IF HE SHOULD, HE WILL ALWAYS HAVE MERIT, AND GREAT MERIT. HENCE, WE MUST OBEY WHATEVER THE SUPERIORS

**COMMAND, AS THEY ARE INVESTED WITH THE AUTHORITY OF GOD.
WE MUST SEE IN THEM THE RAY OF DIVINITY.**

All that he wrote in his personal papers, he lived. What Superior was there who found in him the least resistance to his orders? Moreover, he would only manifest his difficulties, but would always add that he only mentioned them, so that the Superior might know his entire situation. His intention was never to influence the Superior to change what he had ordered. He had also resolve to anticipate and carry out what he felt the Superior would ask.

One of our Priests, who had been his Master in the Novitiate, said of him: 'He was a young man without a will of his own. To obey, he would have thrown himself into the fire!'

It was not only in exterior matters, but he submitted his judgment in all that pertained to his spiritual life and the exercises of virtue. Whenever he had doubts or anxieties, one word from his Director would restore peace and serenity to him. His spiritual fathers attest that he subjected himself to them with the serenity of a child

The Obedience that he gave to his Superiors was as evident in his [62] observance of the rule, that he considered to be the indication of the Will of God. This commitment of his to the rule began as a Novice, and he fulfilled it until his death. the young Aspirant who was with him at Pavia tells us:

WHENEVER I WENT INTO HIS ROOM AND CLOSED THE DOOR, HE WOULD GET UP FROM WHATEVER HE WAS DOING, AND OPEN IT AGAIN. AT THAT TIME IN PAVIA, THE BELL DID NOT RING FOR THE COMMON EXERCISES [DUE TO SOME EXISTING CIRCUMSTANCES]. HE WOULD ALWAYS TELL ME WHAT WAS NEXT ON THE SCHEDULE. IN THE TIMES ASSIGNED FOR SILENCE, IF I HAD GONE TO SEE HIM, HE WOULD EXPLAIN THIS TO ME IN A FEW WORDS. IN THIS, TOO, I CAN SEE IN HIM TOO, A GENUINE RELIGIOUS.

How could a soul that was so humble, so mortified and so obedient be one that was not most beautiful and adorned with extraordinary Purity? If the lily of purity blooms vigorously among thorns, what fragrance would it not have for him who was so dedicated to mortification? Even though he had a most delicate conscience, nevertheless in all his spiritual writings he does leave in this matter of Chastity the least shade of self-reproach. Rather, he refers to it as a special favor from God. After nothing that chastity is a gift from heaven, he directs to himself these words: 'And you who amidst so many dangers have been so blessed, what is your gratitude?'

However, he was far from the fallacy of abandoning himself to any sense of security. He remained faithful to the following resolutions that he recorded:

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- 1. CUSTODY OF THE SENSES, AND ESPECIALLY OF THE EYES: LOOK ONLY AT WHAT IS NECESSARY, AND DO NOT FOCUS YOUR EYES ON ANY OBJECT.**
- 2. AVOID ANYTHING THAT MIGHT BE AN OCCASION FOR YOU FOR ANY THOUGHTS THAT IS LESS THAN PURE. IF THESE SHOULD OCCUR, REMEMBER YOUR RESOLUTION THAT YOU ARE NOT TO REJECT THEM**

WITH WORDS, BUT BY IMMEDIATELY ELEVATING YOUR THOUGHTS TO JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH - TO ST. ALOYSIUS, ST. ANTHONY, ST. PHILIP, AND TO OTHER SAINTS AND RECOMMEND YOURSELF TO THEM IN A PARTICULAR WAY.

3. IN SPEAKING WITH WOMEN, OBSERVE THE RULES OF OUR VENERABLE FOUNDER. BE MODEST AND END THESE CONVERSATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. REMEMBER THE EXAMPLE OF ST. ALOYSIUS, WHO EVEN FEARED TO LOOK AT HIS OWN MOTHER.
4. AVOID PARTICULAR FRIENDSHIPS, EVEN UNDER THE GUISE OF DOING GOOD.
5. AVOID IDLENESS – TIRE YOUR BODY, AND THANK GOD FOR ALL THE OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES THAT WE HAVE, AS THESE ARE A PROVIDENTIAL REMEDY. THEY PROVIDE THOUGHTS OF A HIGHER LEVEL, AND GREATER PEACE.
6. AVOID OCCASIONS. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THEM OUT OF DUTY, BE CAUTIOUS, BUT DO NOT NEGLECT YOUR DUTY. THE LORD WILL HELP YOU SO THAT YOU WILL NOT BE ATTRACTED BY THEM.
7. MANIFEST YOUR TEMPTATIONS TO YOUR CONFESSOR IMMEDIATELY. A TEMPTATION THAT IS EXPOSED IS HALF CONQUERED.
8. GO TO CONFESSION FREQUENTLY. BRING TO IT SINCERE SORROW, AND DO NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THE PENANCE IMPOSED BY YOUR CONFESSOR, BUT ADD OTHERS.

AS COMMUNION IS THE BREAD OF ANGELS, AND THE WINE THAT GERMINATES VIRGINS, IT WILL RENDER YOUR SOUL MORE CANDID. HAVE NO FEAR OF RECEIVING IT, BUT LIVE WELL AND APPROACH IT OFTEN. HAVE DEVOTION TO MARY MOST HOLY; TAKE REFUGE UNDER HER MANTLE, AND SHE WILL DEFEND YOU AS A SPECIAL PROTECTRESS.

9. ALSO, OBSERVE THIS LAW, IF EVER IN YOUR READING, CONCUPISCENCE IS AROUSED, DISCONTINUE THAT READING – IT IS BETTER TO REMAIN IGNORANT OF SOME THINGS, AND TO LIVE INNOCENTLY.

These were the defenses that he sought for purity. He added:

IF EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, THIS MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER IS NOT WATERED, IT WILL SOON WITHER. THEREFORE, YOU MUST NOURISH IT WITH THE WATER OF PRAYER. THIS IS THE PRINCIPAL MEANS TO DRAW UPON US FROM HEAVEN THE NECESSARY STRENGTH AND CONSTANCY THAT WE MIGHT NOT BE FOUND WANTING.

We have already noted and we will see further how he watered this garden of his heart with the heavenly fruit of prayer. I should mention here this short and beautiful prayer that he often said from his boy-hood days:

O MY GOD, YOU SEE ME EVERYWHERE! KEEP GUARD OVER MY EYES, MY TONGUE, MY EARS, MY HANDS AND ALL MY THOUGHTS, THAT I MAY NEVER USE ANY ONE OF THEM TO OFFEND YOU.

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Chapter 9

His Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to the Virgin Mary and to the Saints.

The Eucharist is the center of the Universal Church, and the heart of her divine life. It is also the Object that strongly and sweetly attracts to itself the love of choice souls. The elect, drawn by their God, hidden in the shadows of this mystery, taste some droops of that torrent of delights. In heaven, the unveiled drops of that torrent of delights. In heaven, the unveiled Majesty of this same God, inebriates the chosen souls. Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament showers upon them a secret manna, a balm for their wounds, a light for their journey, a fire that purifies and tempers them, and the food that nourishes them. By It, He also becomes their Master of the interior and hidden life. He instructs them with the language of secret inspirations. He continually renews under their very eyes the example of His own hidden life of Nazareth. He teaches them His prayer of Gethsemane, and His sacrifice on Calvary. He inspires them and comforts them to love obscurity, and the sufferings of their state of life. He sanctifies them in It with recollection and prayer.

These were the reasons why Fr. Conte found such delight in conversing with his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The world would disappear from his view. Nothing else would matter to him. He would experience neither hunger, nor thirst, nor cold nor any disturbance of any sort. He would remain there on his knees before [66] the altar. He could seem suspended, most recollected with his eyes lowered and his lips moving. He would stay there for long hours, whenever his duties allowed, and it seemed as though he never wanted to leave.

He once wrote that the Blessed Sacrament was a furnace in which he wanted to be recast and tempered. For him, the Heart of Christ was truly his repose. He desired to be a Victim with Him. In dying to himself and to the world, his wish was to be buried in Him, and to live by His spirit alone. He yearned for no satisfaction, not even for those that are licit in earth. His sole delight was to bring good pleasure to his beloved Christ.

The Blessed Sacrament, then, for him had a marvelous attraction. On certain days of the year, when the Eucharist was reserved in the Novitiate Chapel, he could feel this presence of his Lord so close to his room. He not only went there for adoration as often as he could during the day, but he was hardly able to sleep during the night, so strong was his desire to keep His company. Many times, he would get up from his bed, and would spend a good part of the night before the Tabernacle.

At Pavia, many times he went behind the main altar, to where the Tabernacle was. There he would pour out his soul more intimately, and more freely. He alternated his interior prayer with exterior acts of devotion, and gave the appearance of a person who truly loved his God.

An eye witness who saw him in these acts has stated: 'There was such a look [67] on his face, and from the comportment of his person, his interior, secret joy seemed most evident.'

If this was the flame that burned within him during his visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and then, as a Priest, in the celebration of Holy Mass. Before receiving the Sacred Host from the hands of the Priest, his attitude was one of profound adoration. He prepared himself to receive this Sacred Guest with such piety that his edified companions considered him like an Angel.

After he had been ordained a Priest, he spent a long time in preparing for Mass, as well as much time in making his thanksgiving after it. In its celebration, however, he was not scrupulous. He noted this thought in his Diary: 'If you are asked as a Priest what you are doing, your answer should be I am thanking God for my Mass – after dinner, it should be, I am preparing for tomorrow's Holy Mass.'

To ascend the altar worthily, he implored the mediation of her, who on Calvary stood unmoved, next to the Cross of her Redeemer. She bore in her soul the sea of sorrows that submerged the divine humanity. She participated intimately in the great sacrifice of universal expiation, of which the Mass is a continual renewal. She thus became as a Priestess and a **Co-redemptrix**, intimately united to the Priesthood of the New Covenant. For this reason, of all those devoted to Mary, the first place is reserved for Priests.

It is certain that all the faithful, almost instinctively are inclined [68] to venerate Mary, the Mother of the Redeemed, the Hope of the Afflicted, the Refuge of the Suffering, the Ideal of Virginity and Mercy. All souls have a need from time to time for her, for a breath of fresh air, outside of the impure and difficult atmosphere of this world. The more one approaches to God through grace, the more must he love this beloved Mother, who is His most pure and perfect image. A tender devotion to Mary is the distinctive mark of the elect, and the genius of the saints.

From his childhood, Fr. Conte loved Mary sincerely and considered her always as his Heavenly Mother. He had a special devotion to her Immaculate Conception. He compiled a list of more than 200 glorious titles, relative to that mystery, taken from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. To her, and to her most chaste Spouse, he attributed the grace of his having been preserved from the dangers of the world, and led finally to the door of religion.

During his notes, were found these supplications to her:

MARY, MARY, MY HOPE AND COMFORT, COME TO ME ALWAYS WITH YOUR COUNSEL, THROUGH THE DARKNESS – BE THE GUIDING STAR THAT POINTS THE WAY THAT LEADS TO HEAVEN. O MARY, FULFILL THE OFFICE OF MOTHER, BY INSPIRING ME TO LIVE IN THE HOLY FEAR OF GOD, AND IN THE EXACT OBSERVANCE OF HIS LAW. O MARY, ASK GOD WHAT IT IS I AM TO DO HERE ON EARTH.

His heavenly Mother soon let him know what he was to do, and assisted him to carry it through. When he entered Religion, to put His servant to the proof, allowed his spirit to be permeated with fears and darkness. In these difficult moments, he would turn to his Heavenly Mother and he would often receive from her such comfort, that he made a note of it in his diary, in most sincere expression of gratitude.

Not only as a Novice, but also as a Priest, in addition to the Rosary, and the other customary devotions, he also recited her 'Little Office.' At the striking of the

hour, he used to say a *Hail Mary*. On Saturdays, and during Novenas in preparation for her Feasts, he would add some penances to his prayer. God alone knows his aspiration and ejaculations that he continually directed to her. On her Feast Days, he opened his heart to her in most tender affections, and with his filial requests. He would ask her for the grace to live only for God. It would be better to cite his own words:

TODAY, THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION, I PRAYED MUCH TO MARY MOST HOLY, THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF ST. JOSEPH. ON THIS DAY, SHE, BY HER HUMBLE AND TRUSTING CONSENT, BROUGHT DOWN FROM HEAVEN THE ETERNAL WORD, WHO BECAME INCARNATE IN HER, THUS BEGINNING THE REDEMPTION [UNDER THIS ASPECT, THIS IS THE GREATEST FEST]. I PRAYED THAT AS I RECEIVED THIS SAME ETERNAL WORD IN HOLY COMMUNION, THAT HE MIGHT BE INCARNATE WITHIN ME, AND TAKE FLESH IN ME, BY HAVING ME LIVE A NEW LIFE, BY INFUSING HIS SPIRIT INTO ME. MAY THIS, THEN, BE THE PRINCIPLE MEANS AND THE END OF ALL MY ACTIONS.

He used to delight in talking about her to others, especially with children and uneducated persons. Many times, he would then persuade them to pray with him to her.

His devotion to Mary led him to a devotion to St. Joseph. He wrote: **[70]**

I ALWAYS PRAYED MUCH TO ST. JOSEPH FOR HIS AID. TO HIM, I OWE SO MANY EXTRAORDINARY GRACES. AMONG THESE GRACES I CONSIDER THE GREATEST, MY DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED MOTHER. [I WILL ALSO SAY THAT THROUGH THIS DEVOTION TO HER, AND IN RELATION TO IT, I CAME TO LOVE ST. JOSEPH.

He then enumerated a rather lengthy list of what these 'extraordinary graces' were: having been preserved from the corruption of the world, and having been able to break all chains that impeded him from giving himself entirely to God. He considered as graces that he had entered a Congregation, placed under the protection of the Holy Souses, Mary and Joseph, his Vow of Chastity, his being able to educate youth and his constancy during Novitiate.

Of this Novitiate, he wrote: 'Because of my tepidity and negligence, I truly merited to be dismissed.' He also noted his Profession, Ordination, and many other graces of his are on this list.

He used to exhort others to be devoted to St. Joseph, and to hope for all things in the intercession of a Saint, who was so good and powerful before God. He chose this Saint almost as the Director of his soul, as he was persuaded that St. Joseph was not only a model, but that he was the master of those souls who lived the interior life. He often said this following prayer:

O BLESSED ST. JOSEPH, I ENTRUST MYSELF ENTIRELY TO YOUR PROTECTION. AS ONCE YOU WERE THE VIGILANT GUARDIAN OF THE CHILD JESUS, GUIDE ME IN ALL MY ACTIONS. RECOMMEND ME TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY, THAT THROUGH THIS GATE OF SALVATION, I MIGHT TAKE REFUGE IN THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS.

A young man who was often in Fr. Conte's company, remarked:

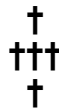
HOW MUCH HE LOVED ST. JOSEPH! HE OFTEN USED TO SAY TO ME: 'PRAY TO ST. JOSEPH TO OBTAIN THE GRACES YOU NEED.' I TOLD HIM SOMETIMES THAT I HAD PRAYED MUCH AND HAD OBTAINED NOTHING. HIS REPLY WAS: 'FAITH IS WHAT IS NEEDED, FAITH!' HE ALWAYS GAVE ME COURAGE, AND WOULD SUGGEST DEVOTION TO THIS GREAT SAINT. HE WOULD OFTEN CITE THE EXAMPLE AND THE WORDS OF ST. TERESA TO WHOM HE WAS MOST DEVOTED.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, therefore, were the 'triple cord' that bound his heart. Under a little picture of the three of them, he wrote:

'MAY JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH BE THE THEME OF YOUR THOUGHTS, THE SIGH OF YOUR SOUL, AND THE OBJECT OF YOUR AFFECTIONS — YOUR STRENGTH, YOUR ANCHOR AND YOUR SURE REFUGE.'

In addition to the Guardian Angel, and St. Anthony, he was also very devoted to St. Teresa, whom he believe obtained for him many graces. He attributed his intact purity to the intercession of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and St. Philip Neri. In St. John Berchmans, he found a model of heroic perfection in regular observance, whom he imitated. In St. Stanislaus, he admired the resolution of giving himself to God at a tender age. Fr. Conte always regretted the fact that he has so long resisted similar graces in his own life. He was devoted to St. Bassiano and Blessed Joanna Maria Bonomo, the Protectors of his native Bassano. He emulated St. Francis de Sales, and was a perfect imitator of the Saint's meekness and kindness. He prayed to St. Francis of Assisi for his love of poverty. He was devoted to Margaret Mary Alacoque, and prayed to be inflamed with devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He also prayed to St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori [72], and St. Vincent de Paul. He also had a special devotion to the Venerable Cure' of Ars, John B. Vianney.

There were also other saints to whom he prayed, according to his needs. In his prayer, he would call on the merits of our own Venerable Founder, to whom he attributed more than one grace that he received. He admired the Founder's heroic virtues, and was proud of them, as a true son. He earnestly hoped that he would see the Founder one day raised to the honors of the altar.



Chapter 10

His Charity toward God

Lastly, something should be said concerning his Charity. This is the supreme virtue, the fire enkindled by the Son of God on earth, and which is the summit and the crown of holiness. It is the Breath of the Holy Spirit, that in the enclosed garden of the hidden life it nourishes, vivifies and beautifies everything. It is the one virtue that includes all the others, and elevates them to a divine level. Every other virtue is merely a different manifestation of it. It is the virtue that, without which, were I to speak all tongues, possess all learning astonish the world with extraordinary prodigies, I would still be nothing. On the other hand, when it is possessed a simple laborer, a mother of a family, in which Providence has placed them, can be elevated to the merit of heroes.

Just what is a saint? He is a person full of charity who loves God for Himself, one who lives himself in God and his neighbor [73] because of God. When this flame permeates a soul, this detaches itself from everything else, to fly freely to the embrace of the Supreme Good.

This is a description of Fr. Conte. The comforts of life, its pleasures, its enticing allurements, friendships, freedom and the strongest affections of his heart were all sacrificed out of love for God. For this reason, mortifications were dear to him, as were dependence and the obscurity of his humble room. How many times, after his Profession and Ordination, his good parents desired to have him home for a few days. He certainly had nothing to fear from them, and his Superiors granted him permission. However, he had a fear of interrupting his pious exercises even more of taking back the least particle of the holocaust he had made on the altar of divine love. Therefore, he never acquiesced to the requests of his parents.

He not only sacrifices the things that were his, but even more so, did he sacrifice himself. From the morning until night, he was motivated by the impulse of obedience and charity. He did not have, as has been stated, a will of his own, but rather gave every effort to contradict it. Among his resolutions, this one was found: 'Do always that which you find repugnant, and avoid that to which you are inclined.'

What more could be asked? He even denied himself willingly his spiritual inclinations, in accord with the divine good pleasure. He preferred rather the God of Consolation than the consolations of God. He wrote:

YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU, O LORD, ABOVE ALL THINGS, EVEN WITHOUT THOSE CONSOLATIONS. THIS NOT BECAUSE IT IS MY DUTY, OR BECAUSE OF ANY FEAR OF YOU — BUT, BECAUSE YOU MERIT IT, [74] O INFINITE GOODNESS. IT IS ONLY RIGHT AND JUST THAT ALL I HAVE, AND ALL THAT I AM, SHOULD RETURN TO YOU, THANKS TO THE MAGNET OF YOUR LOVE. BECAUSE OF YOUR LOVE, I CAME INTO BEING, AND THROUGH YOUR LOVE, I AM ALL THAT I AM. BIND ME TO YOU, WITH TIGHT CHAINS, THAT I MAY NEVER DEPART FROM YOU, THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.

His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was founded in sentiments such as these. These explain his spirit of prayer, which could be seen in the near continuous movement of his lips, and which only stopped with his last breath. These sentiments also have us understand his love for penance, as it is said: 'without sorrow, no one lives in love.'

