

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]

VERONA

Prem. Tipografia Vescovile P. Colombari

1886

TABLE of CONTENTS**Dedication****Preface****Brief Remarks on the Congregation [1816-1886]**

†

Brother Francis Stevanoni	+ February 28, 1860
Fr. Charles Fedelini	+ June 30, 1860
Fr. Innocent Venturini	+ February 26, 1864
Brother Horace Negro	+ June 16, 1865
Brother Paul Zanoli	+ June 11, 1866
Chapter 1:	His Childhood and Vocation
Chapter 2:	Charity towards His Companions and the Sick
Chapter 3:	Mortification and Prayer
Chapter 4:	Zeal for the Salvation of Souls
Chapter 5:	His Last Illness and Death
Anthony Caucigh, Novice Student	+ August 11, 1866
Chapter 1:	Birth, Entrance into Religion; Vestition
Chapter 2:	Spirit of Devotion and Prayer
Chapter 3:	His Other Virtues
Chapter 4:	His Last Illness and Death
Brother Amadio Caresia	+ January 26, 1868
Brother Joseph Reali	+ November 15, 1868
Fr. John Mary Marani	+ July 1, 1871
Fr. Richard DaPrato	+ October 17, 1872
Chapter 1:	His Birth and Childhood
Chapter 2:	His Studies – the University of Padua
Chapter 3:	His Theological Studies – Ordination
Chapter 4:	Life as a Canon, Entrance into Religion
Chapter 5:	His Religious Life
Chapter 6:	His Precious Death and Reputation for Holiness

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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 1810¹, 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 Zanoli, first withdrew from the world. They took up residence as poor men, in a little house next to the Church of the Stigmata². The property included all the area of our present House, as well as that of the Convent of St. Teresa³. The Church and the gardens had been offered to him by the Very Reverend Father Galvani⁴.

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 Trinity⁵.

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.

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 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

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

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

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 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 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 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.

⁸ ib.

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.

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

⁹ cf. The Life of Fr. Innocent Venturini, an early member of the Congregation, further ahead in this volume.

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**].

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 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 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

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], 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.

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 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

¹² This was formerly a place for accepting abandoned orphans.

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 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].

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**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**¹³. 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

¹³ Translator's Note: the same family name as the Mother of Fr. Innocent Venturini – [cf. ahead].

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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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 it¹⁴.

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 through 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.

¹⁴ 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.

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.

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 thee¹⁵.

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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¹⁵ 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**¹⁶. 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.

¹⁶ Translator's Note: the same family name for the Mother of Bro. Francis Stevanoni.

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 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 Stimmate 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 grater 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 Stimate, 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 Stimmate 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.

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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!'

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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 led 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 said, 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 heaven¹⁷.'

The members of the Oratory at the Stimate 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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¹⁷ 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.

[82]

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 secreta 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 on 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!'

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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.

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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 test 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 bedside, 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.

[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.¹⁸

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 Trinitá*, 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,

¹⁸ It is read about St. Francis that he sometimes ordered his beloved Brother Masseo to whirl around until he almost fell from dizziness.

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!***

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 Stimmate, 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 Stimmate 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.

[104]

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.

[**109**]

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.

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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.

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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.

[115]

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.

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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 every one, 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.

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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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