Although the Superiors were very hesitant in granting him permission for bodily penances, the Lord was more willing to try him with sufferings of the soul. It is through these that God strongly proves them who love Him. From his writings, we see that Fr. Conte's heart was often as dry as the desert, and his mind was clouded with darkness. He was severely tried by doubts and anxieties, and was tempted to lose all confidence in God. All that he did, seemed to an illusion to him, and he felt that faith and hope were empty dreams. There were times he felt that there was no solid ground under his feet, and the fury of violent passions were unleashed against his heart, that he was much like a small boat caught in a raging storm.

He once wrote to the Superior General:

I FEEL SUCH A BITTER STRUGGLE OF VARIOUS PASSIONS AND TEMPTATIONS, THAT OPPOSE EVERY DESIRE AND EFFORT TO FREE MYSELF OF THEM ... IT SEEMS VERY CLEAR THAT AS THE LORD IS HURT, THAT HE WANTS ME TO REPAY IN THIS LIFE FOR MY LONG RESISTANCE TO HIS GRACE.

He wrote to an aunt of his who was a Nun:

THE ENEMY OF ALL GOOD [77] EMPLOYS ALL HIS MIGHT TO OBSTRUCT MY PATH. HE USES EVERY MEANS AND WILL TO OPPOSE EVERY GOOD THAT I UNDERTAKE IN MY OWN BEHALF, AND THAT OF OTHERS. IT SEEMS HIS INTENTION IS, IF NOT TO TIRE ME, AT LEAST TO LESSEN MY PHYSICAL AND MORAL STRENGTH. NOW THAT I AM GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF INTERIOR STRUGGLE, A DARK NIGHT AND A GLACIAL AVALANCHE.

Elsewhere, he referred to these experiences as 'the dead of night, an abyss of confusion and darkness, most painful anguish.' In the midst of such tempests, he would increase his acts of faith, and abandonment into the arms of God. He would strive to invoke Him as a Merciful Father, while considering the devil as a ruthless tyrant. When his troubled heart would keep him from such sentiment, he would take his pen in hand, and compile protestations of fidelity in God, of adherence to His infallible Word, of promises to live and die as a true son of the Catholic Church and as a Religious.

Sentiments such as these, he wrote often, as the considerable amount of his papers attest. It is true that in all his contacts with others, he gave no indication of his internal conflicts. He seemed always to be the same. However, anyone who came upon him during his solitary prayer, and who noted his unusual comportment or the expression on his face, would get some idea of his interior agony, and they would be moved to compassion.

The following notes were found among his papers:

O LORD, I DO NOT MERIT CONSOLATIONS; I AM CONTENT TO REMAIN IN THIS STATE THROUGHOUT MY LIFE - GIVE ME YOUR LOVE, AND I WISH NOTHING MORE FROM YOU.

[76] Christ, however, did not always have Fr. Conte drink from the bitter Chalice of His Passion. There were times in which He infused into His soul that consolation that is reserved for His Chosen ones. He did receive a few drops of it that overpower all the delights of this world. On such occasions, Fr. Anthony would exclaim: 'Oh! How good it is to be with Your grace, O my God!' This was the re-echo of St. Peter's words on Mount Tabor: ***How good it is for us to be here!***

At such times, the light of faith, which shortly before seemed to give such little light, shone again with its customary splendor. In one such moment, he wrote the following:

O HOLY FAITH, SUBLIME GIFT AND STUPENDOUS MIRACLE OF DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE, AND SPLENDID LIGHT THAT GUIDES ME SECURELY ALONG THE WAY OF THE ETERNAL TRUTH! YOU BRING LIGHT TO THE DARKNESS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY CHAOS OF THIS WORLD. YOU ARE THE MEDICINE FOR THE DOLOROUS ANXIETY OF MY RUTHLESS UNCERTAINTIES, AND YOU BRING SERENITY EVERYWHERE WITH YOUR BLESSED RAYS YOU ENVELOP ALL THINGS IN THE DIVINE HARMONY OF YOUR PROFOUND MYSTERIES - YOU ARE PEACE AND HAPPINESS. FROM YOU, I KNOW WHITHER I HAVE COME, AND THAT FOR ONLY A LITTLE WHILE, WILL I REMAIN HERE, AND WHERE ULTIMATELY I AM TO GO.

I would say that this prayer seems to be a Hymn taught to him by God and echoes the words of the Prophet: ***My lips will sing the Hymn, since you have taught me Your justification*** [Ps 118].

These periods of light would also pass, and the obscurity and tedium were not long in returning. Fr. Conte would then impose prayer upon himself all the more. He took extra care not to neglect a single point of his usual exercises, but rather increased them. He would find comfort in recalling the happy times of his spiritual peace, and followed blindly the path of obedience.

[77] He would find consolation in doing all he could for God, and he noted this resolution: 'I would prefer a thousand times over to suffer with Him and to follow Him to Calvary, then to enjoy for a single day the delights of this world!'

He was sustained by the grace of the Heavenly Spouse, Who from time to time would hide from those who loved Him, so that He would be more avidly sought by them. He abhorred the thought of belonging to the large, but vile number of mercenaries. Such souls, when they discover that they are not being rewarded with sensible consolations, turn back to find their delight in the diversion of the senses, in creatures and in miserable satisfaction.

From his sufferings, he found a motive to re-enkindle his fervor. He would renew his resolutions to emend his entire life, nor did he waste any time in so doing. In addition to the Community schedule, he had one of his own that regulated all the

actions of his day from 5:00 a.m. until 11:00p.m. He felt that he was no longer the master of his time, as he had consecrated it all to God by his Profession, Therefore, he worked assiduously to make the work of his day a buckler against the attacks of temptation, as St. Jerome states: *The shield of the heart is hard work.*

As if to keep himself armed, he wrote a kind of personal memoir, or list of protestations of faith, hope and charity and of the other virtues. These were also intended to be prayers to God, to Mary most holy, to St. Joseph and his holy Protectors. He placed all that he wrote, together with an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus next to his heart. He wrote: 'I intend by this to be so enclosed in this sacred Sanctuary, and enveloped with thorns [78], that I will be unable to find its exit.'

He also copied down the Formula of Vows, and the 'Testament of his Soul', which is a strong avowal of wanting to die with the dispositions of a perfect Religious and Christian. He asked that this testament of his, after his death, be placed in his grave with him.

He kept these documents close to his heart, as though to guard its entrance and to withstand the blows of the enemy. At the earliest suggestion of any temptation, he would bring his hand to his heart. This would serve as a reminder for him to renew his virtuous protestations and acts that were contained in these pages. He would thus find refuge and contentment in carrying out tranquilly what he was doing. It was, as it were, a powerful weapon with many degrees of effectiveness, that would exterminate the enemy onslaught. It was also a reminder of the obligations he had assumed before God, Whom he had resolved to serve: 'without exercising my own liberty, but rather as a slave enchained by His holy fear and love.'

So great was his desire that burned within him of uniting his will to God, that whatever adversities befell him, he would accept joyfully. To those around him, it seemed that such occasions were actually his will, and not only his acceptance of the will of God.

His sense of charity brought him to despise tepidity, and even the least offense in the service of his beloved God. He once wrote:

HOW TERRIBLE, HOW HARMFUL IS TEPIDITY TO A CHRISTIAN SOUL, NOT TO MENTION THE SOUL OF A RELIGIOUS! — HOW TERRIBLE IT IS TO SEE A RELIGIOUS FREELY COMMIT VENIAL SINS. SUCH A SOUL PIERCES THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS. TO SEE A SOUL, SO FAVORED BY HIM CORRESPOND [79] WITH SUCH LITTLE GENEROSITY, AND TO GO TO THE VERY BRINK OF OFFENDING HIM SERIOUSLY, TO HIS OWN GREAT HARM! WHAT COURAGE DOES SUCH A ONE HAVE IN RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION! HOW POORLY MUST HE RECEIVE IT. HE WILL NOT NOTICE HIM AVOIDING HIM, AND BESTOWING HIS GRACES ON OTHERS WHO ARE MORE WORTHY THAN IS HE!

This explained his earnest desire of destroying sin in souls, of setting them on the path of virtue, and of bringing them to the Redeemer. For this, he sacrificed his time, his repose, his every diversion, his food, his health — and his life. He resolved

never 'to ask for graces that would benefit only himself, that is, those that would be for his own sanctification, and without any benefit for his neighbor for the glory of God.

Fearing that he might be useless for this, he often recited this following prayer that he kept close to his heart among his other papers:

IN CASE, O LORD, YOU SHOULD SEE THAT BEING SO UNWORTHY, I AM UNABLE TO BRING ABOUT ANY GOOD, EITHER BECAUSE OF MY IMPERFECTIONS, OR BECAUSE OF MY INSUFFICIENCY, IN GOOD TIME, THEN, PLEASE ACCEPT THE OFFERING OF MY LIFE AS A SACRIFICE, OR AS AN EXCHANGE FOR THE LIFE OF ANY OF MY SUPERIORS, OR COMPANIONS, WHO MAY BE USEFUL FOR YOUR GLORY, FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE HOLY CHURCH AND THE GOOD OF SOULS. AMEN.

Whether it was because of this humble sentiment of not being able to love and glorify God as much as he should have, and wanted to – or, if in him was verified that saying of St. Philip Neri, who to inspire all to perseverance, asserted that our Lord did not usually send death to a spiritual man, without first sending him a warning of it, or giving him an extraordinary spirit [cf. Baci, *Life of the Saint*, Chapter 21] – the fact is that he, as though he had a presentiment that his last day was near, he spurred himself onward, to sanctify himself in a short time. He would remind himself that soon he would die. Unfortunately what he feared, came to be a sad reality.

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[80]

Chapter 11 His Death

Despite his delicate constitution, and his yearning for penance, Fr. Anthony generally enjoyed good health in all the time he lived in the Congregation. He was never so indisposed that he had to spend a single day in bed. At Pavia, he never complained of feeling sick, although that region is often over-cast and damp. He accepted the ordinary discomforts, and often joked about them.

I will cite only this one passage of a letter he wrote to the Superior General, dated October 26, 1888, just a few weeks before he died:

I SEND YOU THESE FEW LINES FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF OFFERING TO YOU, AS SUPERIOR, MY WHOLE BEING, AND TO SEND MY SINCEREST BEST WISHES. I WANT YOU TO KNOW OF MY AFFECTION FOR YOU – [YOU WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN, AND ARE A GOOD FATHER TO ME]. I SINCERELY APPRECIATE THE MANY WONDERFUL GRACES THAT HAVE COME TO ME IN YOU, AND MY BELOVED CONGREGATION.

This letter then goes on with many other sincere expressions of his deep affection. He then stated:

ON THE FEAST OF ST. TERESA [OCTOBER 15], I COMPLETED ONE YEAR HERE. IT WENT SO FAST, THAT THIS SEEMS LIKE THE FIRST DAY. THE BAD WEATHER IS NO BOTHER TO ME, EXCEPT THAT 'LADY FEVER' HAS PAID ME A FEW VISITS. NOW, HOWEVER, THAT 'SIR COLD' HAS ARRIVED, I AM FEELING BETTER.

In his assignment, therefore, Fr. Anthony enjoyed good health. Spiritually, too, he was happy in the thought that he was at the post that God has assigned to him. He entrusted himself entirely to God, with filial abandonment, and would not have changed places with the happiest man in the world. He rejoiced in the great harvest that he saw flourishing before his eyes. Although now, his mortal sojourn was coming to a close, no other thought, or preoccupation moved him other than working on, while there was still light. He wanted to reap as much of his harvest as he could before the fast approaching night.

The Superior General had noted that Fr. Conte had overcome the obstacles of his retiring nature, and he saw that he no longer had an inordinate fear of failing. The Superior heard of the great strides he had been making in the apostolate, and came to nourish the highest hopes for the young priest. Fr. Vignola, therefore, was most desirous of having this beloved Priest near him, and had thought of recalling him to Verona. Although Fr. Conte was indeed young in years, he was much proven in spirit. The Superior General therefore wrote to him:

WITH SINCERE GRATITUDE, I ANSWER YOUR LETTER. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE SENTIMENTS OF AFFECTION YOU EXTEND TO ME, AND FOR THE HAPPINESS YOU FIND IN THE DUTIES OF YOUR ASSIGNMENT THAT OUR CONGREGATION IMPOSES ON YOU. IN DUE TIME, I WILL RECALL YOU TO VERONA, AS AN ESTABLISHED *MISSIONARY*, READY TO TAKE ON SOME FORMAL *MISSIONS*.

[82]

Such was the encouragement of the wise Captain that made the good soldier forget his every fatigue, and to redouble his efforts. These were the hopes held for him here on earth, but God had other plans.

At the beginning of winter, an epidemic of small pox broke out in Pavia. It infected many, and a good part of them died. Our entire Community there, including Fr. Conte, were vaccinated. That same day, he began to feel quite indisposed, but little attention was paid to it. Three days later, he was confined to bed, and vomited almost continuously. The doctor was summoned, and after examining Fr. Conte, he stated: 'It is nothing to be worried about; I will stop by again tomorrow morning.'

The following day, however, the doctor diagnosed his malady as small pox, and that it had entered an advanced stage. The doctor took the Director aside and told him that Fr. Conte was bleeding internally. On hearing this, the Director became very concerned, and made sure that all the remedies were carried out. He never left Fr. Conte's bedside, as he was his Confessor.

A few hours later, he noticed that Fr. Conte had become quite restless. He was moaning and no longer able to talk. From his appearance, it was now clear that his end was near. The Director bestowed upon him all the spiritual comforts, and

repeatedly gave him absolution. Fr. Conte was aware of what was going on, and responded with a nod of his head. When the Director asked him if he wanted Extreme Unction, he indicated that he did. There was now such serenity that shone on his face that it seemed much like the light of the future joy that was awaiting him.

Without any delay, the Director administered the Last Sacraments to him, and then sorrowfully began the prayers for the recommendation [83] of Fr. Conte's soul. The other confreres had been summoned and were kneeling around his bed, overcome with grief.

These prayers had just concluded, when Fr. Conte, as in an attitude of prayer, serenely expired. It was just about noon, on the 18th of December 1888.

The doctor, who had been hastily summoned, then arrived a few minutes later. He could not believe that the end had come so quickly. His examination revealed that there had been a massive internal hemorrhage. It was then too late but it was now easy to assign the cause of his rapid deterioration. However, for a good many years Fr. Conte had not been motivated by human considerations. He considered all that happened as the provident hand of Him, Who governs all things, and Who treats with regard to all of us as sons of His Blood: ***With great favor He disposes of us*** [cf. Ws 12:18]. He lived his life in an atmosphere of faith and love of God. He investigated, adored and fulfilled His will, and with the total sacrifice of himself, he concluded his days.

As death is the echo of one's life, faith lit the candle by his bed in death. He was a Priest who lived his ordinary life in the light of this faith. He lived in the conviction that God did not count the days of one's life, as he did their works. In our piety, we are constrained to believe that God had found that his good and faithful servant, in the prime of his life, had achieved the perfect measure of merit. Hence, He did not want to delay taking him from the midst of the miseries and the iniquity of this earth. He chose to call him to dwell in the blessed company of his saints: ***Being made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled a long time: For his soul pleased God: therefore, he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities...*** [Ws 4:13, ff.]

The grief that followed Fr. Conte's death was reflected by the Director of the House of Pavia, in a letter to the Superior General:

YESTERDAY, IN OUR PROFOUND SORROW, WE ACCOMPANIED OUR BELOVED CONFRERE, FR. ANTHONY TO THE CEMETERY. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL YOU THE GRIEF THAT EVERYONE FELT AT HIS SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED DEATH.

HIS EXCELLENCY, BISHOP AUGUSTINE RIBOLDI, WEPT BITTERLY, AND WITH HIM, EVERYONE WHO KNEW FR. CONTE, DURING THE SHORT TIME HE WAS AT PAVIA. ALMOST THE ENTIRE CHAPTER OF THE CATHEDRAL, AND THE BISHOP HIMSELF, SAID MASS YESTERDAY FOR OUR DEPARTED. THE RECTOR OF THE SEMINARY, AND ITS PROFESSORS, ALSO OFFERED A MASS FOR HIM, SOME IN THE CHAPEL, AND OTHERS IN OUR CHURCH. A NUMBER OF OTHERS DID LIKEWISE. IN ALL, ABOUT 30 MASSES WERE OFFERED AS SUFFRAGE FOR THE SOUL OF FR. CONTE. AND YESTERDAY, MORE THAN 100 COMMUNIONS WERE RECEIVED FOR THE SAME INTENTION.

THE PROCESSION TO THE CEMETERY WAS SUBDUED, ALTHOUGH MANY TOOK PART IN IT. THE PROFESSORS OF THE SEMINARY, WITH THE RECTOR, WERE PRESENT AS WELL AS THE CURATES OF THE PARISH, AND THOSE OF THE NEIGHBORING PARISHES, AS WELL AS OTHER PRIESTS. THEY ALL CAME WITHOUT ANY SPECIAL INVITATIONS BEING SENT OUT.

A NUMBER OF FAMILIES SENT THEIR SERVANTS TO CARRY THE TORCHES. I CAN TELL YOU THAT THE SORROW WAS FELT THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE CITY. SOME OF OUR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY DELAYED THEIR DEPARTURE FOR THEIR CHRISTMAS VACATION SO THAT THEY COULD ACCOMPANY FR. ANTHONY TO THE CEMETERY.

I PETITIONED THE CITY GOVERNMENT TO HAVE A SPECIAL TOMB, OR A LOT, OR CRYPT IN THE CEMETERY, BUT THIS WAS DENIED. THE ANSWERED RECEIVED WAS THAT THERE WERE NONE AVAILABLE, AS THE GALLERY OF THE ARCH IN THE CEMETERY WOULD HAVE TO BE CONSTRUCTED AT OUR EXPENSE. THERE WOULD ALSO BE THE FURTHER REQUIREMENT OF ERECTING A MONUMENT. THEREFORE, WE HAD TO BURY HIM IN THE COMMON AREA.

THUS, THE PRIEST, WHO OUT OF LOVE FOR CHRIST, MADE HIMSELF POOR AND HUMBLE IN LIFE, NOW LIES IN THE PUBLIC CEMETERY, 'WHOSE REMAINS ON THE LAST DAY WILL ARISE IN SPLENDOR —

WHEN EACH ONE OF THE BLESSED WILL COME FORTH

FROM HIS LOWLY TOMB, TO THAT CHOICE BAND,

SINGING THEIR ALLELUIAH, WITH VOICE RESTORED.

[DANTE, *PURGATORY*, c. 1, v. 7; c. 30, v. 15]

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[WITH ECCLESIASTICAL APPROBATION]

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Brief Biographical Sketches

Volume I

Two Brothers

Father Peter Vignola,

Superior General,

and his brother,

Father Vincent Vignola,

of the

Congregation of the Priests

of the Sacred Stigmata

of Our Lord Jesus Christ

VERONA

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of the Life of

**Fr. Peter Vignola,
3rd Superior General**

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Chapter 8:	His Religious Life
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Compendium

of the Life of His Brother,

Fr. Vincent Vignola

Chapter 1:	Who was Fr. Vincent?
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Preface

The first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation is to be celebrated with as much solemnity as possible. The Congregation was founded on November 4, 1816, when Venerable Gaspar Bertoni entered the Stimate, with his first Companions. As a commemoration of this event, it was decided to gather Recollections of our Fathers and Brothers, who have died after 1886. The Reminiscences of our deceased confreres before this date, were already published on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola, of venerated memory.

The [First World] War, however, has discouraged any exterior celebration of this event. Moreover, it has called to arms a number of those assigned to gather these reminiscences. Therefore, they have been unable to present them in time for publication.

Only the under-signed, who is most advanced in years, being the oldest member of the Congregation and the most unoccupied, has been able to fulfill this assignment. He was given the task of compiling the reminiscences of Fr. Peter Vignola, his predecessor in the Office of Superior General; of Fr. Vincent Vignola, his Master of Novices; and of Fr. Joseph Marchesini⁶¹, his Prefect.

All three of these men were most dear to the complier – all three were native Veronese – and all three were contemporaries of our Venerable Founder. Since the others were unable to fulfill their task, the undersigned is happy to publish the biographical sketches of at least these three men. He believes that their lives can be held up as models of the Christian and Religious Life, and which, only with difficulty, could ever be surpassed.

May God grant, through the intercession of His Most Holy Mother, that this small and poorly arranged booklet, might contribute something to enkindle in us, during the centenary celebration of the Congregation, that spirit of our Venerable Founder. This spirit is in the hopes of each and every one, and the object of the efforts of us all.

From the Stimate, November 4, 1916.

Fr. Pio Gurisatti

⁶¹ Fr. Marchesini is the subject matter of Volume 2 in this series.

A
Compendium
of the Life
of
Fr. Peter Vignola,
3rd Superior General

Chapter 1

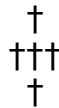
The Vignola Family

The Vignola family can very well be called a patriarchal family. The old homestead was in St. Stephen's Parish in Verona, on the street that leads to the Church of the *Madonna del Terraglio*. The family is patriarchal, not only because of the simple, affable and gentle characteristics of all its members, but above all, because of the spirit of piety and religion in which each one of them was distinguished. The members of this family gave genuine edification to the poor families, a great number of whom lived in the Vignola neighborhood.

To be persuaded even further concerning this family, two facts should be recalled here. Three sisters of the head of this family had entered Religion. They were, however, driven from their Convents at the time of the suppression of the Monasteries, carried out by Napoleon I. Another outstanding fact was that of the Vignola sons born to these blessed parents, five of them were ordained Priests. Fr. Vincent, who was the last ordained, recalled on the day he sang his First Mass, that there were all five brothers on the altar. This was indeed an unusual occurrence – in fact, it was more than rare, it was unique.

The oldest of the sons was Fr. Peter. Here we will give only a very brief biographical sketch. This could serve for the edification of all, and at the same time, to honor and revere this faultless and apostolic priest. The memory of him will move our hearts, [6] and will regenerate them with a flood of holy thoughts. He was a Priest who loved and was beloved in God, and through God. He was a Priest who was always docile and receptive to the inspirations that came to him from on high. He responded always to the fervent and binding exhortation of the Apostle: *I exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called* [Ep 4:1].

In this first Chapter, I wanted to give some idea of the incomparable family of Fr. Peter. It seems to me that this brings honor and glory also to him: *The glory of children are their fathers* [Pr 17:6].



Chapter 2

His Birth and Early Education

Peter Vignola was born on the first day of the year 1812. His parents were John Baptist Vignola, and Lucia Fiorani. At that time, the family was living in the Cathedral Parish, and then later moved to the house in St. Stephen's Parish, where it still may be found. On the day of his birth, he was also baptized. This home in which he was born, served as a stepping stone to the Priesthood. In that home a Christian atmosphere pervaded the family life. The young boy's simple soul was permeated with a profusion of graces, and the ineffable delights of the faith. This grace and faith have an effect on a man, even before he is brought forth to the light of day, through

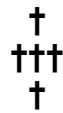
the sacred contacts with the soul and heart of his Mother. One day, God will have us understand how much we owe to our good Mothers. How many prayers have they sighed for us, and how many tears have they shed for us in their piety!

A good Mother was the first grace that the Lord bestowed on Peter Vignola. She trained him from his earliest years to be docile, obedient, devoted, modest and dedicated to prayer. He was taught to frequent the Church, the classes of Christian Doctrine, the Sacraments and all sacred things. How will the child correspond to these efforts of his Mother!

[7] As a boy, he set up a little altar in his home, and there with his brothers, would carry out their own sacred services. This, for them, was a great diversion. The good Mother observed all this, harbored in her heart, as did her husband, the highest hopes for the future of her sons.

However, she was taken from them when Peter was 14 years of age. He thus baptized with his tears the dawn of his adolescence. The young boy did not feel that his Mother was gone forever. In his heart, he wept for her death, but at the same time, he believed she was in Paradise – he cried for her absence, but yet felt her presence. He would look toward the heavens, as though to follow her blessed journey. Her voice seemed still be coming to him, and reinforced the lessons that she had taught him. She seemed to speak to him from her grave, and from the sky.

The childhood of Peter Vignola was spent in blissful ignorance of all that brings bitterness, and that fill the ears of one's spirit with noisy enchantments. It was not hard for him to hear, nor difficult for him to follow the angel of good counsel, calling him to the Priesthood. His entire family, and those who knew him, were just waiting for this day. As had his Mother, they, too nourished the highest hopes for him. Considering his consistency, modesty and piety, as well as his retiring manner, they would ask one another in the words applied to St. John, the Baptist: *What, then, will this child be?* [Lk 1:66].



Chapter 3 His Holy Vocation

He was a boy endowed with an excellent temperament, a firm intelligence, good and sound judgment. What is more, there was a goodness about him, and an evident holiness of life. All those signs that are generally considered as sure indications of a vocation to the Priesthood, appeared in young Vignola so clearly and evidently, that they provided an adequate response to the question: *What will this child be?*

In a special manner, the fiber of his nature was so serene and candid, and the customary practices of his family marvelously lent themselves [8] to the mysteries of grace. Grace always makes use of nature, and perfects it. Souls of this type do not

experience tempests. The flesh and ties of blood have little effect on them. There reigns in them a solemn and pensive quiet, that produces reflection and ecstasy. They do not fear, but they are watchful – they do not doubt, but they adore - they do not ask, they await.

However, in some cases, before one manifests his intention of consecrating himself to God, he must spend long and difficult weeks in recurring uncertainties and dismaying indecision. There are others, perhaps, more fortunate, who announce this intention with the simplicity of an unexpected statement, almost as though they were not even serious. Peter Vignola was one of these.

He had just completed with honor, the four years of High School, and the two years of Rhetoric in the Imperial Royal Lyceum. After spending the summer vacation in the family home in Avesa, he was coming back into the city with his brother, Louis, to begin the study of Philosophy. When they passed through St. George's Gate, they reached the stone bridge. Louis turned to follow the road to the right, leading to the High School, but Peter stopped, and called out to his brother: 'So long - I am going to the Seminary!'

At these words, Louis stopped, and followed his brother with his eyes, and no doubt with his thoughts. Perhaps very soon, Louis would follow in the path his brother was now treading alone. At that moment, he had a strong desire to follow his brother. He would do so in fact one day, and would be the second Vignola son, among the five to become a Priest.

Perhaps a little anecdote will seem of no value to some. In my judgment, though, it does indicate one of the most lovable aspect of Peter Vignola's temperament. It gives us some idea of the promptness, joy and abandonment with which he would obey down through the years, the divine invitations to evangelical perfection.

From his first days in the Seminary, he dedicated himself to the attainment of knowledge. He knew that this was so necessary for him to render himself an apt instrument to work one day for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The thought that he was studying for God, was to him as a sharp spur to carry out with the greatest possible diligence his scholastic duties. This soon became [9] known to his Superiors. They noted the advance he was making in his studies, as well as his progress in the exercise of the virtues. Shortly afterwards, he was vested in the ecclesiastical habit. He put it on for the first time, to his great happiness, in St. Stephen's Church.

His companions in the Seminary have retained among their most cherished memories the example of Peter Vignola as a Seminarian. In the exercises of piety and study, he stood out among all the others, and was a source of encouragement and comfort. Their close contact and familiarity while conferring a mutual confidence, did not in the least lessen their respect for one another. This brought them close together, despite differences in age and social condition. When the spirit of Christ blesses a thought and consecrates an affection, it infuses as well a drop of that marvelous balm that preserves the from the inevitable frailty of human realities.

The sublimity of the priestly ministry toward which he had directed his steps, was the sole motive for his actions. He kept his eyes riveted on that venerable summit, and always nourished his hopes by it. He was much impressed with the statement of St. Augustine, that a young man from the moment he becomes a Cleric, his is obliged to perfect holiness. Young Vignola was continually spurred to the acquisition of this holiness from the habit he wore, as well as from the state for which he had been chosen.

Moreover, he was most mindful of the fact that as a Priest, in addition to his own sanctification, he would also have to work for the salvation of others. From his Seminary days, he felt the ardent flame of zeal for his neighbor. In a special manner, he dedicated himself especially on holy days, to work among the youth, in supervising them, and instructing them in Christian Doctrine.

Two years after he had been vested, he was assigned by his Superiors to teach out at St. George's, which at that time was a mission church. However, he never forgot his Parish Church, that always remained most dear to him. There he also instructed the young children for the solemn general disputations in doctrine. In this field of preparing the young boys and girls for these disputes, he manifested an unusual ability.

He had a special inclination to work in the Oratories. The [10] providential [10] institution, precisely at that time, through the efforts of Ven. Gaspar Bertoni, were just beginning in the city. It was in 1836, in fact, that Fr. Gaspar began sending his sons to work in the Oratory of St. Stephen's Parish. Their activity gave birth to what can be called the second Stigmatine House in Verona.

Venerable Madeline di Canossa was caring for the education and instruction of young girls in two of the poorer and more abandoned parishes of the city – San Zeno's and St. Stephen's. Fr. Bertoni did the same for young boys in the two extremities of Verona, on both sides of the Adige. As a Seminarian, Peter Vignola worked with our first Fathers for the good of the youth of his home Parish. He gave the highest hopes of what he would one day do in the Apostolate among the young, when he entered our Congregation.

All this time of intense activity, he was disposing himself and preparing himself for Ordination.

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Chapter 4

His Ordination to the Priesthood

During the month of September 1836, Bishop Grasser, of sacred memory, conferred the Priesthood on Peter Vignola. The contentment of his pious soul on the day of his First Mass cannot be described.

The Bishop, who knew him very well, chose him right away as his Secretary. Although he was still very young, the Bishop entrusted much to him, in carrying out the most sublime and delicate matters. However, Fr. Peter felt very ill at ease in that office. The many and diverse occupations and difficulties that are so often tedious and material, were a painful restraint on his zeal. He wanted so much to work in a less confining and more extensive field of the apostolate. Hence, it must have been for him [11] a happy day when he was assigned to the Diocesan Seminary. He was named Assistant to the Rector, the austere and pious Fr. Bacilieri.

Young Fr. Vignola could very well be numbered among those who in the words of the Holy Spirit *are commended for the gift of discipline* [Ws 7:14] Who was more qualified for the post of Vice Rector than he? Certainly by his example, even before his words, he would teach the young candidates for the Priesthood what they had to do to succeed in their holy vocation.

In the words of the Prophet: *Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge...* [Ps 118: 66] – he prayed to God. He would repeat this same prayer many times in behalf of those souls Providence had entrusted to him.

What a marvelous reality! Every apostolate that aspired in divine pride to bring light and love to souls, almost always begins with the education of youth. The ancient wise men have left memorable and serious statements in this regard: ‘The upright education of youth,’ says Plato, ‘of all the public duties is the most important; it is the supreme duty of the Magistrates.’ Aristotle adds: ‘The first and principal care must be education. When this is lacking, of necessity, the state will perish.

There are even added reasons for the importance of education. The Divine Restorer of all things wished to live for a time as a child, and he, being God, humbled himself and became an infant. He exhorted His disciples, as adults, to look after the youth – He told them to be as children in order to win over the youth to themselves. From all this, is derived a love that surpasses all love, and a paternity that has no rival. It has become the strongest and most terrible plan to combat the evil of men and times. There is no one, who from it, will not recall the glory of our early Confreres, and who would not hope for better times in the future⁶².

⁶² Translator’s Note: Fr. Gurisatti has captured well a consistent ideal lodged for many years in the heart of Fr. Peter: here is a Proposal of the House Chapter of the Stimmate, dated Feb. 1874:

Having assembled at the invitation of Fr. Director, those having a vote among the Apostolic Missionaries at the House of the Stimmate in Verona, to express in Chapter, that which they would desire to be discussed in the Gen. Congregation, that is to be held in the very near future. These Rev. Fathers were present:

. Peter Vignola, Director⁶²

Fr. Peter spent ten years in the office of Vice Rector. As he himself said it seemed to him like ten days. It would be necessary to have some idea of our Seminary to understand the work it involves. Hence, those assigned there must be endowed with a spirit of sacrifice, necessary for the fulfillment of that office. They [12] have the responsibility of all that pertains to the exterior discipline, not only of the major seminarians, but also of the young boys in the last two classes.

The Vice Rector was very much imbued with this spirit of sacrifice. He was always ready to see those who sought him out. He watched over them, both day and night. He made himself all things to all of them, and never showed himself to be bored with them. He was always charitable, and never seemed to change. He avoided distinctions of every kind, and was beloved to all of them, as he loved them all in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Can there be any wonder with this attitude that the years in truth passed as days?

. Joseph Marchesini
 . Charles Zara
 . Thomas Vicentini
 . Louis Morando
 . Peter Beltrami
 . Lawrence Pizzini
 . Lawrence Rigatti

Having invoked divine assistance, the Director explained the reason for the meeting, and he invited those attending, in the order of their seniority, to propose whatever in the Lord, they believed expedient to propose to the Gen. Congregation, for the greater glory of God, for the development of the Congregation, and for the greater profit of its members.

When various proposals had been discussed and formulated, and put to a secret vote, the three following resulted as the ones to be presented to the Gen. Congregation:

1. The Congregation is asked to review the Rules for the special offices of the individual Superiors, for the purpose of avoiding the danger of conflicts.

2. It is asked to open an Elementary, and a High School. If this should not be presently possible, it is asked to look into the possibility of opening at least a High School, for the purpose of:

[1st] corresponding to one of the principal ends of our Congregation, that was born and flourished with teaching⁶²;

[2nd] corresponding to the desires of the public, which in the present circumstances, is asking for this;

[3rd] avoiding scandal, in having such a large building, without any scope of public benefit – furthermore, because of the statement of our Holy Father, Pius IXth: *For the instruction of the youth, go to any extreme, save sin!*

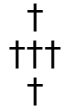
3. There is expressed the earnest desire that a greater number of Aspirants might be accepted.

This meeting was adjourned, and all affixed their signatures.

Fr. Peter Vignola, Director
 Fr. Joseph Marchesini
 Fr. Charles Zara
 Fr. Thomas Vicentini
 Fr. Louis Morando
 Fr. Peter Beltrami
 Fr. Lawrence Pizzini
 Fr. Lawrence Rigatti

This was received today, and placed among the *Acts*, Feb. 25, 1874.

Fr. John Rigoni, Secret.



Chapter 5

Rector of St. Peter's in Monastero

Fr. Vignola was an extremely busy man. From the bosom of this, our land, a land of faith and martyrdom, a land of song and tears, there came forth the shout of liberty, as we all know. As a wind through the trees, it indicated the coming storm. When the two supreme loves of time and eternity were united under the holy name of Pius, Italy conquered – when they were dispersed, Italy lodged was conquered. The sectarian desire of unity rendered inefficacious the just desire of independence. In place of another Legnano, there was had Novara!

The heart of Fr. Vignola was not unmoved by the sufferings of his humiliated Fatherland; however, this traditionally had been the home of the Gospel. As well as giving birth to courage, it was also the homeland of Saints. Whatever anyone may think was his motive, for choosing to leave the Seminary in 1848, it would seem vain to seek for it elsewhere than in his conviction that he was no longer useful for it. He was chosen by that great light of the Veronese Church, Bishop Aurelius Mutti, as Rector of St. Peter's in Monastero. Shortly thereafter, there came the Imperial royal Decree approving his assignment.

Fr. Peter remained at this Church for only four years. These years, however, were sufficient for all to come to know his ardent zeal for the good of souls. So that it will not be stated here, what will be said below concerning his zeal for the care of souls, I will only note here [13] that as Rector of that Church, in limiting his apostolate to that area marked out for him by Canon Law, and the orders of his Superiors, he was a most valid assistant to his Pastor. He rendered him invaluable services, employing every possible means for this end. There was never the least shadow of jealous rivalry, or childish reprisals that darkened this sector of the Lord's vineyard.

He was guided to do all things by his prudence and by his refined and just judgment, which were his natural qualities. There was, however, one unfortunate episode, that we will mention here. During his Rectorship, it seems that the unfortunate Priest, Fr. Cajetan Trezza, was either assigned to the Church, or certainly frequented it. As measured and prudent as Fr. Peter was, he once expressed serious misgiving about Fr. Trezza's future. This Priest, from his earliest years, manifested a lack of balance, and was vain and proud in matters pertaining to the ministry, especially preaching.

When Fr. Peter heard him preach on the occasion of some solemnity, he expressed himself as believing that this was a Priest who did not seek God and souls, but himself. Fr. Vignola said he personally was quite concerned about the Priest's future. Event were to prove that Fr. Peter had not just incorrectly. The

unfortunate Fr. Trezza afterwards lost his vocation, and his faith as well. He was defrocked, and became an apostate from our holy religion.

All this while, Fr. Peter was winning the esteem of the laity and his Superiors. He was soon judged suited to occupy a position of even greater importance, as will be seen in the next Chapter.



Chapter 6 Arch-Priest of St. Firmus Major

Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, outside of serving God and serving only Him. [Qo 1:2]. These are the words of the Holy Spirit, as well as those of the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ*, which teaches: *It is vanity to long for honors, and to seek honorable and high positions.* [Book I, chapter 4]. These maxims were deeply impressed on the mind and heart of Fr. Peter as will be seen from what is to follow.

For some time, a Bishop had been occupying the throne of St. Zeno, to whom would very well be applied the words of St. Augustine, inscribed in his *Book of Confessions*. Originally these words were written concerning St. Ambrose: *I began to love him, not as a Doctor of the Truth, but as a man who was most kind to me.* I have in mind here Bishop Benedict de Riccabona. By his gentle temperament and even his physical appearance, he was much like Fr. Vignola.

One day, much out of character, the Bishop went up the stairs of his Residence, deeply troubled and concerned. He came down again about an hour later, and seemed totally preoccupied with a thought that was causing him anguish and travail. From his residence, he went directly to the Cathedral, and there before the altar of the *Madonna del Popolo*, he prayed and wept profusely.

Shortly after this incident, the Parish of St. Firmus Major, still in tears because of the death of that Angelic Pastor, Fr. Pompei, was consoled by the appointment of Fr. Peter Vignola. The reception accorded him was joyful and cordial, most worthy of him and the parish, of the God of the People and of the People of God.

That happy day, however, passed swiftly, as do all joyous occasions. When the light had been turned off, and the signing died away, with the darkness came the concerns of the Parish. While his parishioners slept soundly, as is customary, when there is genuine happiness. The Pastor, however, was not able to sleep much that night. The dawn brought him his commitment before God. The hour had struck to set out on his task. The hour for sacrifice had come, the hour to work for the salvation of souls. The Redemption carried out on the Cross, continues to descend on generations that pass before it. With the cry of the Apostle Paul: *The world is crucified to me, and I to the world!* [Ga 6:14]. Fr. Vignola accepted that portion of

souls that the Lord has entrusted to him. With a heart full of inexpressible charity, he took them to himself as something sacred, and something that was his own.

[15] Who, though, can say to a soul, or to many souls: 'You are mine?' The possessive pronouns 'mine', and 'yours' have left many sad pages in the history of peoples. The patriarch of Greece and Rome said to the poor slaves: 'You are mine!' A tyrant once said to all the nations of Europe: 'this land is mine, and you are mine, sons of this land!'

A Holy Father once called these two words: 'mine' and 'yours' cold. These words affirm the right of ownership, and they render legal any and all hardships, no matter how arduous they may be. They do not create that relationship which they mean to imply. The most often indicate egoism, which is an even worse vice.

Who, then, may say to a soul, or to many souls, 'You are mine?' God who has created them can say it, as can Christ, who has redeemed them, at the cost of His Blood. So, too,. Can they say it who are the cooperators with Christ and who with Him sacrifice themselves for souls, repeating the words of the Apostle: *For free though I was to all, unto all I have made myself a slave, that I might gain the more converts* [1 Co 9:19].

When a soul is loved in this way, or when many souls are so loved, it very well may be said to them: 'You are mine.' The reason is because first that has been said to them: 'I am yours!' This was the first greeting that the new Arch-Priest gave to those souls, who were awaiting him.

It is not easy after so many years to give a minute and precise account of his pastoral efforts. It is well known that the life of a good Pastor must be spent entirely in a series of occupations. These are almost the same, and they are always aimed at nourishing a portion of the flock of Christ. This is brought about through the truths preached in the words of the Apostles, sealed with the blood of Martyrs, defended with the wisdom of Doctors. The life of a Pastor has a perfect counter-part with that of a father of a family. He must be simple, hard working and beloved to his people, and faithful to the Church. It is nourished day by day, with silent sacrifices, unnoticed charities, and quiet tears, under the eyes of God, and out of view of the world. There is nothing in a Pastor's life that is extraordinary or outstanding.

Furthermore, in the midst of the most ordinary things, these [16] must not be confused with those that are mediocre or common; love is needed more than eloquence, and this brings the joy of light and true greatness. His love can be the occasion and the cause of prudent new ventures, and devout forward thinking.

St. Bernard has put this well in a few words: *Do the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.* This wise motto of St. Bernard gave to the zealous Pastor, Fr. Peter, the inspiration and a norm to comply faithfully with the duties of his ministry. You would have had to see him, and his spirit of recollection as he ascended the steps of the altar to offer there the Immaculate Lamb, for himself and for the salvation of the world. You would have had to hear him, with his holy words of mercy, as he

sought to bind up the terrible wounds that the sons of the Old Adam inflicted upon themselves and others: *Do the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.*

There is nothing more proper, or believed to the basic nature of such a mission than to care for the harsh and tremendous necessities of the poor and afflicted. It requires the artful discovery of the hovels of shameful need, to discern the most jealously guarded sorrows. A Pastor must be as a prodigal parent to some, while being to others the angel of consolation. He must bestow his help with humble and reverent affection, which is really what is expected of the recipient of his kindness. He must manifest a fraternal participation in their sufferings, which is a property of the Charity of Christ: *Who is weak, and I am not weak?* [2 Co 11:29]. Such a life is a magnificent fulfillment of doing *the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.*

It is impossible to count the number of Instructions, or Homilies Fr. Vignola delivered as Arch-Priest to his people, without marveling at the loving and patient efforts he employed in compiling them. What pains-taking care, what a spirit of piety and what evangelical unction can be seen in this work of his, that are most evident in those neatly written note-books of his.

Prayer, which is the marvelous bond between heaven and earth is for the Priest a question of spiritual life and death. However, to spend long hours, kneeling on the bare floor, with arms outstretched and eyes streaming with tears before the tabernacle, or at the feet of the beloved Immaculate Virgin, praying for himself, his children and especially for those whom he felt he had lost ... this is to do *the ordinary things, but not in the ordinary way.*

[17] There is to be added to all this his many wise provisions to re-enkindle among the children and the adults a love for the school of Christian Doctrine and the Oratory. Equally worthy of mention is the zealous care he employed to renovate and strengthen the old and venerable Church. Furthermore, the many priestly virtues of that soul that were manifest in his not being satisfied with the good he had already accomplished. His heart and mind were aflame with projects of an ever wider scope. In Fr. Vignola, there was the genuine image of the good Pastor.

There can be no wonder, then, that his Superiors entrusted to him the most delicate tasks and duties. Among these, was his appointment as the Defender of the Bond in the marriage cases that were before the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, that had been instituted between the Austrian Empire and the Holy See. There were times when the validity of marriage was in question, and he would defend the various cases with such force and clarity that these marriages were saved. The civil authorities, too, soon recognized and appreciated his talents. He was named a member of the Commission of Public Benefices.

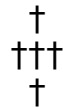
During his four years as Pastor at St. Firmus Major, the extraordinary and solemn commemorations in honor of the Virgin Mary were a great comfort to him. These were held to celebrate the Solemn Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, that was promulgated at this time. In that year, the solemn procession

that the citizens since November 26, 1511, decided would be observed every year, was held. Its purpose was to commemorate their deliverance from a plague three centuries previously, and each year the event was commemorated. The miraculous statue of Mary Immaculate was carried from St. Firmus' to the Cathedral. After services held in the Cathedral, it was returned to St. Firmus in a triumphant procession.

I cannot close this Chapter without recalling more in particular the beautiful endeavors fulfilled in these years by the Arch-Priest, Fr. Vignola. First, there should be mentioned his repairing the roof, and his renovation of the interior of the Church. We should not overlook his part in restoring the classical *bas-reliefs* of the monument *Della Torre*, which Napoleon I had carried away to Paris. They had been exhibited in the Louvre Museum, from which a metal replica was made. He also restored other ancient frescoes.

All of this is in addition to other undertakings that are omitted here for the sake of brevity. It was inevitable that the esteem in which Fr. Vignola was held would grow among his parishioners and the citizens of Verona.

The affection for his person was never in the thought, or aspirations of the good Arch-Priest. All this while, in his own mind, the thought of renouncing the world, his Parish and all that he could hope for, was forming in his mind. He then made the decision to join the Congregation at the Stimmatine



Chapter 7

Fr. Peter, Stigmatine

When a Priest, under the Patronage of the Blood of Redemption, celebrates his Spiritual Nuptials with souls, he reflects in his heart and says: 'I will stay with you until death.' However, all souls and concerns about them are in the hands of God. When He says: 'Come!'. It is necessary to do so, and when he says: 'Depart!', this, too, is necessary. On close examination, the People of Christ, or as the People of Israel before them, have their origin and life in those historical, and simultaneously prophetic words addressed to Abraham: *Go forth out of your country, and from your kindred, and out of your father's house, and come into the land which I will show you.* [Gn 12:1]

In those days, there flourished a religious society, that had the name of the Priests of the Stimmatine. They were well known for their apostolic holiness of life, and their example of heroicity of austere virtue. Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, one of the most brilliant gems of the Veronese Church, had established it on humility. From this foundation, it was to ascend to the most brilliant heights of Christian love. Between these two extremes of humility and sublimity, he placed abnegation and detachment of all those things that are passing.

On January 20, 1859, Fr. Peter met his brother, Paul, walking along the street. At this time, Monsignor Paul Vignola was the Arch-Deacon and Canon of the Cathedral. Fr. Peter said to him: 'Here, take this as a little remembrance ... I do not need it anymore.' Fr. Peter handed to his brother his Arch-Priest's ring. Fr. Paul was quite astonished, because he did not [19] know of his brother's decision.

That very evening, a humble priest hurried along the street, all wrapped in his cape, toward the house of those holy penitents. He knocked at the door and asked for his brother, Fr. Vincent, who for some time had been a member of the Community there. Fr. Marani, who was the Superior of the Stigmatines, already had been informed of Fr. Peter's decision, and went to call Fr. Vincent. He told him simply that his brother, the Arch-Priest, Fr. Peter, was waiting at the door and wanted to speak to him. Fr. Vincent went right away, and greeted him, and conversed with him briefly. He then got up to take his leave.

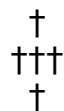
'Wait a minute', Fr. Peter said, 'I am going to stay here in your company – I, too, am going to be a Stigmatine.'

At first, Fr. Vincent thought he was joking, but soon realized that all had been decided. He embraced his brother fraternally, and with great happiness led him into the cloister. He introduced him to Fr. Marani, and the other Fathers who had gathered around. He said: 'Here is my brother – from now on, he is my Brother in a two-fold manner!'

The Pastor of St. Firmus, after four years in the ministry as Pastor, was once again, just 'Fr. Peter.' He was 47 years of age, and it was truly edifying to see him make his two years of Novitiate in the company of young Novices. He manifested humility, dependence and docility, and truly seemed to be one of them.

When these two years had passed, on the Feast of the Purification, Fr. Peter bound himself perpetually to God with the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

Fr. Peter was to spend 32 years in the House of the Stimate. Without exaggeration, it can be said that he spent them entirely in the sanctification of himself, and in doing good to souls.



Chapter 8

His Religious Life

We have said that the life of Fr. Peter at the Stimate was spent from the first until his last day, in his sanctification, and [20] that of others. Primarily, he attended to his own perfection through the practice of the Christian and religious virtues. I will treat here only of his principal virtues.

There was in him a very profound Faith, and a great attachment to the Holy Church and the Roman Pontiff. His Faith appeared even externally in his manner of praying, celebrating Mass and in the services he conducted. He performed all of these duties with composure, gravity and devotion.

His attachment to the Roman Pontiff was such that whenever he might have expressed an opinion regarding matters not yet defined, as soon as he heard that the Pope had spoken about them, even implicitly, he changed his view.

Many of his penitents could attest to the nature of the great Hope that moved him. Many doubting and scrupulous souls had been inspired and comforted by entrusting themselves completely to Divine Mercy, and to hope always in God.

His Charity toward God and toward his neighbor were likewise most ardent. The many endeavors he undertook for the Glory of God and for the good of his neighbor bear eloquent testimony to this.

What, then, can be said of his other moral and cardinal virtues? His sense of Prudence, even as a young man, was recognized in the various assignments he held, as Secretary to the Bishop, as Vice Rector of the Seminary and as Pastor of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. This was especially evident in the direction he gave to souls, even to those in a very high station. He was also a prudent Spiritual Director to many religious societies. He manifested this virtue in many other, varied apostolates, that were confidently entrusted to him by our Bishops.

Regarding his Temperance, it is sufficient to recall his spirit of mortification and poverty, that were always outstanding in him. He had a great love for common life, and would not tolerate the least exception, or dispensation in his regard. Surely, in his somewhat advanced age, when he entered Religion, with the habits he acquired, both in his comfortable family home, as well as in his own Rectory, he must have felt [21] some needs. However, at the Stimate, both as regards the quality and the quantity of the food, a stern diet was observed.

At supper time, for example, there was served a plate of beans and only a quarter of a liter of wine. Of this, he would only drink but one glass. Rather than complaining about the food, he seemed most content with it. He used to say that he was in such good health, that all the nourishment of the food must have been going directly to his blood!

The facts seem to substantiate this. Previously, he had been somewhat thin, and seemed sickly. Shortly after he entered the Stimate, however, his color improved and he looked like a man with a most robust and health constitution. He did not need much rest – during the summer, he used to get up at 4:30 a.m., and at 5:00 a.m. during the winter. He was usually the first one to celebrate Mass.

With this manner of life, and with the exercise of these and other virtues, Fr. Peter worked for his own perfection.

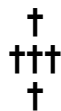
I have also said that he was much dedicated to the sanctification of others. In his every contact with souls, he worked for their improvement, throughout his entire life that he lived at the Stimmate.

Just about this time, Fr. Charles Fedelini died. He had been teaching Moral Theology at the Seminary for many years. Fr. Vignola was then assigned by his Superior to succeed him on the Seminary Faculty. He remained at this assignment for a number of years, and was known for his precise order and practical wisdom. He exerted every effort in teaching, because to him, this was a way of doing good to souls.

Whatever time he had free from his teaching chores, he dedicated to hearing Confessions. People from all walks of life flocked to his Confessional. He also preached the Spiritual Exercises many times in various localities to the Clergy and to Religious Communities. Even more frequently, though, he gave Parish Missions. He gave much of his time to the Marian Oratory, and for a number of years, he was its Director. He was also very dedicated to teaching Catechism, and to explaining Christian Doctrine. In the beginning, he attended to those duties in the various parishes of the city, and then later, at the Institute of St. Sylvester. He continued teaching the youth of this Institute for many years, right up to the last hour of his life.

He had an extraordinary enthusiasm for doing good to souls, which is the most sublime and lofty endeavor. This is the sole passion [22] worthy of a man of God. Throughout his entire life, this drove Fr. Vignola in all of his many and arduous undertakings. This was, so to speak, his first and last breath.

An inexhaustible source of goodness seemed to breathe from his priestly character. He was a man of genuine and tender kindness, that easily drew hearts to his own. He was to all a true friend, a brother and a father. A learned and zealous Arch-Priest, who later became a Canon, said of him: 'Whenever anyone went to him, he would soon know of the love of Fr. Peter; he would be loved by all who sought him out.' This says a great deal, because here on earth there is nothing better than to love and beloved. Truly he was simply 'Fr. Peter.' This was not merely an extrinsic, or formal title. When the people put these two words together, they expressed the very nature of the man and his affection for them. This was Fr. Peter. By calling him by this name, there was implied a bond of spiritual friendship, and there was the echo of long lines of favors he had bestowed. It was the sound of happy memories as well as future hopes. To all, the name of Fr. Peter said so very much. His name was to them the summary of a life entirely spent in his own sanctification.



Superior General

In September of 1875, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, of holy memory, breathed his last. The few priests that comprised the General Chapter elected Fr. Peter to succeed him. During Fr. Lenotti's administration, as Superior General, Fr. Peter had held the post of General Councilor, and that of the Director of the House of the Stimmate. For the next 16 years, that is, for one half of his life spent at the Stimmate, he was to govern our Congregation. He ruled it with an inspired, meek and patient zeal. Since the endeavors fulfilled by him were too many and so significant, we cannot dispense ourselves from at least referring to his more noteworthy achievements.

[23] Certainly, his most outstanding accomplishment, for which we owe him eternal gratitude, was the Approbation of our Congregation by the Holy See. Sixty years had passed since its foundation, at the time of his Election. Because of the small number of the members of the Congregation, all that had been obtained in that time was a Decree of Praise from the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX. The Pope himself expressed the wish that the 'Little Flock would grow!' This had to be a reality before the definitive approbation could be granted to it.

The number of Venerable Gaspar Bertoni's sons had increased somewhat, but the many difficulties and various obstacles left much to be desired. The rules, left by the Founder, were not yet entirely adjusted. The part pertaining to the government of our Congregation was judged to be deficient, in that the Constitutions were not in conformity with the new norms of the Holy See that were required before approbation was granted to the new Institute.

There was also an element that, sad to say, prevented him from carrying this out. There was almost an open war, and many accusations were leveled at him. What saddened his paternal heart the most was to see the defection of some of his Priests, who could not adapt themselves to those proposals of changes in the rules, which the Sacred Congregation demanded before the granting the requested approbation.

It seemed that the Lord permitted all this in His Providence, to bring more clearly to the fore, Fr. Vignola's truly illumined understand, his meekness and his exemplary patience. You would have had to see how kindly he treated those who opposed him, the charity with which he would defend them. He would attribute all he suffered to difficult temperaments, or characteristics of those who were in opposition to him, or their lack of a full knowledge of the circumstances. Notwithstanding these, and much more mortification and bitterness to which he was subject, and to which we have only alluded here, he overcame this difficult period. He finally succeeded in obtaining the long-awaited Decree of Approbation, and the entire Congregation rejoiced.

Another accomplishment of his, which was also significant, was to re-open the Schools of the Stimmate, that had been originally established by the Venerable Founder long before. They were closed in 1844, because the Jesuit Fathers in that

year opened a High School at St. Sebastian's. Because of the evils of those times, this Jesuit School alter was also closed. For a long time thereafter, Verona lacked any Parochial School that for so many years had done so much good for the poor children.

In 1874, Fr. Lenotti and his Council felt that by re-opening at least the Elementary School at the Stimate, much good would be obtained. It was decided to send some of the Priests to Padua to prepare for the examinations to receive accreditation as teachers. The following year, however, Fr. Lenotti died, before being able to see this project succeed.

One of the first thoughts of his successor, Fr. Vignola, was to re-open not only what had been planned by Fr. Lenotti, but also to add the elementary grades, then those of the high school level, and also those of the lyceum. With this plan in mind, Fr. Vignola set about to renovate and to furnish the buildings. Even more so, did he make provision for the Priests who were to obtain the required diplomas for teaching in the future high school and lyceum. The expense, effort and sacrifices he endured, as well as the laborious planning, were unbelievable. With the help of one who was experienced in these matters, Fr. Vignola, in a very short time, was able to overcome all the difficulties, and set the program in operation.

Fr. Vignola understood profoundly the world of his times. He grasped the fact that if there were those seeking to poison, that is, those who would teach without a sense of faith and delicacy, much harm would be done to so many young souls. Eventually, he felt this could ruin and destroy society itself.

Sad to say, in his times, there very well could have been inscribed over many schools: 'Butcher shop of conscience, slaughter house of souls!' A remedy was sorely needed for such frightful conditions. To save the youth, the great Pontiff, Leo XIII, had said that it would be necessary to walk along the edge of hell. To Fr. Vignola, whatever the cost would be, the school was to be re-opened.

[25] A learned Priest said about those times:

This is precisely what the new Superior said to me one day, using other words, concerning this project. I was congratulating him for having had the far-seeing courage to provide for a wholesome education of the youth, in preparing Christians for life in this world, as well as for the life of heaven.

From the opening day, the school flourished. It was frequented by other Religious Congregations in the city, especially by the new College of St. Aloysius, the Camillians, Fr. Provolo's students as well as those of Monsignor Comboni. Illustrious families sent their sons there, as did those of the nobility and aristocracy. They all stated that they were happy to send their sons to school at the Stimate. The results were most heart-warming, because when the boys graduated, and then went on to the Seminary, or to the state Universities, the mere fact that in their applications, they stated that they had attended the Stimate, was of itself a sufficient recommendation. Fr. Vignola himself took over the directorship of the school.

However, the End of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata is not only the instruction and education of youth, but it is also Preaching, especially Missions, the Spiritual Exercises, and the explanation of Christian Doctrine. During the Administration of Fr. Vignola, this phase of the 'End' was fulfilled in a manner never before equaled. A great many Missions and courses of the Spiritual Exercises were preached, and so many parishes benefited by the schools of Christian Doctrine, called the Fourth Class⁶³.

There was no danger during his years as Superior that any of his sons would be left inactive. The Parish Missions followed one right after another. The schedule was such that as one of the Missionaries closed one Mission, his companions would set out for another parish to open the next one. Those assigned to teaching, in the times they had free from school, were occupied in preaching. On all the holy days, almost every one of the Priests would go to some Church or other, to teach the *Fourth Class*. Fr. Vignola himself took part in preaching, both the Parish Missions, as well as the Spiritual Exercises to religious Communities. He, too, often taught Christian Doctrine every holy day.

⁶³ Translators' Note: Fr. P. Vignola reflects well the early ideal taught by Fr. Lenotti a Novice trained by the Founder himself:

It is most helpful also to reflect from one of these very special sons of the saintly Founder the genuine portrait of the **Apostolic Missionary**, according to St. Gaspar's heart, in the new Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider Fr. John B. Lenotti: he came to the Founder still as a Seminarian [a *timid rabbit*!!], and received his First Formation from St. Gaspar; he was a man by nature and by grace who would have been the very least capable of altering the ideal handed on by the Founder. He was the first Master of Novices in the Congregation, [as the Founder himself had been his!], and then later the Superior General. He tried to put together a **Directory for Novices**⁶³ a work that remained incomplete at his death⁶³. He also wrote a most wonderful *Proemium* to this work – while it may not stand out for its elegant Latin, the ideal presented is familiar to generations of Stigmatines:

...The End of the Sodality is this: to be Apostolic Missionaries, for the service, or help, of Bishops. Therefore, its members ought to be always ready and prepared, both day and night, at any hint on the part of their own Superior, even in an instant, to go anywhere, whether near, or far, whether within the city, or outside, to undertake any office or ministry conferred upon them: to giving instructions, sermons, the Spiritual Exercises, to any group of men whatever: to hearing confessions of those held in prisons, and to be with those who may be condemned to death; to supplying for this or that Chair of Philosophy or Theology, as well as filling in at a Parish for a time which may be unexpectedly deprived of its Pastor; and whenever a given work has been completed, and even when not yet perfectly accomplished, they should be ready to give up the place to someone else, and be ready to take on some other more grave [graviora] and difficult [ardua et difficilis] assignment. And they should do all this, and all the more so when this should come about: with a joyful spirit, a happy face, without offering excuses of their own ineptitude, or that they have had too little study, without seeking the reasons for all this, and without receiving or demanding any compensation [gratis]. They are to be prepared for all [parati ad omnia] to which the Superior might send them. The Superior should try to meet the needs of the Bishop, and deny nothing to him, in so far as this would be possible and the Community has confreres who are suited for a given task. And the Superior will deny nothing, and indeed will even try to meet the requests of pastors, wherever they may have a need, in so far as this will prove possible, and to provide the means...

In addition to being the Superior of the Congregation, he was [26] assigned by the Chancery Office as the Director of a number of Institutes, of all the Sister Penitents of St. Sylvester, and of the Sisters of the Holy family. He was named examiner of Vocations of the Seminarians, as well as Pro-Synodal Examiner.

To this should be added the great number of persons from all walks of life, especially Priests, who flocked to his Confessional, or who sought him out for counsel in their difficulties. He was esteemed by all of them as a man of counsel. His advice would always be brief, frank and precise, and everyone left him contented. He would give this advice at the proper time, sometimes in the form of a story, or as a prayer, and would only give it after having reflected on the matter for some time.

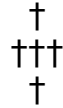
He could very well be compared to St. Francis de Sales. He possessed in an eminent degree, a talent that we might call the art of administration. To achieve success, he knew well how to wait. He was convinced, as we all should be, that virtue grows slowly, almost unnoticed. His norm was to go slowly in all things, and never to walk ahead of Grace. He believed that without grace, nothing would be gained.

From this, it should be clear that his gentleness was in some quarters, judged as weakness. Whoever would think this, must know that there is a weakness that is more venerable than power, as that of a baby, or a woman, and that it is sometimes causes greater awe than does that of a king. As Superior, Fr. Vignola knew that there are some wounds that are cured by oil, and that there are others that can only be remedied by fire and iron. Whenever he employed this latter expedient, it was clear that it was most distasteful to him. Everyone know that there is nothing more tender, and at the same time, more powerful than tears.

This was Fr. Vignola as Superior as he seemed to his penitents, to those in distress and also to those who were subjects under his administration⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ **Translator's Note:** The *Apostolic Missionary*: a beautiful description of the *Apostolic Missionary* in the mind of Fr. Bertoni – [comparable to this description of Fr. Peter Vignola by Fr. Gurisatti] – may be found in his letter 4 to Fr. Bragato, dated December 1, 1837, in which he tells us beloved confrere the work of his close collaborator, Fr. Marani. There is particular emphasis in Fr. Bertoni's description of Fr. Marani's *Apostolic Mission toward the Clergy, both seminarians and priests*:

... Fr. Marani spends his days in school at the Stimate; evenings and on days free from classes, he works at the House of the Dereletti. At the Stimate, he teaches his classes, and studies in the library for his Preaching. At the Dereletti on Saturday evenings and on Sundays, he hears confessions, and at great length, and with much fruit for the entire neighborhood. The other evenings he gives a Conference in Moral Theology with about ten, or twelve Priests, like in the old days which was our custom at St. Firmus'. After his methodological exposition which he conducts along the style of Fr. Guerreri: he offers his opinion and resolves, as the situation might demand, and this is every day, the most intricate cases, and the Lord has bestowed on him light, prudence and more than ordinary great charity. On Thursdays, as is the practice, he takes part in the Scrutinies of the Seminarians, and after this, he receives penitents of every manner, and at every hour, even interrupting his lunch, his supper, and putting off his own rest. Likewise on Feast Days he hears Confessions in the Choir area at St. Stephen's up until the time it is time for him to give his Instructions at St. Sebastians, which goes until to the time which the Lord Himself determines. The People listen to him very willingly, and it seems that the Word of God is not just cast on the



[27]
Chapter 10
His Last Years and His Death

During the last years of his administration, Fr. Vignola did not limit his zeal to the City of Verona. He extended it far beyond. He assigned his priests to preach Parish Missions in other cities, as well as to teaching, when there was an equal need for Christian Education. He tried to respond to this anxious cry, heard from one end of Italy to the other calling for Religious Instruction. To this cry, he added his efforts, to bring about what was wiser and more merciful, that of total instruction. The frightening number of the illiterate had made people forget that there were even millions more who were uneducated. This is the real and deep wound of our present society. It festers all the more as the number of those who are totally illiterate dwindles.

This man of God, from his first years as Superior, opened the House of Parma, for which his predecessor, Fr. Lenotti, had only begun the negotiations. In accord with the wishes of that Bishop of holy memory, Bishop Villa, the elementary school was opened at *Borgo Bertano*. This was the most miserable and abandoned section of the city. Then an Oratory and a recreation center were opened for the youth.

Bishop Riboldi, who was later a Cardinal, wanted the Congregation to come to Pavia. An Oratory, a recreation Center and a Night School were opened, and Missions were preached in a great number of the villages of the Diocese. Through the influence of Bishop Villa, who was from Bassano, the Congregation also established a High School, an Oratory and a Recreation Center there. Finally, in the last year of his life, Fr. Vignola sent his sons to Rome.

All of these holy endeavors were truly the incarnation of his spirit. They were the master-stroke, for which he lives and will live, blessed by his just reward. These blessings of his, come not only to his sons, and to the Veronese, but also in those cities where the Stigmatines visited.

[28] The consoling effects of all his work were evident during the year of his Jubilee. On that day, all of his sons were gathered around their beloved Father. He was moved by it all, to the point of tears, and he received a glimpse of the glory of eternity that awaited him. The talents and hearts of his sons united in their tribute to him. From the holy city, the hand of the Supreme Pontiff blessed him and his family. Moved by it all, he seemed to explain: *Now, O Lord, dismiss Your servant in peace!*

*ground, but it is received on good ground [cf. Mt 13:8, 23]. Before taking up again the course of his instructions, I sent him to St. Zeno's to preach the Octave for the deceased....*⁶⁴

His last wish had been fulfilled, and he was ready to die. However, his rugged constitution was to keep him in good health for four more years, working as he had done from the time he had been a young man.

He was in his 80th year, on Sunday, August 23, 1891. That morning, as was his custom, he had heard the Confessions of his penitents, and said a late Mass for the convenience of the people. After dinner, he went to the Sisters at St. Sylvester's. With that great heart of his, that paid no heed to the weight of his heavy schedule, nor his many years, for one hour he instructed those Daughters of misfortune and tears.

When he came down from the pulpit, he gave Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. He then stopped to talk for a few moments with the Mother Superior concerning some matters of the Institute. He took his cape and hat, and started out the door. He suddenly felt ill, and complained of a severe headache. He was ushered into the Chapter Room, where he sat down. Shortly afterwards, he slumped backward, unconscious. A priest and the doctor were summoned. Immediately the Last Sacraments were administered to him. After three hours of agony, he was dead. The call to eternity came to him in the field of his labors, and he answered the summons to appear before God.

The beloved Father was laid out on a miserable cot. To those who came to pay their last respects and to pray for his eternal repose, he seemed composed in the solemn sadness of death, and in the cold ecstasy [29] of silence and peace. His eyes seemed as though they were closed in sleep, and there was a slight smile on his face. He seemed to be absorbed in happy thoughts with the Angels.

We will never forget the beloved image of Fr. Peter. With his head bent slightly forward, and his hair whitened by long years of meditation on the things of God, he was an impressive sight. His eyes seemed recollected in sentiments of humility and serene in the joys of love. His lips were long employed in imparting counsel and hope, as well as Prayer. His whole face seemed to bespeak a peaceful and dignified benevolence. He had such a look of meekness about him, that this image remains engraved on our minds and hearts. Our beloved and good Father - bless, and bless always, your beloved Congregation, and all those who remember the example of your virtues and who honor your memory.

On that great day, will his vesture appear more resplendent!

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†††
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Chapter 11

His Funeral

By special permission of the city officials, the day after his death his body was brought back from St. Sebastian's to the Stimate. His funeral was set for the next day.

It was the summer season, and many families and Religious Institutes were out of the city. Nevertheless, a very large number of people from every walk of life, especially Priests, who were the most attached to him, attended his funeral and took part in the procession to the cemetery. This was a genuine tribute of the sincere and profound esteem in which Fr. Peter was held throughout the city.

His sons, however, were not content with just this service. They wanted to honor him with a solemn ceremony, and it was decided to delay until a better time, when more families and religious Institutes would be back in the city. The 18th of November was chosen as the date.

St.. Teresa's Church seemed more suitable and spacious than the Church of the Stimate. It was gorgeously set out in mourning. In the center, a majestic catafalque was erected with appropriate inscriptions.

The service began, as is customary, with the singing of the Nocturn, which was followed by the Mass, celebrated by the Vicar General, Monsignor John Baptist Peloso. All the parts of the Mass – the Introit, the *Dies Irae* and the Offertory - were sung quite well in Gregorian Chant. For the *Libera nos Domine*, the children sang alto, and others attending sang the bass.

The eulogy was delivered by the Very Reverend Arch-Priest of the Holy Apostles Church, Fr. Louis Giacomelli. It was full of his most delicate and successful style, that he so well brings out in his writings. He expressed some very moving sentiments.

There was a large number of laity in attendance, as well as representatives of Religious Institutes, many Priests and noble families. They all flocked to the Church that Morning, both for the many low Masses that were celebrated as well as for the Solemn Mass.

I will try to bring this *Compendium* to a close, citing the inscriptions that were composed for the occasion:

†

Over the Main Door

To the Beloved and Blessed Soul – Of Fr. Peter Vignola, Superior of the Priests Of the Sacred Stigmata – The Sons of his Heart – In Solemn Tribute of Prayer and Mourning.

†

Around the Catafalque

For God and For Souls – From Your Earliest Years, Your only Loves - You have trod
All the Laborious Paths – of the Apostolic Ministry.

Upright in Character with Affectionate Smile – An Illumined and Operative Charity –
Undaunted Patience – attracted Hearts to You – and You brought them to God.

A Paradise of Benign Wisdom – was Your Mind – A Treasure of Holy Affections –
was Your Heart – Ah! In a Flash – so Beautiful a Mind, so Beautiful a Heart, had
gone!

[31] Right up until the Last Hour – of Your Advanced Old Age – You burned with zeal
– For the Salvation of Others – You fell on the Way – As a True Soldier.

†

Under His Portrait

The Image of the Father – That Death destroyed - But He lives eternal in the Grateful
Hearts – of the Many who loved Him.

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A
Compendium
of the Life
of
Fr. Vincent Vignola

[33]

Chapter 1 Who was Fr. Vincent?

To write the Life of Fr. Vincent Vignola is an undertaking that should intimidate anyone who does not have a mind and a virtue that is far superior to the ordinary. Fr. Vincent was a most endearing man, endowed with a most candid nature. He had a keen intellect, a most sure judgment and a most meek heart. His was a most solid virtue, and a most unusual holiness. He would have us think of what St. Thomas said one day concerning St. Bonaventure who was writing the life of the Holy Patriarch, St. Francis of Assisi: *Only a Saint can write the life of another saint!*

In our present case, it ought to be said: 'You would have to find a learned man who is also holy to write about Fr. Vincent – it should not be attempted by anyone who lacks either of these qualities.'

However, the writer of these lines has been urged by those who are bound by a similar affection for their beloved Father and old Master of Novices. Therefore, the author of this present Biography bids the pious reader to attribute to him that love that blinds and deceives, not allowing us to know ourselves and our own insufficiency.

This having been said, we will not set out on our endeavor. we will make every effort to be brief, because our subject, in truth, could not be dealt with adequately.

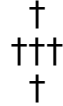
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Chapter 2 Vincent as a Boy

Vincent Vignola was born in Verona on October 25, 1821, in the Cathedral Parish. His excellent parents were outstanding Christian [34] citizens. They were John Baptist Vignola and Lucia Fiorani. Vincent was baptized the day following his birth.

To sum up in a few words all that is known of Vincent as a child we can use as our principle that from the morning, one can judge what kind of day it will be. The fortunate parents and family of this beloved child were able to see the holy life that he would lead, by noting in him early a candid, joyful and peaceful temperament. He seemed to be permeated with goodness and he was the joy of his family. Years later, as a grown man, he gave of most edifying example of his imperturbable tranquility and heroic patience. On the first anniversary of his beloved Mother's death, young Vincent was walking through the garden of his family home, absorbed in sad thoughts. He did not notice a ditch in his path, and he fell into it, and badly bruised and cut himself about his head. A doctor was summoned immediately, and he applied a most painful remedy. However, this was inexpertly done, and the poor

boy still had much to endure, submitting to a frequent cauterizing that was both painful and dangerous. Through it all, he never gave the least sign of impatience, nor complaint. The doctor stated that he had never seen anyone, even in adult age, who had such heroism and heroic patience, as he came to admire in that lovable, little boy.



Chapter 3 School Years

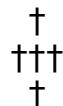
In 1827, when Vincent was almost 6 years of age, he began attending elementary school. He completed four grades as was the system at the time. He stood out because of his special diligence, his extraordinary memory and his quick mind. He likewise distinguished himself because of his modest and affability with his companions. He won their hearts and those of everyone with whom he came in contact. Because of his great submission toward his teachers, he was proposed as a model to his fellow students.

About this time [35], he received his First Communion, and began to receive It frequently. And with edifying devotion. What can be said of his spirit of piety which, in the schools of that period, was not much esteemed. He was most devoted to the Most Holy Mother of God, As he had lost his own Mother as a young child, he chose Maary as his Heavenly Mother, and remained devoted to her throughout his life.

When he had completed elementary school, he was enrolled in the regional lyceum. In those years, his mind and ability came to be known even more. His talents opened up, and he surpassed his fellow students, especially in the sciences, physics and mathematics.

In addition to the positive sciences, for which he manifested a fertile and versatile mind, it was evident that he had a great ability in poetry. In his early years at the lyceum, he was under the tutelage of the Professor of Italian Literature, Professor Capparozzo. It was noted that the boy had a facile, poetical style that was evident in all his verses. He gathered poetry and wrote his own in two very beautiful volumes.

To sum up in a few words all that has a bearing on the studies and talent of young Vincent, it would suffice to say that all of his fellow students, as well as his teachers, had for him a sincere esteem, a most tender love and a holy envy. The few testimonies that have come down to us, are most laudatory, and give abundant proof of this.



Chapter 4

As a Seminarian

Audisius, in treating of the signs of a vocation to the Priesthood states that these are not just a few, or different acts, as those could be the result of art of hypocrisy. What is needed is the evidence of natural, good habits. These indicate the inclinations, the temperament and the soul of a [36] Youngman.

We read in the Book of Wisdom: *And I was a witty child, and had received a good soul!* [Ws 8:19]. 'I was a witty child' – i.e., exceptionally formed and disposed by nature to acquire wisdom. 'I received a good soul' – not by my own merit but because of a gift of God, I received a good soul. That means a good nature corresponding to a natural temperament. This natural inclination for good, I received through the gratuitous beneficence of God.

Under this aspect, Audisius reasons;

I would be content with a greater or lesser intellectual ability, but I would never cease demanding from aspirants to a way of life that demands such humility, abnegation and charity, as does the Priesthood. This is the 'good soul' intended by the Holy Spirit, because grace ordinarily makes use of nature, and perfects it.

As another great Servant of God has said: 'Temperament and nature are the foundation on which the Grace of God works.' Now, I say that this fundamental sign of a vocation, more than any other, was found in an eminent degree in young Vincent Vignola. When he finished the course at the lyceum, he answered the call which he had heard echoing in his heart for some time. In 1840, he sent in an application to the Diocesan Seminary, and was accepted into the Theological Course. For a long time, previously, his innate goodness, his angelic modesty and his spirit of prayer had given those of his family and all those who knew him every indication that one day he would be a Priest.

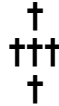
He studied at the Seminary for four years. From his very first day there, he won the hearts of his fellow seminarians, as well as of his teachers. This was due to his edifying conduct, his jovial temperament, his diligence in study, his exact observance of the seminary rules, his obedience and his piety. During the early months as a Seminarian, he was vested and received the Minor Orders.

Both he and his family were most happy. He was happy because he had achieved his great hope of being vested as a soldier [37] of Jesus Christ. His family was delighted, in that it considered itself blessed to have consecrated to God, and enrolled in the army of the Church, the fifth of its sons.

With his Vestition, Vincent dedicated himself with greater ardor of spirit to a way of life in which all who saw him could truly compare themselves to him. The hours of the day were well divided between prayer and the fulfillment of his duties in the Church and study. On holy days, he spent all his time in the service of his Parish,

in instructing the youth in the Oratory and in Christian Doctrine. He would also supervise them and direct them in their recreations.

In truth, therefore, it can be said that as a Seminarian, he began that life of sacrifice that was to last all his days. He gave up his sleep, his own comforts and dedicated his very being for the good of others. There is no wonder, then, that he easily obtained a dispensation, because he lacked the Canonical Age, and was promoted to the Major Orders, including the Priesthood.



Chapter 5 As a Priest

In St. Stephen's parish, it was long the custom to celebrate with due solemnity, the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross in the month of September, by means of a Triduum.

The Vignola family had somewhat previously moved from the Cathedral Parish to old St. Stephen's Parish. Then, on the 3rd Sunday of September, in 1844, the Feast of the Holy Cross was being observed. The newly ordained, Fr. Vincent Vignola celebrated his First Mass, assisted on the altar by his four priests brothers, who had already been ordained. We cannot describe the beauty of that moving day.

Shortly after his ordination, he was assigned to this Church. He immersed himself immediately in the works of charity, and zeal for the salvation of souls. He was totally dedicated to the priestly ministry, and his most benign and kind manner, was inspired all the more to conquer hearts for God.

[38] His most loving and intelligent efforts were spent for the good of souls. The beautiful and beloved image of St. Philip Neri seems to have come alive in him. The little urchins of St Stephen's would chase after him, as did the children of Palestine of long ago, follow after the Divine Redeemer. He delighted in speaking to them of God, of the Blessed Mother and of the Saints – he had a special knack in bringing about such conversations.

One day he was walking with the boys past the Jesuit Novitiate Chapel on the *Corso della Porta Nuova*. He asked the boys: 'Did you hear that bell? It is announcing the services for the Triduum in honor of St Stanislaus Kotska. He was once a young lad, as you are now ...' For the rest of their walk, Fr. Vincent told them the life story of the young Saint which they enjoyed very much.

From 1850 – 1857, he was assigned to give the weekly lesson of Religious Instruction to the students of the public school, of St. Stephen's Parish. He fulfilled this task with such success, that he merited the most ample praise from his Superiors, especially the Bishop. A Citation of the Imperial Royal Inspector of the

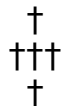
district, dated October 3, 1853, greatly praised his zeal, charity and diligence. The citation also expressed the desire that every such school might have a Catechist, such as Fr. Vincent.

However, Fr. Vincent's activity was not limited to the Priestly Ministry. As he was endowed with a quick and versatile mind, he never gave up his beloved studies of Italian literature, both prose and poetry. As we shall see, he was also most dedicated to the physical sciences, and mathematics.

His ability in this last mentioned field was further attested to by the fact that in 1854, he was named a 'Corresponding Associate of the Academy of Agriculture, Arts and Commerce.' In thus being enrolled, he received a diploma and its statutes, and the Academy made it known that it gloried in having so capable a number in its ranks. This was not a mere formal compliment, as three years earlier, in the meeting of the Academy, dated May 22, 1851, it recorded that it has conferred [39] its gold medal on the 'Abbot', Fr. Vincent Vignola, for his important and useful modifications on the electric motor.

Then, in the year 1855, when Bishop Riccabona was ruling the Diocese, he named Fr. Peter Vignola as Pastor of St. Firmus Major. Fr. Vincent requested and received permission to go there as his Curate. In this Parish, at his brother's side, he dedicated himself, heart and soul, to assist him in his pastoral ministry.

Fr. Vincent had always lived in perfect peace and harmony with all of his beloved brothers. It truly seemed as though one could not live apart from the others. There was such love among them, that it seemed that they had all the same heart and soul. Nonetheless, it had been decreed by God that their paths would separate, as will be seen in the next Chapter.



Chapter 6

As a Stigmatine

From the last words of the preceding chapter, the pious reader could readily deduce that God was calling Fr. Vincent to a more perfect life. As had his brother, Fr. Peter, he, too, had come to have a very high regard for our first confreres. The Venerable Founder, from the year 1846, had sent them to assist with the Youth Program and the Parish endeavors in St. Stephen's Parish. The Vignola home was just a few steps away from the House of *Santa Maria del Giglio*. For some time, then, the Stigmatine had been his ideal, and his continual ardent desire.

Although he was so close to his brothers and had never kept anything from them, he never once mentioned this to them. His reason was that because of their closeness to one another, he kept his greatest secret to himself for fear of saddening them.

He did, however, expose his desire to Fr. Marani, and reached an understanding with him. Fr. Marani was then the Superior of the Stigmatines, having recently succeeded the Venerable Founder.

The day set for his entrance finally arrived, and Fr. Vincent [40] then told his brothers, and his only sister, Teresa, all about his plan. This one sister, being the oldest of the children, they all had loved as a Mother.

We can only imagine how this announcement took them by complete surprise. We can also say that they were disappointed, and all opposed his decision most resolutely. The one most vehement in his objections was Fr. Peter, who had come to rely heavily on him in his Parish, in addition to loving him as a brother. Fr. Peter had but shortly before taken over his Parish, and little did he know then that God had also chosen him to enter this Congregation, and that one day he would be its Superior General.

However, Fr. Vincent was set on serving God with the total abnegation of his own will, and was convinced that this was the Will of God. He remained firm, gave up all that he owned and left that very evening, November 28, 1856, to enter the Stimate.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th of that same year, he began his Novitiate, with another Stigmatine Aspirant, Joseph Marchesini⁶⁵. His piety, affability, gentleness and meekness were most apparent. He gave immediate evidence of his spirit of sacrifice, that is, his spirit of obedience, poverty, mortification, patience and charity. In all these traits, he soon gave a most brilliant example.

During his first year of Novitiate, that is, on February 28, 1857, it was transferred from the Stimate to the House of the *Santissima Trinitá*. Fr. Vincent was involved in this transfer with the other Novices, among whom there were three Priests, with their Master, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti.

In those times, the ancient Convent of the *Trinitá* was badly in need of renovation. The Cloister was actually falling down, the walls were crumbling and the rooms were dark and in poor repair. As a result, this fervent Novice from his first day there, was supplied with the means of practicing holy Poverty. After a sufficient proof of this virtue, as well as the other religious virtues of Obedience and Chastity, the two years of Novitiate, which were then customary, passed, and Fr. Vincent made his Perpetual Profession. In 1859, he and all the others of the House, returned to the Stimate, because of the renovations at the *Trinitá*, which by now were judged absolutely necessary. Work was begun on the old Convent right way.

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⁶⁵ His life story will be found in Volume 3 of this series by Fr. Pio Gurisatti.

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Chapter 7
Fr. Vincent, Missionary

With good reason, I felt that this present Chapter could be entitled 'Fr. Vincent, Missionary.' Among the few priests who at the Stimmate in those times, called themselves *Apostolic Missionaries*, there were some who preached as many Parish Missions, Spiritual Exercises to Colleges of both men and women, Religious Communities, Seminarians and Priests, as did Fr. Vincent. He began in his very first year, even from his first months as a Novice, to preach important Mission that were crowned with excellent results. To mention only his more important assignments: on December 19, 1854, he began one at St. Peter's in Morubio; in January of 1857, at San Massimo's in Stelle of Valpantena. Immediately after that, he went to the Conossian Teaching Sisters of Cremona, then to the Clarissan Sisters of Verona. In 1858, he went to Vicenza, then to St. Anthony's Basilica in Padua, and to Noventa di Piave, where he heard Confessions 12 hours a day.

A characteristic of the Missionary journeys undertaken in those times by our first Confreres, such as Fr. Vincent beginning in 12858, was that one Parish Missin followed right after the other. They left, for example, on June 14th for Montorio, then moved on to Pigozzo, Trezzolano, Velo, Tregnago, Bolea, Vesteina and always just prior to the Bishop's Visitation of these places. The Fathers did not return to Verona until the 22nd of July. This list only includes the Mission and retreats that he preached. Not only during his early years in Religion was this his assignment, but with the passing of time, he went to Mondovi, the Cathedral of Treviso, to San Zeno in Val di Non, to Borgo, Vallarsa, Roncegno, Villiazzano, Povo, Trent and many other places.

When he would return from these Missions, he busied himself in the City with his ardent zeal for the good of different religious groups, through his preaching and hearing Confessions. His facile delivery and learned sermons that he gave in explaining the Gospel, as well as in his Catechetical Instructions, monthly days of recollection, not to mention his instructions, conferences, meditations, along with his academic discourses and panegyrics, made him a welcome [42] speaker who brought consoling results. This list does not even include the courses of Spiritual Exercises that he gave many times down over the years to our own Community.

He made use of the same principles and truths, that according to the method of St. Ignatius were established for the Spiritual Exercises. He would nevertheless present these same maxims, always under a different aspect. He not only was not boring, but he often was even entertaining!

Among his most celebrated accomplishments was a Retreat he gave one year on 'The Workings of a Clock'! This retreat was so named because of the introduction, the meditations and closing were all based on the various parts that make up a clock. He used as his examples the casing, the wheels and their purpose, the mechanism, the glass, the springs, the hands, levers, gears, movements, coils,

screws, cylinders, rings, weights, chains, metals, gold, silver and steel. It was a delight to hear him!

It was also a marvel to see him always ready and prepared for any type of preaching. Often he would substitute for anyone who had been assigned to a specific task who was unable to meet his commitment, due to illness or any other reason. The Superiors would turn instinctively to Fr. Vincent, who was always ready and even happy to accept.

Fr. Marani used to say: *Be ready for all things* [Parati ad omnia!] – and for him, this was not merely a slogan. He often asked for its fulfillment, even from the young students. There is recorded one example of this – on Saturday in 1868, Fr. Marani had commented on his oft-repeated challenge: *Be ready for all things!* He then added to one of the students who was standing near him: ‘Tomorrow morning, you will explain to the Oratory the meaning of: ‘Be prepared for all things!’ The student accepted the order, kissed Fr. Marani’s hand, and went off to prepare himself. Fr. Vincent often received a similar assignments during his life. He was in truth the genuine Missionary in motion, always prepared for all things.

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Chapter 8

Fr. Vincent as a Teacher

The life of a Missionary is a life of continual privations, indescribable fatigue and true sacrifice. In addition to delivering the assigned sermons, he often would have to remain in the Confessional for as much as 15 hours a day. I will not mention here the other privations which he must expect, more or less according to the places, the individuals, the rectories and the seasons. Because of this, the Venerable Fr. Segneri has well written: ‘Whoever is not disposed to suffer cold, hunger and this, should not be a missionary.’

With this in mind, there should be no wonder, then, that as Fr. Vincent lived the life of a true Missionary for many years without respite, without ever seeming tired, but even, according to his nature, he was indifferent, happy and even content - his health was to suffer as a result. He paid little heed to it, and the superiors due to the indifference he manifested during it, also did not notice it. However, his disposition gradually worsened, and in 1862, he became seriously ill. He began to spit blood and it was clear that his life was in danger. Thanks to God, he did recover somewhat, but the doctors forbade him to preach any more.

In that same year, the renovations were just about completed at the *Santissima Trinità*. On The Feast of St. Charles, November 4, 1862, the Novitiate and the Student House were moved back from the Stimmat to the *Trinità*. The following was the list of its personnel: Fr. Lenotti was Superior and Master of Novices; Fr. Marchesini, Prefect; and Fr. Vincent Vignola, Teacher.

The many and rare talents that Fr. Vincent possessed, were well known to the Superiors. He was especially capable in Italian Literature, physics and mathematics. Hence, the judgment was made that he could still be useful even in his somewhat [44] weakened health. He was assigned as teacher of these subjects, and this new appointment was a delight to him.

Fr. Vincent began his teaching career in the private High School and Lyceum of Verona, during that November of 1862. He continued in this role until the 18th of August 1866. On that day, because of the political upheaval, he went to the Province of Trent with the Students, who were transferred there. Fr. Vincent continued teaching until 1874.

His classes in Italian, as well as those in physics and mathematics, were comparable to those of an experienced Professor. His explanations were most learned, clear and evident; they were accompanied by his goodness, kindness and charity. The students looked upon his classes as a sort of pass-time. He was a capable man, but never gave any indication of pretension. He used to be genuinely embarrassed in front of his students when they showed their esteem for him. He used to say that his only qualifications for teaching was his 'Degree of Ignorance!' He was a humble man, meek and patient. When the occasion arose, and he had to correct his students, he would also direct their attention to his own faults.

He was so clear in his explanations that even the mediocre students were able to grasp them. He used to make use of the most common and understandable similitudes and comparisons. In the presence of his Superiors, he would often come to the defense of his Students. One day, in 1867, he wrote to the Superior General from Villazzano. In his letter he described the students as a promising group of mathematicians, who were a joy to him, and who so readily understood the matter he presented. He expressed his thanks to God for them.

Fr. Vincent, however, did not limit his activities to teaching, but he also attended to his own learning. The old *Academias*, that were common in that time, were put on almost without number, and were under his direction and assistance. We will indicate here only a few of the principal ones: the memorable and most successful *Accademia* presented for the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Marani in 1864. He wrote a poem for that occasion that Professor Gagliardi put to music:

Onward, my brothers, ever up and free

In Mirth and rejoicing toward our goal.

Let us show in our faces for all to see

This happiness profound, that is in our soul!

He also wrote a few verses of dedication for the oil portrait of the Superior, painted by the artist Recchia, and donated for the occasion by the Vezzari family:

How beautiful indeed is this portrait!

How well it captures his usual state.

His expression grave, but also serene

His manifest kindness is herein seen

In his clear eyes there is detected

The depth of his soul, therein reflected.

How beautiful indeed is this portrait!

Shortly after their transfer to Trent, another *Academia* was held for the 50th anniversary of the Congregation, 1816-1866. There were also others, as the 25th anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Pius IX, the centenary [1874] of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, for various Fests of St. Joseph and those held on the Espousals almost every year. Professor Gagliardi also put to music the beautiful Hymn to the Espousals, that begins:

So worthy of praise is Mary's Name

Throughout heaven and earth is its renown,

But also does his have an equal claim,

As God espoused Joseph, his too doth resound.

Pure lilies of untarnished splendor

Each breathing forth a heavenly odor

Among You, grow these two plants.

He took every occasion to offer a sample of his verses. One of these described in an imaginary manner, a trip he made to preach a Mission in San Zeno, in Val di Non. It also describes a trip he made to the Sanctuary of San Remedio. It ended with a poem on the '*Bread of the Nonnes*', a sort of simple and flowing poem of 250 verses of 5 syllables each.

On the occasion of the First Mass of Fr. Charles Zara, as Fr. Vincent had been explaining Euclid in class, he took the time to compose a most affectionate letter. In it, he asked pardon for not having written a worthy poem. However, his letter was full of such expressions as: Conical sections ... hyperbole and parable ... elliptic curvatures ... parellepypeda ... In addition to these expressions which he presented in rhyme, he had about 70 'septenary dactyls'.

We will not comment here on his many other poetical compositions, one more beautiful than the preceding. The night before he left for Trent, he was bothered by a mosquito, and as he could not sleep, he got up and described his experience in verse. It is really a delight to read. He wrote another ode to a 'Pumpkin'; another entitled: 'In His Easy Chair'; and still another entitled: 'Self-Love.' His work was much like that of a piano [46] tuner. Suffice it to say that the poems he wrote and collected amount to two volumes. Writing these verses was not his only hobby, but he took

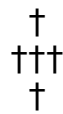
delight also in prose. He inserted in all his writings, even his humorous ones, a moral, aimed at the good of souls.

From the first year he was at Villazzano, and more precisely on December 16, 1866, on his own initiative, he devised an idea that would help keep strong the union and charity with the Confreres in Verona. He thought up the idea of issuing a Newsletter, that was to be sent out every 15 days. The first issue had as its title: *Messagero Tirolese*.⁶⁶ The first section was always a religious exhortation. Then, there would be a Chronicle of events of items of interest. Every issue that has come down to us was compiled and written under his direction. That same year, he wrote the *Biography of Anthony Caucigh*, proposing him as the model for the young Novices. He also compiled a booklet entitled: 'The Month of St. Joseph' – for the Novices and the students which he wrote and bound himself.

On November 4, 1866, a few months after he arrived in Trent, as he felt he had too little to do, he accepted a class of Christian Doctrine. For some time, this had been taught in the Seminary Chapel, and had always been poorly attended. With his clear, and understandable explanations, and his friendly manner, he gave this Course new life.

It is not known, nor can it ever be explained, how that holy man found time for everything. After he had been teaching, writing, preaching, or hearing Confessions, whatever free time he had left, he would put it to good use. With his clever mind, he would make little gadgets, pictures or engage in arts and crafts, to distribute his creations as gifts to the children. He made a Tabernacle for the Blessed Sacrament, and set candle-sticks around it, on a wooden base. It was covered with paper, giving it the appearance of marble, and then was encased in glass. It was then set off with gold stripes, and beautiful designs.

After his serious illness, Fr. Vincent spent his years from 1866 – 1874 in this way. In this latter year, he was named Director.



Chapter 9 Fr. Vincent as Director

In the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ*, it is written:

It is a great and beautiful thing to live under obedience, to live under a Superior and not to be master of oneself. It is much more secure to be in subjection rather than to be in charge. Anywhere you may go, you will not find peace, except in humble acceptance and dependence on a Superior [Book I., c. 9]

⁶⁶ Translator's Note: The forerunner of the Stigmatine *Bertoniano*???

The principle was very deeply ingrained in the mind and heart of Fr. Vincent. Even though he was eminently qualified in mind and spirit, learning and holiness, he was 54 years of age before he was entrusted with the duty of commanding.

It is a well known fact that from the time Bishop Riccabona left Verona for the See of Trent [1861], he did all in his power to have Fr. Marani send the Stigmatines to his new Diocese. For this end, many and long negotiations were undertaken, with little or no success. The main problem was a lack of personnel.

However, the political events of 1866 came to the aid of the Bishop. He did not content himself with inviting the Stigmatines to find refuge in Trent, but he offered them the temporary occupancy of his own Episcopal Summer Residence in Villazzano, just outside the city. Even before the change in the government, about the middle of August, and more precisely on the 17th, the exodus began. The first group of Students accompanied by one of the Priests, set out from Verona. The next day, the second group left with Fr. Vincent, and a few more on each of the following days.

In the time that was required to move furniture, beds, kitchen utensils, etc., from Verona to Villazzano, our Confreres were hospitably lodged in a college that had been offered to them by Fr. Bernard Fusari, an excellent Priest of that city. They stayed there until August 24th, as on that day, the wagon [48] arrived at Villazzano. It was so heavy, however, that there was fear that it could not cross the Bridge at Fersa, which had to be crossed in order to reach Villazzano.

Our Students were to remain in Villazzano for six years with Frs. Richard DaPrato, John Baptist Lenotti and Vincent Vignola. In June of 1872, Bishop Riccabona fell gravely ill, and his doctors advised him to go out into the country during the summer months. Therefore, the Students moved again, this time to Povo, into a house rented from the Ballarini family. They remained here until November 24, 1874.

In the meantime, Fr. Vincent had been named Director of the Student House. In that position, he began negotiations to purchase the House of San Bernardino in Trent. Papers were passed on August 27, 1872.

The House was really only a farmer's shack. Next to it, there was a very large field of most fertile soil that promised a good crop. It was irrigated by the nearby Persa River, that cuts through the property. However, the house was in such bad repair, that it was truly and rightly called a 'shack.' The Director's first job was to have it renovated. This proved to be a long task, and the community could not move in there before 1874. Then began the most regular and normal period of Fr. Vincent's active life.

During these years, Fr. Lenotti and Fr. Vincent made the long journey from Trent to Prague to visit our beloved Confrere, Monsignor Bragato. After the political changes of 1866, he no longer came back to Italy. The Empress Marianna, wife of Ferdinand, had a stupendous royal summer residence in Galliera of Cittadella. As

she was Italian by birth, she used to remain there for the greater part of every year from early spring, through the fall. The Priests attached to her Court, always accompanied her there, and among these, was her personal Confessor Fr. Louis Bragato.

To this Priest, our Congregation is much indebted. It was he who maintained, and it might be even said, he is the one who [49] saved it during the years of its suppression. The real truth of the matter is that through his intercession, the most pious Empress sent sums of money to Trent. We ought to consider her as a true benefactress.

It was only proper that these two representatives of our Congregation should go there in person to express their gratitude to Fr. Bragato, and the august Empress. This visit resulted in benefiting substantially the recently opened House of Trent, and the young Students in lodged, who were in extreme need of being subsidized.

I cannot bring this Chapter to a close without at least mentioning briefly the great good accomplished by Fr. Vincent Vignola and his companions in the new House of San Bernardino. In addition to assisting the students in scholastic and spiritual matters, they gave Missions in many parts of the Diocese. Without respite, they reached to many Religious Institutes and frequently they were invited to the Seminary. The faculty there consisted of Monsignor Manin, Rector; Monsignor Zambelli, Spiritual Director – both of these were friends of Fr. Vincent; Monsignor Inherhoffer, Prefect; Monsignor Planer and Monsignor Molinari. Fr. Vincent came to be loved, esteemed and admired by all of these men, and scarcely a day would go by that he was not called upon by one or other of them.

An even greater accomplishment, though, was that Fr. Vincent began a most ambitious enterprise in the new House. He built a little Chapel on the ground floor, and opened it to the public. It was frequented not only by the People of Trent, but also by souls from the nearby villages of Povo and Villazzano. These people had a great love for our Fathers, and came to them in great numbers for Confession. Soon it became necessary to construct a door leading out into the street, and the little Church acquired the appearance of a sanctuary. Fr. Vincent was always available and took interest in all that went on.

He was entirely forgetful of himself,. And he manifested such a spirit of mortification, poverty and sacrifice that he was an edification for all. This, though, and even more will be seen better and more clearly in the following chapter.

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Chapter 10

Fr. Vincent Director at Parma

On the 5th of September, 1875, the Superior General of holy memory, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, passed away. Shortly thereafter, the Chapter met to choose his successor. By a marvelous disposition of God, Fr. Peter Vignola, Fr. Vincent's brother, was chosen. This was the same Fr. Peter who had done all in his power to dissuade his brother from entering, only to follow him a few years later. At this same Chapter, Fr. Vincent was named a General Councilor.

Bishop Villa, who had only recently taken over the See of Parma, had worked to have the Stigmatines in this city, and in his Diocese. He had already concluded the negotiations with Fr. Lenotti. It was also fairly well known that Fr. Lenotti was going to send Fr. Peter Vignola to Parma. As it turned out, Fr. Lenotti died, Fr. Peter succeeded him in the government of the Congregation and he sent his brother, Fr. Vincent to Parma. He set out on February 1, 1876, with Fr. Louis Morando and Bro. James Zadra. The previous evening, January 31st, there was held the moving service for those going on a journey that was concluded with the fraternal embrace.'

To secure this foundation, in addition to Bishop Villa, a pious layman, by the name of Camillus Cagliari had worked very hard. This fervent Catholic layman went himself there on that February 1st, to meet our Confreres at the station. In those extremely difficult days at Parma that resulted from the lack of finances and other matters that had to be ironed out, this generous man was a pillar of strength. He also enlisted the aid of other good persons worthy of mention, as the Countess Benassi, and others.

Fr. Vincent graphically described these anxious days in his Chronicle for the House of Parma. He wrote:

Our arrival seems to have moved both the good and the bad. The newspaper, *Il Presente*, on the day before we got there, had an article to the effect that the Priests of the Stimmatine were coming to the city. The tone of the article was certainly not one of congratulations.

The campaign of presenting an appeal to the Mayor had not succeeded.

On March 7th, another unfavorable article appeared: 'The Brethren, or Priests of the Stimmatine, impart to the people of that sector, the Sunday instructions.' Then it added the pointed comment: 'What does the Deputy, the Marchese, Mayor della Rosa, say of this?'

The Fathers began their work from scratch. St. Ignatius had said that Poverty is the foundation stone of religious houses. The community there lacked even the essentials. On March 18th, a coffee set arrived, consisting of four cups that were sent by the Countess Benassi. They did not even have the means there of making a fire. Bro Zadra one day told Fr. Vincent there were not even any wooden matches. He was told to say one *Hail Mary*, and shortly afterwards a wagon load of wood piled up

at the door. The Brother who had not ordered it, was about to send it back. He asked Fr. Vincent about it, and found that neither did he have any knowledge concerning it.

They were most concerned as to how they were going to pay for it. The wagon driver just said that he was told to deliver it, and wanted to know where he should unload it. Due to his insistence, they agreed to take it for the time being. Later, they discovered that it was the gift of a noble woman, their benefactress.

The Countess Saragna had heard that there were not enough beds in the house, so she went one day with a supply of blankets. On the day of their arrival in Parma, Bishop Villa gave them a ham for their dinner. However the Community never asked for a thing. As it was still the custom, then, to render their services gratuitously, Fr. Vincent once refused 30 Lira that was given to him for a sermon he preached on the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross. The vestry man prevailed upon him to take it. He would not, however, until he had written to his brother, Fr. Peter about the matter.

In this way, Fr. Vincent's reputation gradually increased. Bishop Villa, a zealous Apostle, hardly ever let a day go by without calling for him. The youth of the area were very soon attracted by [52] Fr. Vincent's fine manner and his gentle way. That sector that housed the dregs of society, earlier had to be policed, but in a short time its aspect changed.

On February 16th, just one day and two weeks after their arrival, Fr. Vincent was seen surrounded by 50 boys. 'They are too many to feed so soon,' he wrote jokingly. He sacrificed himself for them in school, in the Oratory, in the Recreation Center and in Church. They came to his Confessional and he sought them out in their houses and even along the streets.

One night, he was returning from a preaching assignment, and ran into a crowd of mischief-makers. They began to make fun of him. All of a sudden, a shout was heard from among the rabble: 'Don't say anything to that Priest – he is the best there is. We know him – he is Fr. Vincent of the *Quartiere!*'

Another day, he came across two boys who were arguing violently. Their words then became blows, and they shouted terrible curses at one another. The good Father just watched them. One of them said to him: 'Just mind your own business!' Fr. Vincent answered kindly: 'But, this is my business.' He then spoke to them in such a gentle way that soon they were asking his pardon. They then asked him if they could come into Church, and if he would hear their Confessions. He most happily heard their Confessions.

How he loved children! He would spend hours at a time making trinkets to give to them. He came to know of a poor boy and took an interest in him, because of his goodness. He sought to provide for him the necessities of life, and asked alms for him. He even deprived himself, even though his own life lacked these same necessities. He taught and instructed the boy privately. Such cases were multiplied many times and without this charitable Priest, no one knows what would have become of them. With his help, a good number of them were able to find their places

in life, and some of them even became Priests. I myself have come across some of those who gratefully attributed their successful careers to the charity of Fr. Vincent.

[53] It was not only the youth who benefited from the solicitous and loving care of this charitable Priest. He extended his zeal to every social level. All the sections and Church of the city, and especially those of the *Quartiere*, can attest to this – especially St. Charles, St. Cecilia, the *Chieppine* Sisters and the Guasti's. He frequently helped at the Diocesan Seminary, where all the Professors and most particularly, the future Cardinal Ferrari – who would become the Rector of the Seminary, came to love him. In years later, this Cardinal Archbishop of Milan often mentioned him.

Evenings, the Priests would gather at our House – among them would often be the future Cardinal], to discuss and to solve together the moral cases. In those sessions, they all came to know and admire in Fr. Vincent more than his angelic life. They came to see that he was a man of not just ordinary knowledge, and that he had a sound and practical judgment, that was remarkable.

It would suffice to know that after only four years in Parma, he was elected an Active Associate of the Academy of St. Thomas. On March 4, 1880 he received his membership scroll.

It would be too lengthy to give even a compendium of all the activities of Fr. Vincent as Director at Parma. To sum them all up, he was described as an angel of goodness, kindness, meekness and amiability. Very well could there be applied to him what he wrote of his brother, Fr. Ignatius Vignola, who died in 1876. Fr. Vincent wrote: 'Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God.' To those outside the House, Fr. Vincent was known as 'the Apostle of Parma.'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ **Translator's Note:** There is an interesting episode regarding Fr. Vincent from his 'Parma Years'. His name does not appear among the Capitulars present when the 10th General Chapter opened, Feb. 18-28-1881 – the re-election of his brother, Fr. Peter, was dead-locked. Here the Chapter Minutes speak:

IInd Session

the 20th day of February 1881, Sunday ⁶⁷

On this day, at 3:00 p.m., the Capitulars assembled in the orator next to the room of the Ven. Founder, where, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, with the **Veni, Creator**, Fr. Mark Bassi delivered the prescribed discourse, for the Election of the Superior General; when this was finished, and after a brief prayer in private, all the Capitulars entered the room of the Father Founder, to proceed to the Election.

There were 14 present.

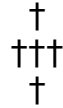
The ballots were distributed, and collected, according to the prescriptions, and the following were nominated:

- Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Seven Votes
- Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Five Votes.
- Rev. Fr. Francis Benciolini with one vote.
- Rev. Fr. Chalres Zara with one vote.

Therefore, no one obtained more than half of the votes.

The Vote was repeated on those nominated, with the same number voting, and the result was:

- Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Seven Votes



Chapter 11

Fr. Vincent in Retirement

Fr. Vincent had worked for a long time. In all the years, he applied himself with tireless assiduity. He was a faithful laborer, who served God joyfully, evening those most bitter [54] and sad times, that would ordinarily break even a soul of bronze. Those very sacrifices that he joyfully undertook, as well as his many and varied cares demanded in his role as Superior of a House that had such a diversified program, had taken their toll on him. His brother, Fr. Peter, the Superior General, recalled him to Verona, with the idea of giving him a little rest to restore his failing health.

On his arrival back in Verona, however, despite his ailments that became increasingly worse, he was resolved to make the best use of his retirement. He cordially, and I might say, avidly, accepted every effort to preach, to hear Confessions, to instruct and to help out in any way. With his great solicitude, he would go to hear Confessions, either in the house, or outside. He went to religious houses, schools and colleges, and to all, he was an Angel of God. In his benign and serene manner, he would bring joy and peace. He was even jubilant when he was able to do some good. He never spared himself when it was a matter of the spiritual good of his neighbor.

As he was well along in years, it cost him a great deal to maintain discipline, especially among the young boys of the early high school classes. Nevertheless, he

Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Six Votes ⁶⁷.

Rev. Fr. Charles Zara with One vote.

No one was elected.

A THIRD vote was taken with the same result.

A FOURTH Vote was taken, still with the identical results.

A FIFTH vote was taken, still with the same results.

A SIXTH vote was heard, but this was no different in its result ⁶⁷.

At this point ⁶⁷, Fr. Vincent Vignola arrived, and a SEVENTH vote was taken:

Voting 15

The following were nominated:

Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Eight votes. [foot-note continued on next page]

Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Six Votes ⁶⁷.

Rev. Fr. Charles Zara with One vote.

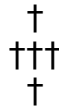
THEREFORE: SINCE THE VERY **REV. PETER VIGNOLA** OBTAINED MORE THAN HALF OF THE VOTES, HE WAS PROCLAIMED BY THE VICAR OF THE CONGREGATION, AS THE LEGITIMATE SUPERIOR, AND THE DUE REVERENCE WAS PAID TO HIM BY THE VICAR, BY THE SECRETARY, AND BY THE ASSISTANT, AND BY ALL THE OTHERS IN ORDER.

agreed to teach Religion to them. His patience with these boys, who at times were totally undisciplined, bordered on the heroic. He remained always meek, kind and amiable toward all.

One day, the Dean of Studies entered his class room while Fr. Vincent was teaching Religion. Seeing him more serious than usual, he was asked: 'Have the boys bothered you?' He answered that they had, 'perhaps a little too much.' He was then asked what had happened. He began by saying, 'some of them...' – but, was interrupted and was asked for the names. He then turned to the students and said: 'Be good now, otherwise next time I will tell them.' He was truly a model of goodness, meekness and kindness.

Notwithstanding his failing heath, Fr. Vincent lived 'retirement' in these occupations from 1886 until April 19, 1889.

This type of retirement can very well be compared to that time [55] in the life of our Divine Master, shortly before His Sorrowful Passion. Our beloved Fr. Vincent was being prepared for his Ascent to Mount Calvary.



Chapter 12

From the Pulpit to His Death-bed

A debilitating heart ailment had threatened the life of Fr. Vincent, and each day it was more of a concern.

On the evening of Good Friday, April 19, 1889, a Priest was scheduled to preach in the Church of the Stimmate. A few days before, this Priest had not been feeling well. In the sermon for that night, he was to ascend Calvary, meditate on the Agony of Christ, and preach on the Seven Last Words. Fr. Vincent seemed very unhappy when it was decided to look for a substitute and no one thought of asking him. Finally, he made his willingness known to the Superiors. He was overjoyed when they accepted his offer, and he set himself to the task of preparing for the devout service.

His first brief sermon, I would say, he gave with extraordinary effort and fervor. It was, though, a supreme effort, and an outlet for his inner piety, the last flicker of a light that was going out. When he got up to speak on the Second Last Word, he seemed drained. He struggled to his feet, his voice was very weak, and he was seen frequently mopping his brow with his handkerchief – but, he continued on.

Then the sad and mournful verse was sung: *'When death with its fearsome grasp – comes to carry off my life – then, o Lord, come to me!'* At this moment, he suffered a paralysis of his left side, that soon was general. One of the Students went up to him and whispered: 'Father, you are not well- come down!' He answered; 'I'll

be all right, just bring me a glass of water.' He was too long accustomed to struggling against his indispositions. However, his sacrifice was not consummated.

With the Feast of the Mystery of the Cross he had begun his Priestly lifelong years before in St. Stephen's Church. Now, preaching on these mysteries of the Cross, he concluded it at the Stimate.

He was taken from the pulpit, and carried off in a chair to his bed. As he was being carried along, he joked and said: 'Take good care of this arm-chair... for heaven's sake!'

Every possible care was administered to him. The doctor drew some blood from him, which seemed to help somewhat. He was in such good humor, it was as though he was trying to hide his true condition. His Confessor asked if he would care to go to Confession, and he said he would most willingly. He received this sacrament in full possession of his faculties.

After 9:00 p.m., the doctor returned, and found that his condition had gravely worsened. It was then decided to bring him Viaticum. However, this was delayed, as Fr. Vincent was disturbed by period of vomiting, that lasted until about 10:00 p.m.

It seemed that these spells had passed and his Confessor asked if he wanted to receive Holy Communion. He answered that he did, and the Priest went to the nearby Chapel to bring it. However, when he returned to the room with the Sacrament, Fr. Vincent's mouth was clamped shut, and he seemed to have lapsed into unconsciousness. Extreme Unction was then administered, and the prayers for a departing soul were begun. About mid-night, he entered into his last agony, that gradually became worse until sunset of the following day.

It was now Holy Saturday, about the time when the *Regina Caeli* was to be sung. In the space of 24 hours, Fr. Vincent had passed from the pulpit to his death. He rendered his soul back to God, amidst the sorrow and grief of his confreres, who were gathered around his bed.

We will refrain here from mentioning the grief that his sudden death brought to so many in Verona, Trent and Parma, among Stigmatines and all those who had come to know the beloved deceased. I will close here stating that the memory of Fr. Vincent and the love that was hard for him will remain unchanged in the minds and hearts of all. What power, what amiability and what force there was in that Priest to bind hearts!

One of his admirers states: 'If it were possible, I would have encased him in gold!'. Another remarked: 'to please him, I would have done anything. He inspired me with his rectitude of soul, with his unstained and meek heart; he always thought of the good of others, and was incapable of thinking evil of anyone!'

He was truly worthy of the honor that Verona paid him the morning of his funeral, on April 22nd. The last tribute was devout and moving. Many members of

the Clergy were present, many representatives of Religious Institutes, as well as a large number of the faithful. The general consensus was: Verona and the Congregation of the Priests of the Stigmata had suffered a great loss. He was a gem, who was all the more lovable, for his modest and unassuming ways.

May his rare virtues remain deeply impressed on our minds and hearts, and may they always inspire us to imitate them.

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Brief Biographical Sketches

Volume II

Father Joseph Marchesini

of the

Congregation of the Priests

of the Sacred Stigmata

of Our Lord Jesus Christ

VERONA

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Preface

The first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation is to be celebrated with as much solemnity as possible. The Congregation was founded on November 4, 1816, when Venerable Gaspar Bertoni entered the Stimate, with his first Companions. As a commemoration of this event, it was decided to gather Recollections of our Fathers and Brothers, who have died after 1886. The Reminiscences of our deceased confreres, before this date, were already published on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola, of venerated memory.

The [First World] War, however, has discouraged any exterior celebration of this event. Moreover, it has called to arms a number of those assigned to gather these reminiscences. Therefore, they have been unable to present them in time for publication.

Only the under-signed, who is most advanced in years, being the oldest member of the Congregation and the most unoccupied, has been able to fulfill this assignment. He was given the task of compiling the reminiscences of Fr. Peter Vignola, his predecessor in the Office of Superior General; of Fr. Vincent Vignola, his Master of Novices⁶⁸; and of Fr. Joseph Marchesini, his Prefect.

All three of these men were most dear to the complier – all three were native Veronese – and all three were contemporaries of our Venerable Founder. Since the others were unable to fulfill their task, the undersigned is happy to publish the biographical sketches of at least these three men. He believes that their lives can be held up as models of the Christian and Religious Life, and which, only with difficulty, could ever be surpassed.

May God grant, through the intercession of His Most Holy Mother, that this small and poorly arranged booklet, might contribute something to enkindle in us, during the centenary celebration of the Congregation, that spirit of our Venerable Founder. This spirit is in the hopes of each and every one, and the object of the efforts of us all.

From the Stimate, November 4, 1916

Fr. Pio Gurisatti

⁶⁸ The Biographies of the Vignola Brothers is the subject matter of Volume I of this series.

Chapter 1

His Birth

On the 22nd of November 1856, young Joseph Marchesini, aged 23, inspired, as he said, by Mary Most Holy, exchanged the comforts of his home, for the most mortified life that was then lived at the Stimate.

He was born September 5, 1833, on Via Pallone, the son of Louis Marchesini and Ursula Ruzzenenti. They were parents who were rich in the goods of this world, but also - and what is more important - in their long-standing faith and in the solid Christian virtues.

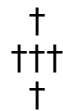
His father had a great affection for the Priests at the Stimate, and especially for their Founder, the Venerable Gaspar Bertoni. Mr. Marchesini hardly let a day pass without making his way at least once, and even twice, to that hermitage. He was often accompanied by his sons, especially by Joseph who was the oldest.

Years later, Fr. Joseph stated that his family was so close to the Stimate that his Father hardly did anything, whether in spiritual matters, or those concerning his considerable holdings, without first consulting Fr. Gaspar.

At his death, Mr. Marchesini was assisted by the Stigmatines. Fr. Marani stayed with him to the last to care for his soul, while Brother Paul Zanolì was almost always at his side as Infirmarian.

There can be little wonder, then, with such an example, that the Marchesini family grew up most attached to our early Confreres. At one and the same time, two of the sons, Joseph and John Baptist, the second born, were Novices. The latter, however, entered shortly before Joseph. John, however, before the end of his Novitiate, partly because of his health, and partly because he was needed to administer the family estate, returned home. When Joseph entered the Congregation, the administration of their property was left in the hands of outsiders.

I felt it was necessary to mention these particulars to show the good influence of the example of these parents on their children. Mr. Marchesini was truly a Stigmatine in spirit, and his sons wanted to be Stigmatines in fact.



Chapter 2

His education

One of the great concerns of Louis Marchesini was to provide a Christian education for his sons.

He, therefore, decided that all of his children would attend Catholic schools. His daughters were enrolled in the Schools taught by the Sisters of the Holy Family. His two older sons, enrolled at St. Sebastian's, taught by the Jesuits, and the third son attended a College in Brescia, conducted by this same Company. He never let his children leave the house alone, even to go to school, or to Church, and they always went together. Fr. Joseph mentioned this years later. He said that at the time of his Father's death, he was already 20 years of age. For the first time in his life, he left the house alone. He said he felt so strange that he looked around rather sheepishly, and felt very self conscious. The Church that he attended was actually quite close to his home, as the family attended the Parish conducted by the Fathers of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. He usually attended this Church for Christian Doctrine. For daily Mass, he usually came to the Stimate, which was also near his home. He also attended the Oratory at the Stimate, and it was where he went to Confession.

How edifying it was to see Joseph, as a young man, always among [61] the first to arrive for the Oratory, of which he was Prefect. He gave no heed to human respect, and often served Mass, and frequently received Holy Communion. It was also most edifying to hear him say that he had never taken part in games, attended amusements or diversions of any kind. Never in his life did he ever set foot in any theater, and I say this, not only for the purpose of seeing a show, but even to see what they looked like inside. He had no friends, or companions, but always accompanied his Father, or his brothers, or was with some of the family servants.

One of his pass-times was to sit by the window of his house to watch a soccer game. Sometimes, he would be joined there by a fine young man of the nobility, as his house provided a good view. Among those he used to visit was the Marchese, Louis di Canossa, during the early years he was a priest [a future Cardinal].

He did enjoy hunting and also had a great love for horses. When he would go out for his recreation, it would either be horse-back riding, or driving in a carriage. This was always with his Father's permission. Even when he went hunting, it was always on their own property, and in the company of good people, such as Fr. di Canossa, during his years he was a Canon. This is one little anecdote I recall that Fr. Joseph recounted in his humble way.

One day when they were out hunting together, as every now and then, they would indeed come across a hare. According to the rules, it was Fr. di Canossa's turn to shoot first. However, Joseph, without reflecting was ready for the kill sooner. Fr. di Canossa was a little angered, seeing himself deprived of the first shot. In a polite, but firm manner, he brought this to young Marchesini's attention. Joseph took it well, and meekly responded that his guest was right.

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Chapter 3

He enters the Stimmate

Shortly after his Father died, as we have already seen, young John Baptist Marchesini was already an Aspirant. His younger brother was away at College in Brescia. Necessarily, then, and also because his Father had so directed, Joseph took charge of the administration of the entire estate. This was comprised principally of large and fertile fields that were quite extensive and distant from one another.

Joseph was a most precise and exact man, and this large estate took up much of his time. His widowed Mother, although grieving for the loss of her husband, was content and happy to see the manner in which the family affairs were being handled.

One day, without her least suspecting it, Joseph let her know that his mind was made up to follow his brother, John, to the Stimmate. On hearing this news, that was so unexpected, she was deeply concerned about what his departure would mean. In her consternation, she hurried to speak with Fr. Marani, now the Superior General of the Congregation, who had long been a family friend and counselor. She asked him to use all his influence and authority to dissuade her son from taking such a step.

Fr. Marani had been well aware of the situation for some time. Whether it was to accede to her wishes, or to put Joseph's vocation to the test, he used every possible argument to have the young man give up this resolution of his. However, the fervent young man remained firm and resolute in his desire to follow what he believed to be the Will of God, and the inspiration of Mary Most Holy. Then, other persons of influence talked to him, even Priests, for the purpose of proving his vocation still further. All was to no avail. Joseph consistently answered that he wanted to be a Priest more than anything else.

What caused the greatest admiration for him and was a source of edification, was the fact that he wanted to enter to become a Brother. This was the deciding factor in that the fervent young man gave proof of his spirit of mortification and humility. This was the foundation of his vocation, and he retained this same spirit for the remainder of his life.

At long last, all the obstacles and difficulties that stood in his way were overcome. Being most happy and contented, he received the blessing of his Mother, and attained his longed for grace. As we have seen, he entered November 22, 1856. In gratitude to God, he never tired of repeating: ***This is my rest forever and ever: here will I dwell for I have chosen it.*** [Ps 131:14].

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Chapter 4

His Novitiate, Profession and Studies

As was the custom in those times, among well-to-do families, Joseph, in his early years, had only taken those studies that would provide him with an education sufficient for his state in life. For all practical purposes, he had completed to what would be comparable to the high school of today. Hence, he did not even dream it would be possible to complete those studies that were necessary for the Priesthood. He was content, as he had said, to become a Brother. However, the Superiors thought otherwise, and to obey their orders, he prepared himself for the task of hard study.

He was vested and began his Novitiate, on the Feast of the Espousals, January 23, 1857. During the two years of probation, he reviewed his earlier studies, and also completed those studies called 'Rhetoric.' The very day he took his Perpetual Vows, January 23, 1859, he began his course in Philosophy, to be followed by that of Theology.

Notwithstanding the fact that he was endowed with a fairly good memory, his difficulties were not insignificant. Those that he encountered and overcame, were further complicated by his somewhat delicate health.

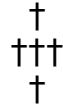
There was also the fact that this new way of life was notably different from what he had been accustomed to. At home, the family usually had a light lunch at noon, and the main meal [64] at night. So it was, at noon at the Stimmat, he had little appetite, whereas by supper time, which consisted of a little plate of beans, he was famished.

Another fact seems worthy of note. At home he was accustomed to smoking. On entering religion, perhaps he could have asked permission to break this habit gradually. He knew, however, that the life in religion meant a life of mortification. He was expected to endure some mortification, so he never brought the subject up. It was edifying and most amusing, to hear him tell the story of how one day, while on a walk, outside of *Porta Nuova*, he passed near a man who was smoking a cigar. He walked close to him so that he could get the smell of the smoke. Some might say that this is a small thing, but genuine religious understand it better. They know, as did he, that without the spirit of sacrifice, one cannot be a religious.

Because of this good spirit of his, and due to his desire for regular observance, as well as for what I would call his tenacity in observing good order in all things, he was judged most suited to be put at the head of the small group of Novices, aspirants and Professed of that era. He was named the Prefect.

One of his duties was to ring the bell for the community exercises. Sometimes I can still see him, with the bell in his hand, as he awaited the first sound of the clock, that he might ring the bell promptly. His punctuality was a characteristic trait of his entire life. He also expected it of others in conformity with the old rule that states: ***rivaling on earth the heavenly spirits, they will hasten – even fly – to do the will of the Lord!***

In this assignment of Prefect, over the young students, and with his spirit of mortification and sacrifice, as we noted earlier, in the 6 years, due to his intense efforts, he completed all his requirements. He was then promoted to Major Orders and the Priesthood.



[65]
Chapter 5
His Ordination

After Joseph had received the Major Orders of the Sub-diaconate and the Diaconate, in the shortest period of time, Fr. Marani himself brought him to Trent. There, Bishop Benedict Riccabona, our long-time friend and benefactor, ordained him a Priest on Sunday, March 23, 1862.

On the 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation of Mary most Holy, surrounded by his Religious Confreres, by his family and relatives, he celebrated his First Mass in the Oratory of the Stimmate.

Full of gratitude for so great a grace, that far exceeded his humble but ardent wishes, joyfully he repeated the words of the Prophet: ***What shall I render to God for all that He has rendered to me?*** [Ps 115:3]. He wondered how he would be able to correspond to God for such a great and outstanding grace. He resolved that he would belong entirely to God, and he would sacrifice himself to Him, by consecrating to Him and to his beloved Congregation that had done so much for him, his entire person, body and soul, and all his belongings. He resolved that for the future he would no longer consider anything his own, but that all belonged to God and to the Congregation.

These were his thoughts and he fulfilled them. Through his life, he maintained these sentiments. It was but natural that as a Priest, he would keep this same religious spirit. As it was a source of much edification to our young students, the Superiors confirmed him in the important office of Prefect.

In that year, 1862, renovations at the *Trinita'* were being completed. It was planned to move the young hopes of the Congregation there, i.e., the Aspirants, Novices and the Professed. By the 4th of November, all was in readiness, and the long-awaited **[66]** change took place. A solemn entrance into the new Novitiate and Student House was observed.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti was at the head of the Community there. He was named Spiritual Father and Novice Master, and also had the task of teaching Philosophy and Theology. Fr. Vincent Vignola was named teacher of literature, mathematics and physics, and Fr. Marchesini, newly ordained, was named the Prefect and master of Exterior Discipline.

How zealous he was for regular observance! By his good example, he was always at the fore. He never asked of others what he did not do himself. He did it all with such energy, but at the same time, with such kindness and charity, that the young students acquired a love for him, and even sought his company. He had a knack of dealing with them, through his edifying conversation. He would often tell them stories from the lives of the saints, or cite some episode from the publication of the annals of the Propagation of the Faith. More than one of them was inspired by him to offer their lives for the Foreign Missions.

He was always happy in giving to the Students now and then, with permission, little gifts that they could put to good use. These were, for example, little statues that he used to make every year for the Christmas Crib. As time went on, their number and beauty increased.

When the devout House Chapel was completed, he provided for it a beautiful and precious silver Ostensorium. We still have this, as well as other precious objects he gave, as the need arose for them. He always had in mind bringing happiness to the young students, and of inspiring them to good.

For this same end, he sought to provide for them some diversions, especially during the summer months and carnival season. Throughout his life, he had the job of providing gifts for the feast of St. Lucy, according to the custom of Verona.

Then came the year 1866, with the change of government throughout Veneto, including Verona. In that year, Fr. Joseph had to separate himself from his beloved Students. Fr. Marani [67] had hoped to present the Congregation to the new government, not as an approved Religious Institute, but wanted to establish the fact that the Congregation was exempt from the Law of Suppression, and the confiscation of all its goods. He, therefore, was forced to disperse the members.

He sent the Students to the summer house in Villazzano, which the Prince-Bishop of Trent had offered. The rest of the Priests he distributed to the Stimate and *Santa Maria del Giglio*, so that they could care for the respective Churches, hearing Confessions and conducting the Oratories. Fr. Marani himself went to a house facing the Giusti Gardens.

Fr. Marchesini, with a few companions, were sent to a House he owned, situated on what was called the 'Pozza Estate.' There he would look after the administration of the estate, and also take care of the Church situated upon it. Up until this time, the Church had been under the care of some Diocesan Priests, who were supported by the Marchesini Family. It was opened for the convenience of the people of that area, who lived too far away from the Parish Church.

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Chapter 6

Fr. Joseph at the 'Pozza Estate'

In the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ* it is written: *The habit and the tonsure matter little ... the total mortification of the passions make the true religious.* This is also phrased in the well-known proverb: *The habit does not make the monk!* It can also be said, then, that the Religious House does not make the good religious. To accomplish this, there is needed about all good will and the spirit of mortification. Fr. Joseph was visible proof of this, as he and his companions lived a true cloistered life on the Pozza Estate.

From the beginning there, he set up his own schedule, which he observed exactly. He arose at 5:00 a.m.. He then would set about putting his room in order. After this, he would go down to Church for common prayers, meditation and Mass which was always preceded with due preparation, and followed by a thanksgiving. Following this, he would pray the Minor Hours of his Breviary.

After these exercises of piety, he had a light breakfast. Then, he would dedicate himself to study, especially of moral theology. He would look after his affairs, as the family estate about this time had been equally divided among himself and his brothers. In this matter of his financial administration, he always manifested a great spirit of dependence on his Superiors. He would come in to Verona, at least once a week, to take counsel from his Confreres, and to give them a report.

At noon, there was dinner. This was followed by recreation and then Spiritual Reading, Vespers and Compline. He would study some more, and then visit the fields. Next would be the Rosary, Matins and Lauds, followed by supper and the end of the day.

On Sundays and Holy Days, he was kept quite busy in Church, hearing Confessions, preaching and conducting the Oratory.

He always made a Novena before the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin. The entire month of St. Joseph was observed, especially the more Solemn Novena immediately preceding his Feast. There was a sermon every night, and this served as a sort of Retreat. There was always a very large number of the faithful in attendance. They came not only from the area surrounding the house, but even from some distance. The good that was done there was abundant, as is evident from the large number of Holy Communions that were received every year on the Feast. There would also be a Mass of Devotion.

In the evening, there was a Penegyric on the Saint, and the day was closed with Solemn Benediction. Every year, this was imparted by the Superior General of the Congregation, assisted by a good number of his Priests and Students. The attendance was so large at these services, that the Church could not contain everyone. The crowd overflowed into the Square and the near-by streets.

Returning now to the theme of the Schedule, it varied somewhat during the summer months. All, however, was permeated with that order and precision that was established in the beginning. Throughout his entire life, he was well known for this.

As has been said, even as a young boy, he was a great fan of bird hunting. In the circumstances in which he found himself out in the country, he was surrounded on all sides by his own fields. He very easily and freely could have gone hunting, but he never felt that it was fitting to ask either Fr. Marani or Fr. Lenotti, who were successively the Superiors General of that period. Only after being on the Pozza Estate for eight years, the new Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola, who succeeded the first two, suggested it to him. We can only imagine the satisfaction and contentment of Fr. Joseph on these hunting excursions he had been permitted.

He never let them interfere in the least with his regular practices of piety. On such days, he would get up a few days earlier, so that he might fulfill them exactly. The thought passed through his mind that he would be able, for example, to recite the Canonical Hours in those brief intervals of time when there were no flights in sight. However, he rejected this thought as a temptation.

The visits that Fr. Joseph enjoyed the most were those of his Confreres. During the summer months, they would come out to spend a day or two with him. He always received them with an evident and cordial welcome. He went far out of his way to make them feel at home, and his company was to them a great delight. One day, one of his confreres joked with him and told him that he was a rich country gentleman. He answered back that he owned nothing of his own, but that all belonged to the Lord, the Blessed Mother and to St. Joseph.

In this situation, all through the long, legal battle with the government, the Congregation had to live on alms. Fr. Marchesini was most solicitous to provide for his Confreres, from whatever earnings he was able to realize from his crops, or the slaughter of his animals. He sometimes gave money to his Confreres.

It would be too lengthy to narrate here every detail of the life that was lived on the Pozza Estate, during the years of the dispersion of the Congregation. May it suffice to refer to the observations of the laity. They remarked about the austere life that he lived, his great reluctance in visiting, or receiving visits from his relatives. They also noted his opposition to taking any trips for his own diversion, even though [70] he had at his disposal carriages, horses and every other means for them. Most outstanding was his rigorous reserve with lay people, especially women, who were in his employ. Whenever such contacts were necessary, he conversed briefly, and with gravity and modesty.

This was Fr. Joseph's life on the Pozza Estate, during the long years of suppression, or rather of suspension of the Congregation. When the case was finally resolved against the government, he returned, as we shall see, to the life of the Community.

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Chapter 7

Fr. Joseph, Missionary

During the litigation of the Congregation against the government, it was the general consensus that the Congregation would lose the case, and that it would be destroyed. However, Divine Providence disposed otherwise, and victory was eventually ours. The other Houses were returned to the Congregation, i.e., the Stimmate, *Santa Maria del Giglio* in Verona, and San Bernardino in Trent. The Students were called back from Povo, and were lodged at St. Teresa's next to the Stimmate. The Priests and Brothers were distributed, according to the needs of each place.

After some time, Fr. Joseph was called back to Verona. At first, he was assigned to *Santa Maria del Giglio*, and then later, to the Stimmate. He still would go out to the Pozza Estate on the Eve of every Holy Day, to care for the Church. He would stay out there for a few days now and then, to look after his affairs, as the property was in his name.

Just about this time, there was an effort made to take him from the Stimmate. The over-all idea was one day to inherit his vast estate. Calumnious accusations were leveled at him. It would be too lengthy a matter to go into them in detail, and perhaps, too, all who knew Fr. Joseph also know that the accusations were absurd. Nevertheless, a most careful investigation was undertaken, and the evil interests of the accusers came to light His innocence was clearly and abundantly proven.

There is no doubt that this sad affair deeply disturbed him. When he came to know the source of the accusations, he laughed about the matter, and forgave his detractors. By his conduct, he grew in his esteem and affection for the Congregation, which he was to prove by his deeds, no matter what the cost to him personally. I will only indicate one of these, but it can rightly be called 'heroic'. I entitled this Chapter: 'Fr. Joseph, Missionary' – for good reason.

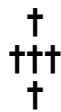
He was already over 46 years of age, and except for the short sermons that he gave on Holy days in the Church on the Pozza Estate, he had never really preached. He had never given the slightest thought to being a Missionary in this sense. The main reason was that public speaking caused in him such a panic that unless it was seen, it would be hard to believe.

Many requests were coming in at that time for Missions and Retreats, and there was only a limited number of Missionaries. Those who had heard him preach at the Pozza Estate, tried to assure him that he would do well on such assignments. At first, it seemed to him that this suggestion was only a joke. His Confreres gave him to understand, however, that he could please his Superiors very much if he showed his willingness for such assignments. By an heroic act of self-denial, he accepted for the first time the assignment to preach a retreat to the young boys of the Oratory at *Santa Maria del Giglio*.

When his first such venture proved to be a success, he had little difficulty in repeating the performance at the Oratory of the Stimmate. The ice had been broken, and he had taken his first step. The next step, however, was extremely difficult, that is, going from those Oratories of our own Houses, into public Churches. The author remembers very well that just before Fr. Joseph's first public sermon that he was to give in the Diocese of Trent, he took his pulse. The count was 120 [72] to the minute. At the beginning of his sermon, he was all out of breath. Thanks to God and his own determination, and the good disposition of his audience, who were most receptive, he took courage. He calmed down, and brought his first sermon to a happy conclusion. The rest of his sermons at that Mission followed suit, and in the end, his work as generally extolled.

He only lived this life as a Missionary for three years. In that time, he had preached throughout the Dioceses of Verona, Trent and Padua. He then went with a Companion to preach in Valstagna, at Brenta, which is a large and fairly well populated city. The day prior to the closing of the Mission, he suffered a severe throat infection. It was felt that he should leave the Church that night, and return to Verona. He was confined to bed immediately, and remained there for several days. The doctors decided that he should not take up these preaching assignments again.

During these three years, whatever Fr. Joseph accomplished, he did with much sacrifice and even heroism. He made it sufficiently clear to all that he had a sincere attachment for the Congregation. He was later honored by the Superior General who conferred on him, as was the custom in those times, the **Grade of Missionary**. He thereby acquired the right of active and passive voice in all subsequent General Chapters of the Congregation.



Chapter 8

His Outstanding Virtues

Before bringing this brief Biography to a close, it seems to me only proper to mention something about those virtues that in some way established the nature of Fr. Joseph.

The first virtue, as all know, and which is the foundation for all the others, is Humility. He always took the last place. In the services in Church, he never allowed anyone to carry the Little Umbrella in the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. On rare occasions, to obey his Superiors, he was the Celebrant at some services. He used to say of himself: 'Did you see [73] the ne'er-do well, acting as a prince?'

One day, a young Aspirant who had heard that he entered the Congregation at a relatively advanced age asked him what occupations he had had up until his entrance. As Fr. Marchesini at the time was looking after his family estate, he

answered that he had been a farmer. He wanted to give the idea that he had come from an ordinary social level. The young boy believed that he had been a farmer.

He went once to visit the House at Bassano. Among the sights of the city, he was also brought to visit the museum. Before entering, the guide offered them the Guest Register to sign, that they might write their name and titles. Fr. Joseph was the last to do so, but when the guide noted that he had not included any title, he asked him: 'Don't you have any title?'

Fr. Joseph took the pen in hand again and wrote: 'A Common Man.' On leaving, he told the story to his Companions.

I would never finish if I were to record all the anecdotes that prove that the most natural thing in the world for him to do was to humble himself.

All that has been said of his Humility can also very well be applied to his Mortification. As a long-standing habit, he rarely ate much at dinner. He would nibble at whatever was placed before him. He was always content with whatever had been prepared, and in whatever way it was seasoned.

In those days, much less wine was available than is now, and even that was diluted with water. He would only drink about half a glass. It is true that in the long period between dinner and supper, because of a weakness of his early years, he always would eat something. In the years he was out in the country, this usually consisted in a slice of warmed over polenta. When he was at the Simmate, he had permission to put two buns in his pocket. These were usually laid out for breakfast, and he would eat them at a set hour in the day. The Superior told him many times that he should go to the Refectory and eat them with some coffee and milk, or with [74] whatever he desired. He, however, never made use of this privilege. It was both edifying and amusing for those who knew of the hour of his lunch to go at that hour to his room. It was quite a sight to see him relishing those buns, as though he were a poor beggar.

With this same spirit of poverty and mortification, he manifested dependence on his Superiors for whatever he needed. This was also true of that time during which he was administering the family estate. It remained true even later when he ceded this administration to others. He did this to conform to the life of poverty, according to the decrees, that had recently been emanated from the Holy See.

Another virtue of Fr. Joseph was likewise outstanding: this was his holy Modesty. Without fear of exaggeration, it can be said that in this he was much like St. Aloysius Gonzaga. He was always recollected and composed, and not even in jest would he permit the least word that would in any way offend this virtue. In his contact with women, he was most reserved, and even austere. His own sisters and relatives on their rare visits to the Pozza Estate were never introduced into his room, but were always received in the waiting room. When he went to extend his greetings, as on the New Year, to members of his family, he always went in the company of someone else, and preferably the Superior. It was pointed out to him that at least after the annual accounts had been made, he should go to visit his brother. His

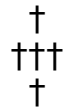
answer was that this would be all right, but he did not wish to go if his brother was away, as only his sister-in-law would be home, and in this case, he did not want to go.

In the place of these insignificant facts, many others could have been recounted. However, I feel that what has been said is sufficient to make known the love this good Priest had for all virtues, and especially for that one that is called the 'Beautiful Virtue.'

Because of his way of life, after his virtuous and exemplary conduct was known to the Superiors, they decided to name him the Master of Novices, when the Novitiate had been transferred to San Bernardino's in Trent. He was to teach them by his example, and by his words, the path of perfection [75] and holiness.

All had been arranged for his transfer. He had made the arrangements for others to look after the administration of his estate. Fr. Joseph, accompanied by the Superior, set out for Trent, and actually had begun his new assignment. However, he was only to remain there a short time. Just after his arrival, he became ill. His condition seemed to be worsening, so he was recalled to Verona.

Before reaching the end of his days, Fr. Joseph gave one more example of subjection and blind obedience to his Superiors. He accepted the assignment which he felt was beyond his physical strength. Doubtlessly, the violence that he had to do to himself brought on a further weakness. This aggravated his sickness and eventually led to his death.



Chapter 9

His Last Illness and Death

We have already mentioned Fr. Marchesini's devotion to his Patron Saint, St. Joseph. He hoped that every March 19th would be celebrated in his Church with the greatest solemnity.

In 1902, he completed his 40th year in the Priesthood. He wanted to commemorate this with an image of St. Joseph, as he had distributed every year, together with a medal to those who took part in his celebration. It seemed that he had foreseen that this was to be the last such occasion, that he would be able to observe this happy custom. On the back of the holy card, he had printed a little remembrance.

Shortly after that last celebration, he began gradually to lose ground. He soon was unable even to give a short sermon to the boys of the Oratory. Then, a slight paralysis developed, and he was no longer assigned to any scheduled Mass. The [76] time was left up to him to choose as he felt would be best for him.

This paralysis increased with each passing day. More than once, he lost his balance completely and fell to the ground. It was finally decided that he was no longer able to go about on his own. Hence, every week end, he was always accompanied in his trips to the Pozza Estate.

As he wished to celebrate Mass every day, he received the faculty of saying the Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Soon, however, his memory began to fail, and very few times was he able to make use of this faculty. After a while, his speech became less coherent, and he had to struggle to make himself understood.

Even in this unfortunate state, he showed his true attachment to the Stimate, as well as his perfect detachment from his well-to-do-family. Despite his harsh trials, right up to the last, in the best way that was possible to him, he showed where his heart was. As we noted before, he considered all that he owned as belonging to the Lord.

He received the Last Sacraments, and died a holy death, on May 18, 1903, in the 70th year of his life.

To the good and faithful Religious, is the reward promised by Jesus Christ, and he is gratefully remembered in the pious suffrages of those who come after him.

The End!